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# The Transformation of an Empire to a Nation-State: From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey

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**The Transformation of an Empire to a Nation-State: From the  
Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey**

By

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**Professor Andrews  
Professor Ferguson**

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## 1. Introduction

On the eve of the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the mass deportations and massacres of the Armenian people, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered condolences for the mass killings that occurred in Anatolia against the Armenian population during World War I. (BBC News) He is the first Turkish prime minister to do so. However, he never uses the word genocide to describe the killings and continues to maintain that the deaths were part of wartime conflict. He blames the mass murder on the predecessor to the Republic of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, and insists that ethnic Turks suffered as well. There are many issues with this statement but I will focus on three. The first, and most obvious, is that Turkey still does not recognize the Armenian genocide as such. Second, by placing the blame on the Ottomans, he is attempting to separate the state of Turkey from the empire. However, they aren't two separate entities. The Republic of Turkey developed within the Ottoman Empire and when the Empire ended and the Republic began is not an easily defined line. While there is the official date the Republic was announced, it was long before that Turkish nationalism began to emerge. Third is the assertion that the massacres were wartime deaths. While they occurred during World War I, the mass murders were part of the nationalist movement's attempts to homogenize a region that was ethnically and religiously heterogeneous.

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an imagined community. (Anderson, 2006) A nation is created and a community is defined. The unifying elements of a

nation are not inherent in a population. These elements need to be established and must be accepted by the population, to some extent, for a nation to exist. A nation has limits, not everyone can be part of it. Therefore, it must be established what and who isn't part of the nation. Dividing up populations into nation-states is a relatively modern phenomenon. Therefore, nations had to be created. In many cases they were created from larger empires. Empires can cover large amounts of land and encompass many different ethnicities and religions. A group of people had to identify a component that would unite them. This process happened all over the world and nations were created.

The Ottoman Empire would eventually be broken apart into different nations. How was the Ottoman Empire transformed into the Republic of Turkey?

### **Literature Review**

The Kurdish Question in Turkey by Dogu Ergil argues, "One of the greatest obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey has been the country's treatment of its Kurdish citizens." Turkey refuses to acknowledge the presence of minorities within its borders, as they would disrupt its created identity of a homogenous population. Ergil argues that while an independent Turkey was being fought for, it was put forth as a multi-cultural society; therefore, the Kurds fought with them and supported the creation of Turkey. However, soon after the creation of the Republic, the elites abandoned this notion in favor of a secular, western, progressive

state. For this nationalism they needed to create the illusion of a homogenous population. “All citizens of Turkey had to adopt a Turkish identity.” (Ergil 2000, 125) Kurds were not discriminated against as individuals so long as they didn’t publicize their ethnicity. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire the Kurds were largely autonomous. In return for their loyalty they were largely unaffected by Ottoman policy. However, under Turkish rule, the new secular policies went against their own values. When they rebelled the Turkish government responded by crushing the rebellion and forcibly assimilating the Kurdish population. However, Ergil fails to account for the Armenian genocide and deportments that had occurred nearly a decade before. There were population policies in place to eliminate ethnic groups before Turkey ever became a sovereign state.

Sina Akşin, a Turkish historian, wrote *Turkey: From Empire to Revolutionary Republic* first in Turkish and then it was translated into English. As described in the preface, books about 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish history are lacking. Akşin’s book is meant to fill that gap. While it is an improvement that the discourse about the events between the present day and the death of Atatürk is beginning in Turkey, there is still a distance to go. Akşin’s description of the violence against the Armenians during World War I never labels it as genocide. Instead, he makes it sound like they forced the hand of the Turks by murdering Turkish citizens. This theme of portraying the Turks as victims continues throughout. He also argues that the ‘Kurdish problem’ is mostly resolved. By rewriting history in this way Akşin reinforces the national identity the ruling elite has worked so hard to maintain. This rewriting of history is an important tool that was

often used to enforce Turkish nationalism.

In my thesis I will examine the concept of nationalism, specifically the process of its creation and how that process can continue to impact state policies. I will specifically examine the creation of the Republic of Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. I will show that the process of the creation of Turkish nationalism was based on homogenizing an area that was ethnically heterogeneous. The Young Turks and their political party, the Committee of Union and Progress, subjected the area of Anatolia to violent population policies in an attempt to create the Turkish nation. The ways in which nationalism has dealt with ethnic minorities and the methods utilized by the Turkish government to create Turkish nationalism from the remains of the Ottoman Empire and its identity have been violent and based on suppressing the identities of religious and ethnic minorities.

In my first chapter I will explore the history of the Ottoman Empire in the decades before its collapse and how the model of subject – ruler transformed to citizen – state. I will look at the process of change as Ottoman identity was transformed to create Turkish identity. In my second chapter I will analyze how violent population policies were used to shape the Turkish population and construct Turkish nationalism. I will specifically examine the violence experienced by the Kurds, Armenians, and the Greeks. I will also consider the continuities between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. In my third chapter I will examine how the politics of citizenship

has continued the violence started in the early Republic and continued to shape Turkish nationalism.



## **2. The Ottoman Empire**

At its peak the Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful early modern empires in the world. It was technologically and militarily advanced allowing its leaders to create an administrative territory that spread from Africa, across the Mediterranean, and into Asia. Constantinople, the capital city, was an economic powerhouse and the largest urban population in Eurasia until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the emergence of a new global dynamic of competition based on European nation-states put pressure on the forms and strategies of a heterogeneous agrarian Empire. From within, nationalist movements gained momentum and the empire began losing territory. Sultan Abdülhamid II responded with reforms that built on earlier efforts to redefine the relationship between the ruling dynasty and the population and attempted to prevent further losses by strengthening his empire. Islam was utilized as a unifying force for the population. However, these reforms did little to stop the loss of territory.

Before the Ottoman Empire, Anatolia was culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse with no one center of power. Religiously, there were different sects of Islam adapted to local customs, as well as multiple forms of Christianity and Judaism. When the Ottomans came to power in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the rulers were creatively able to unify these factors and to finally consolidate their rule with the capture of Constantinople and the resulting demise of the Byzantines. “At the heart of Ottoman success lay the ability of the royal family to hold onto the summit of power

for over six centuries, through numerous permutations and fundamental transformations of the state structure.” (Quataert 2005, 90) In the early years the Sultan was the head of both the political and religious sphere. Power gradually moved away from the sultan and toward newly emerging power factions that connected the palace and the populace in different ways. Effort to create a more centralized government were often figured as a ‘return’ to the past, but were increasingly about creating a more competitive Empire in the present. Thus, reforming sultans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in Abdülhamid, attempted to redefine the role of the military and the fiscal structure necessary to support it.

### **Role of Islam in Ottoman Identity**

While the Ottoman Empire’s government and courts were based on Islamic principles, it was accommodating towards different religions. McCarthy argues “the Ottoman Empire was always an Islamic Empire. In such an empire Christians and Jews were allowed to live, and even prosper, but did not take part in the running of the state.” (McCarthy 2001, 35) Muslims were the only ones who held government positions and were the only ones required to serve in the army. The sultan was also the Caliph, the empire’s religious leader. “The state used the religious authorities and courts to announce decrees and taxes and, as more generally, as instruments of imperial control.” (Quataert 2005, 178) However, each religious community had its own court with its own judges and legal principles, although “non-Muslims legally were inferior to Muslims.” (Quataert 2005, 65) Each religious community was divided into separate *millet*s (nation), which in turn also provided religious services, schools,

assistance to the poor, and other services. “Ethnic divisions were not considered, at least not administratively, within millets. For example, the largest millet, the Orthodox, included Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Arabs and others.” (McCarthy 2001, 39) This began to change with the emergence of nationalist movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Relationship with Europe**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the number of foreign traders living in the major cities of the Ottoman Empires increased, thus also increasing the economic opportunities for Ottoman traders. England, France, the Netherlands, and Venice had established commercial and administrative networks across the Ottoman Empire. (Goffman 2002) In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries a powerful Ottoman Empire was able to negotiate Capitulations, which were reductions in customs dues and granted special privileges to first France and then other European countries. In the early days these were beneficial to the Ottoman economy, however, eventually they were granted to more nations and their actions were not fully controlled by the Ottoman government. Foreigners were now able to have their own courts and the custom dues they paid were often less than the numbers assessed for Ottoman merchants. The increasing power of Europe meant there was no way for the Ottomans to get rid of these privileges and the alliances between foreign merchants and non-Muslim communities contributed to internal fragmentation.

The Ottoman economy was struggling and the government began to take loans from European banks to cover their expenses. The first was in 1854 to pay for fighting the Crimean War, however, they began borrowing money to pay for development as well. Development never kept pace with borrowing, and soon high interest rates put the Ottoman Empire deep in debt. European governments were happy to enforce repayment. In 1881 the Public Debt Commission was created and run by Europeans to take proceeds from taxes. This loss of revenue made it even more difficult for the Ottomans to finance their reforms.

In Europe, imperial powers were negotiating a full transition into nation states. Revolutions increasingly emphasized individual rights and the duty of the state to the citizen. The relationship between citizen and state changed to include “recognition of the individual as a political entity with rights.” (McCarthy 2001, 34) Europe was quickly outpacing the Ottoman Empire in military and economic power, as a result of intense competition over continental resources and shifts in social organization. In an attempt to keep pace with European imperial powers Sultan Abdülhamid II instituted reforms in administration, education, and communications. “It is now generally recognized that the long reign of Abdülhamit II in many ways laid the foundations of what became modern Turkey.” (Zürcher 2010, 274)<sup>1</sup> However, these reforms were not simply the Ottoman Empire succumbing to the pressures to westernize. Internal pressures were just as significant as external ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Zürcher and McCarthy use the spelling Abdülhamit when referring to the sultan who ruled from 1876-1909. I will keep their spelling when using quotes from their work; otherwise, I will use the spelling Abdülhamid.

## The Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century

During the Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century the splintering of the Ottoman Empire began in earnest. The ruling elites realized that the empire could no longer continue in its current state.

Seldom, if ever, had the rebels sought to break out of or destroy the Ottoman imperium. There had been revolts but, generally, these had worked within the system, claiming as their goal the rectification of problems within the Ottoman universe, such as the reduction of taxes or better justice. But in the nineteenth century – in the Balkan, Anatolian, and Arab provinces alike – movements emerged that actively sought to separate particular areas from Ottoman rule and establish independent, sovereign states, subordinate to no higher political authority. (Quataert 2005, 54)

Nationalist movements began demanding sovereign nations. Greece declared independence in 1829, then in 1875 Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Wallachia, and Moldova followed suit. In 1876 rebels in Bulgaria took a stand. With the Ottoman army fighting in other parts of the Empire the rebels began killing Muslim villagers. Violence increased and thousands of Muslims and Bulgarians were killed. Previously, Britain had supported the Ottoman Empire diplomatically to maintain the balance of power in Europe, but reports of the violence against Bulgarians, somewhat exaggerated and ignoring Muslims deaths, turned public opinion against the Ottomans. The Ottoman army most likely would have been able to stop the rebellion, however, Russia decided to intervene. Russia declared war on April 24, 1877 and by early the next year had almost reached Istanbul. Through mediation from other European nations who wanted to prevent Russia from threatening their own interests, the Ottomans were forced to give up land but not as much as they would have otherwise.

However, the violence of the period meant that about 55 percent of the Muslims in Bulgaria were forced to leave or killed. (McCarthy 2001, 48)

As they continued to lose land, the government attempted to bring all Ottoman subjects more fully under their control instead of being led by community officials or other intermediaries. Various reforms by the Sultans tried to make a more expansive definition of what it meant to be Ottoman and include all religions. However, they experienced backlash from Muslims who now had to compete with non-Muslims for jobs and status symbols and non-Muslims were also dissatisfied as it meant individualized taxes as well as being subject to conscription. Instead of creating a more universal Ottoman identity, nationalist movements continued gaining strength, and rivalry from Europe made the situation even more precarious.

## **Reforms**

In response to internal and external pressures various sultans, beginning with Sultan Selim III (1787-1807), realized that the Ottoman Empire needed to centralize and reform key imperial institutions. Following the defeat in a series of wars with Russia, in 1792 Selim III made the first attempt to reorganize the military to more closely resemble European armies. Partly caused by strong Muslim opposition, the military reforms failed politically despite success on the battlefield. Selim III was overthrown and murdered in 1807. His successor Mustafa IV reigned for less than two years before being overthrown by rebels. His brother Mahmud (1808-1839) “was to take the offensive against those associated with the old order, aiming to bring both

centre and provinces back into clear subservience to sultanic wishes.” (Anscombe 2010, 167) One of the factors in Selim’s failure to reform the military was the fact that he left the Janissary corps untouched. The Janissaries had once been a strong and effective military force, however, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century they were poorly trained and lacked discipline. Mahmud slowly built up the power of the army, while, simultaneously, the populace began to turn against the Janissaries. When the Janissaries revolted against the military reforms Mahmud systematically executed or exiled them. The way was now free for Mahmud to institute more wide spread reforms that would redefine the empire. “It was to be centralizing reform: the new system was always aimed at ending local autonomy and increasing the power of the centre.” (McCarthy 2001, 15)

The Tanzimat period began with Sultan Abdülmejid I (1839-1861). Tanzimat means “order” and contains within it a sense of reorganization or restructuring. Abdülmejid I intended to transform the relationship between the ruler and the subject. “He declared that his subjects had rights to ‘life, honour, and fortune’ and that their property was inviolate.” (McCarthy 2001, 16) The government had duties to its subjects who had rights that weren’t just the rights guaranteed to Muslims by Islamic law. These new political rights included the government taking control over issues of welfare, education, laws, and public activities; all of which had previously been taken care of through the separate millets. These reforms show the Ottoman Empire’s attempts to modernize. While many of the changes that were made to the army and bureaucracy were adapted from European practices, modernization efforts are not

synonymous with westernization. The restructuring was intended to preserve the Empire and sustain the Abode of Islam. Tanzimat reformers “planned to understand Europe, to emulate its ways when necessary, but to remain Ottoman.” (McCarthy 2001, 20)

The second sultan of the Tanzimat period was Abdülaziz (1861-1876). His rule brought the Ottoman Empire into deeper debt than it already was. After the revolts in Bosnia and Bulgaria he was deposed by a military coup. The next sultan, Murat V (1876), began the process of the creation of an Ottoman constitution but was found to be mentally unbalanced and was replaced by his brother, Abdülhamid’s II (1876-1909) Abdülhamid continued the process, and a new constitution was proclaimed on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1876. While the new parliament was democratically elected, not all votes were equal and the sultan had final say over whether or not a law passed. Despite the failings of the constitution and parliament, it was an important step in the transformation of the Ottoman Empire to a nation. Previously the belief had been that the sultan was the government. While this wasn’t always the case in practice, it was not made apparent to the populace. “The radical assertion that popular will, as expressed through elections, should be the basis of government was a most signification change in itself.” (McCarthy 2001, 26)

Within the first few years of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s rule he was “faced first and foremost with the necessity to rebuild a state and society shattered by the disastrous war against Russia of 1877-1878.” (Zürcher 2010, 274) At the post-war

negotiations the empire lost land, income, and the faith of the population. “The Treaty of Berlin vividly illustrates the power of Europe during the last part of the nineteenth century, able to impose its wishes on the world, drawing lines on maps and deciding the fate of peoples and nations with seeming impunity.” (Quataert 2005, 59) Sultan Abdülhamid II responded by attempting to centralize power in the government, specifically the sultanate, and emphasized an Islamist identity for his Empire. When members of parliament complained about the war and questioned the actions of the sultan Abdülhamid “did not abolish the constitution; he simply never called a new election for parliamentary deputies. The parliament was not to meet again for thirty years.” (McCarthy 2001, 27) However, the creation of a constitution provided a base for future nationalist movements to build their own attempts at democracy from.

“Abdülhamit was a follower of many of the principles of the Tanzimat – reform of the governmental system, improving government efficiency, and centralization of power.” (McCarthy 2001, 27) While he may not have been able to hold the empire together “the Ottoman Empire could not have fought as well as it did in World War I, nor the Turks won their Independence War, were telegraph lines, roads and railroads not in place beforehand.” (McCarthy 2001, 28) During his reign “the state built as many as 10,000 schools for its subjects, using these to provide a modern education based on Ottoman values.” (Quataert 2005, 62) Power became more and more centralized in the state. During this period “the central state aimed to strip away the differences among Ottoman subjects and make all male subjects the same in its eyes.” (Quataert 2005, 65) Religious affiliation no longer legally affected ones

rights, at least in theory, if not always in practice. However, “the division of labor between the fast-growing state bureaucracy (and army) composed primarily of Muslims on the one hand, and the modern trade and industry sector dominated by non-Muslims on the other” made it increasingly difficult to create a unified society. (Zürcher 2010, 69) The disparity in wealth caused by this division of labor contributed to religious and ethnic tensions.

However, the debt that was owed to Europe left the state financially weak. “Before the Tanzimat, Ottoman rulers had indeed intervened in society and economy, but on a selective, sometimes capricious, basis, not as a matter of state duty. Now the state defined itself as the body that provided for the subject what they needed but could not easily provide for themselves.” (McCarthy 2001, 34) The Ottoman Empire was moving away from the ruler-subject relationship that characterizes an empire and towards a state-citizen based system. To fulfill these promises the rulers needed money, which they were sorely lacking.

### **The Young Turks**

In the Ottoman Empire “loyalties and self-identification of the people, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, were primarily religious.” (McCarthy 2001, 73) The Tanzimat reforms were attempts at nation building. “Recognizing the benefits of nationalism in organizing a state and claiming the loyalty of its people, the Tanzimat government made attempts to create an Ottoman nationality.” (McCarthy 2001, 74) The early forms of the nationalist movement that would eventually lead to the Young

Turks began in the 1860s with their predecessors the Young Ottomans. The Young Ottomans were a group of idealists who weren't satisfied with the Tanzimat reforms. They created Ottomanism, an "ideology aimed at the creation of an overarching common Ottoman citizenship irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliation." (Üngör 2011, 27) The group and their ideology ultimately failed to create a new cohesive identity and a new alternative came to the fore. The alternative group to emerge in this period that would ultimately gain power were the Young Turks. The Young Turks were originally a movement focused on transforming the structures of power and contesting the role of the Sultan. Only gradually did they turn to nationalist discourse as a way of mobilizing popular support. This group would influence a generation that would eventually begin promoting Turkish nationalism and a Turkish cultural revolution. The Young Turks and other nationalist movements destabilized the empire from within.

The Young Turks emerged first as a secret society within discontented students who had been educated in the modern European-style schools created by the reforms of the Tanzimat period. The movement consisted of "Muslim males, born almost exclusively between 1875 and 1885, with an urban literate background." (Zürcher 2010, 110) Even though they were ethnically diverse, including Kurds, Albanians, Circassians, and Turks, nearly all of them had been educated in one of the European-style colleges in the empire and worked for the state. Although they went on to support a secular state it began as an Islamist movement. "Their collective identity was certainly formed in opposition to non-Muslim." (Zürcher 2010, 111) Their idea of

modernity, however, was based on European ideals but adapted to Turkish customs. “Nationalism was never their prime focus, however. Their focus was on developing the Empire economically and militarily.” (McCarthy 2001, 28) They still believed the different groups could work together within the Empire, but under republican rule with a constitution. Their main grievance “against the Sultan was that his regime weakened the state and failed to protect the Ottoman nation.” (Zürcher 2010, 276) While in the beginning the Young Turks promoted Ottomanism, soon they identified with the Muslim citizens, and then, in the final shift, only with a newly invented category of the “Turk”. Each shift brought violent changes to the region and many lost their property, homes, and lives as a result.

### **Constitutional Revolution of 1908**

In 1908 the most influential Young Turk organization was the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). It began as an underground resistance network and was more nationalist and centrist than the other group in the Young Turks. In July the CUP revolted and forced the Sultan to reinstate the parliament and restore the constitution. Nine months later they deposed the Sultan completely. The most pressing concern for the new parliament was how to modernize the empire efficiently and quickly and enable it to join the other leading nations of the world. Their goal was to create a centralized modern state. “What the Committee of Union and Progress wanted to do was to create, out of a society that was divided into special compartments, a modern state which bound all its individual members to one another around a shared identity that was to be based on the principle of universal equality.” (Akçam 2004, 127)

Formally each religious community operated semi-autonomously and then the Ottoman government dealt with the leaders who acted as intermediaries for each community. The CUP wanted to create a system in which the government would interact directly with its citizens. However, they had to find a single element that could unify all the groups they now led. Initial efforts were linked to education reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which all Ottoman subjects would attend the same schools, be subject to the same laws, and everyone would speak Turkish. However, the CUP's hold on power was fragile.

Less than a year after the revolution opposition from conservative religious circles led an armed insurrection on the night of April 12-13 in name of the restoration of Islam and Islamic religious law. They were able to take over the Capital without significant opposition from the government. Within a fortnight, troops brought in from the provinces were able to repress the counterrevolution with relative ease but “the fact that a revolt in the name of Islam had been able to shake the foundations of their regime so easily and quickly came as a rude shock” to the leaders of the CUP.

(Zürcher 2010, 76) However, the revolution was not entirely religiously motivated. In response to the Bulgarian and Macedonian nationalist movements the CUP insisted on radical reforms that increased the focus on “Turkism”. Inevitably, the resolve in instituting top-down reforms created discord within the ranks of the military, religious officials, and other groups.

## World War I

In many ways World War I, July 1914 – November 1918, marked the end of an era.

It marked the end of an old world order and led to the disappearance of four empires. Eastern Europe was broken up into newly created nation states and the Near East into British and French mandates that would become very problematic nation states a generation later. World War I has left an indelible imprint on European memory as the first industrial war, a war in which killing itself became an industrialized process. (Zürcher 2010, 153)

As proven by the defeat in the Balkans against the Russians in 1912-1913 the Ottoman army was nowhere near powerful enough to challenge European armies and “no better way could be found than to put the Ottoman forces in the hands of the Europeans themselves, who presumably knew what an army and navy should be.” (McCarthy 2001, 95) Despite the reforms of Selim III and Mahmud II, the military still needed to be transformed into a modern army. German officers were brought in and reorganized the army into a much improved and a better trained fighting force. Britain was asked to help modernize the navy and France put in charge of the gendarmerie, however, Russia had not been asked to help due to the recent history of animosities between the two countries. Conscription became a tool of nation building. The Young Turks attempted to foster nationalism based on military service but the system of exemptions prevented this. Groups who were exempt were “women; non-Muslims (formally until 1856, in practice until 1909); inhabitants of the holy places, Mecca and Medina; religious functionaries and students in religious schools; and a whole range of professional groups.” (Zürcher 2010, 160-161) The only people who

saw themselves as belonging to an ‘Ottoman nation’ were a small group of Muslim elites.

The Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Russia had been slowly taking away Ottoman land since the 1770s and after they sided with Britain, Germany appeared to be only the remaining country that could prevent further losses. Despite the improvements made to the army, life as an Ottoman soldier during World War I was incredibly difficult. “The conditions under which the army had to fight in wartime were atrocious. In the 1877-8 Russian war, in the Balkan War of 1912-13 and in World War I large parts of the army were starving and many more soldiers died of cholera, typhus and dysentery than did of wounds.” (Zürcher 2010, 160) The Ottoman soldier had essentially been fighting for 30 years.

World War was being fought for the Ottoman Muslim. It was officially declared a *Jihad* and was “partly fought out as a brutal ethnic/religious conflict in Anatolia.” (Zürcher 2010, 148) Ottoman identity was still linked to religion and as I will discuss in the next chapter the CUP used violence to eliminate threats to the identity.

The war ended in 1918. Despite the Central Powers’ loss the Ottoman Empire “survived *as an empire* with the revered institutions of the sultanate and caliphate

intact.” (Zürcher 2010, 193)<sup>2</sup> At the Paris Peace Conference the Treaty of Sevrés, signed on August 10, 1920, split up Ottoman territory. The provisions would force the Ottoman government to acknowledge Greek and Armenian nationalist movements and respect their borders while simultaneously relinquishing territory to Italy. The Allies took former provinces of the empire, especially in Greater Syria and Palestine, and turned the Bosphorus into an international zone. The winning side would effectively be in charge of the military forces; however, the regular army would be forcibly disbanded. In addition, an Allied Commission had control over Ottoman debt and would oversee state budget. Essentially, they had total control over Ottoman finances and the Capitulations were reinstated. “What remained of the Ottoman Empire was to be independent only in name. It was to be unable to defend itself, and its finances, transportation system and police force were to be in the hands of foreigners.” (McCarthy 2001, 127) The government of the last Sultan, Mehmed Vahideddin, signed the treaty and has since been branded traitors in the eyes of Turkish history. A large segment of the population would not accept it.

The emerging nationalist movements transformed the structure of the Ottoman Empire. As ethnic and religious tensions became more of an issue, attempts to modernize the empire fell short. On the losing side of World War I, the changes became even more drastic.

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in original.

### **3. Population Policies**

How does an empire transform itself into a nation? How is a population converted from subjects to citizens? The nature of population politics was forcibly changed in order, first to compete with a new global dynamic premised on nation-states and second to impede the fragmentation of the empire due to successful national movements. Instead of being an Ottoman Muslim or an Ottoman Christian, one was identified by their ethnicity, for example as Turkish, Armenian, Kurdish, etc. People who lived side by side in the Ottoman Empire became enemies. People who had identified as Ottoman Muslims were now labeled as Kurds, etc. In this chapter I will examine the violence that accompanied the building of the nation-state and a clear vision of nationalism from the Armenian genocide in World War I, through the creation of the Republic of Turkey, and continuing to the end of the single party period of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As much as the Young Turks tried to transform the new Republic of Turkey into a different nation from its predecessor, they still inherited many of the bureaucratic and military systems of the Ottoman Empire. They also inherited many of its problems. In 1923-4 “the Kemalist leadership of the Republic broke the bonds of solidarity forged during the preceding ten years and opted for far-reaching secularization and for Turkish (as opposed to Ottoman – Muslim) nationalism and nation building.” (Zürcher 2010, 231) The government had to find a new identity through which to unite the newly created state while contending with “the traumas of a

state which lost most of its centuries-old core provinces in the space of five years and could survive only after massive and vicious ethnic cleansing.” (Zürcher 2010, 52)

One key characteristic of nation-building is the fabrication of an ‘other’ against which a new unity can be constructed. The Ottoman Empire was ethnically heterogeneous. In order to create and promote Turkish nationalism, “from 1913 to 1950, the Young Turk regime subjected East Anatolia...to various forms of nationalist population policies aimed at ethnically homogenizing the region.” (Üngör 2011, vii) These population policies often consisted of either forcibly removing certain ethnic groups from the region or outright genocide.

### **The Armenian Genocide**

The violence against the Armenians began during the reign of Abdülhamid II. Loss of Muslim lives in the Balkans and Caucasus made Ottoman Muslims question the loyalty of Christians living in the Empire. Hundreds of thousands of refugees (mostly Circassians and Chechens from the Caucasus) entering the eastern provinces adding even more tension. As the Ottoman Empire lost more and more land, Muslim refugees came to the territory that remained. This served to further homogenize the population and increase religious and ethnic tension. On November 1, 1895 in the eastern province of Diyarbekir 150,000 people were massacred.

After the defeat in the Balkan wars, in 1915 the CUP turned their attention to the non-Muslim communities. They decided that they were to blame for the defeat.

The elite ranks of the CUP were made up of people who had lost their homeland in the Balkans. During World War I some Armenian rebels sought aid from Russia, hoping to be on the winning side and gain an independent Armenian nation. The Committee of Union and Progress realized this and “the direction of policy was never in doubt: the Armenians were to be destroyed.” (Üngör 2011, 100) Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed.

In early 1915 some Armenians had already been deported. On April 24, 1915, Armenian elites were arrested and executed. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the policy of deportation was focused on practically all Armenians. Forced marches through the desert in Syria and Iraq killed hundreds of thousands. Groups organized for that purpose killed about one million Armenians.

The Armenian genocide is, even now, not formally recognized as genocide by the Turkish government. This denial continues to affect Turkish policy and the place of Armenians in the nation’s historical memory and modern governmental apparatus. Even though the Turkish government will admit that violent acts took place, they place the blame solely on the Ottomans. However, members of the CUP perpetrated the genocide, which was the political party of the Young Turks. The Young Turks then went on to establish the Republic of Turkey. As demonstrated by the massacres during the reign of Abdülhamid, violence against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire was a repeated occurrence. In part, it was a response to the nationalist movements destabilizing the empire and the distrust of the ruling elite, both

the Sultan and members of the CUP. Despite attempts to separate the two, without the Ottoman Empire the Republic of Turkey would not exist in the form it is today, as I will discuss further in the next chapter.

### **War of Independence**

After the end of World War I, the future of the Ottoman Empire was in jeopardy. Much of the Ottoman Empire was divided amongst the Allies. The CUP was kicked out of the government and replaced. The new sultan, Mehmet VI, blamed the current problems on the CUP and dedicated himself to ensuring the survival of the Ottoman dynasty. The Armistice of Mudros signed on October 30, 1918, contained vague provisions about Ottoman independence. In the hope that the Allies would keep their promises the new government admitted to crimes by the CUP that hadn't been committed, trying to maintain the image of the 'good Turk', nevertheless, the Allies quickly broke the provisions. (McCarthy 2001, 129) According to the Treaty of Sevres because of their assistance the Greeks and the Armenians were meant to receive land. "Despite pious pronouncements on the 'sovereignty of peoples' and the need for states that reflected ethnic boundaries, the Allies completely ignored the demographic realities in Anatolia." (McCarthy 2001, 129) If the Turks had not fought back all of the land of the Ottoman Empire would have been divided up. "The invasion of Anatolia by the Greeks, and corresponding occupations of the east by the Armenians and south by the French, galvanized and unified the Turks in a way that had never been possible before." (McCarthy 2001, 136) This determination to protect what they viewed as their homeland strengthened Turkish nationalism and further distanced them from

other groups that had previously existed together under Ottoman rule. The Turks had to stand together as Turks if they were to win their independence.

Mustafa Kemal, who would later be known as Atatürk (Father of the Turks) was born in 1881 in Salonika in the Ottoman Empire. He was educated at a private primary school that didn't have a strong religious focus. After primary school he began his career in military academies. He experienced the destruction brought on by the nationalist movements and he lost his homeland in the First Balkan War in 1912. As a Lieutenant, Colonel Mustafa Kemal took charge of a division in 1915 during World War I. He gained renown for defeating the Allies in Gallipoli. He was also able to keep the army together in the retreat to Adana when the Allies took Haifa, Acre, and Damascus in late 1917. Mustafa Kemal's experiences at a private school and later in Ottoman Europe showed him the benefits of a modernized Ottoman Empire. His education "enabled to comprehend the failure of the reforms to arrest the increasingly rancorous rivalries plaguing the empire's major ethnic and religious groups." (Hanioglu 2011, 26)

In 1919 Mustafa Kemal accomplished the near impossible task of uniting the politicians, religious leaders, merchants, landowners, and military men towards the issuing of a resolution, later known as the Nationalist Pact that demanded "the integrity of all the regions inhabited by Turks be maintained, and that the Turks be politically independent within them." (McCarthy 2001, 137) After the democratically elected parliament passed the National Pact the British were furious and arrested

leading nationalist representatives. At Mustafa Kemal's headquarters in Ankara a new parliament was created, the Grand National Assembly, with Mustafa Kemal as its president. In an attempt to unite Muslims under a nationalist cause Mustafa Kemal promoted the Assembly as devoted to Islamic principles. The nationalist movement was to be unified through religion. A Turkish identity was not as advanced as a major goal as the nationalist movement still needed the support of other Muslim groups, such as the Kurds. The religious sentiment also meant the movement would be united against the non-Muslim Ottoman groups the Allies had supported.

“As politician, diplomat and commander, Mustafa Kemal fought and won a protracted and arduous struggle on three fronts. In less than four years, he had risen from being the rebel general of a dying empire to become supreme leader of a resurgent nation.” (Hanioğlu 2011, 128) Finally, after much destruction and death, the war of independence ended with the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in October 1923. The Turks demanded independence and received it. The special rights, the Capitulations, foreigners had been granted by the Treaty of Sevres were removed. “The new Turkey was to be a state like other states, in charge of its own politics and laws.” (McCarthy 2001, 147) Now an independent nation, Turkish nationalism could reign supreme. “Not only the Ottoman Empire had died in the wars, Ottoman society, with its multiplicity of ethnic groups and religions, had died as well.” (McCarthy 2001, 148) The new Republic of Turkey was proclaimed on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1923 by the Turkish parliament, the Grand National Assembly in Ankara.

## **Republic of Turkey**

Under Mustafa Kemal, the new nation aimed to become a modern state, with a population joined together by a sense of patriotism. However, despite his use of religion as a unifier during the War of Independence, this patriotism was not to be religion based. “Mustafa Kemal and the state elite adopted policies and programs to homogenize linguistic, historical and cultural features of the Turkish society and to construct a ‘new national identity’.” (Kaya 2013, 72) Despite the creation of a new state, it was the by building on the reforms made during the Ottoman period that Mustafa Kemal was able to establish the new republic.

In the aftermath of World War I and the War of Independence Turkey was devastated. “No other country, not even Russia in the revolution, suffered so much loss of life, physical destruction, and dislocation of people in the wars.” (McCarthy 2001, 206) The new state needed to be rebuilt. In order to create a successful secular state with a national identity based on ‘Turkishness’ Mustafa Kemal needed to reform the institutions of the state. Instead of religious law, the Swiss civil code was introduced and secular courts would enforce it. Education was now run by the state, instead of religious institutions. Latin script was adopted and Turkish was made the national language.

Much of the current literature emphasizes the tension between Christianity and Islam during the process of the transformation of the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. This dichotomy is utilized within the east vs. west, civilized vs. uncivilized

discourse that is so prevalent. While it was a factor, it is more complicated than simply Muslim vs. Christian. Throughout the war the Young Turks made it clear that they were still in support of an Ottoman Empire for Muslims. “The proclamations of the national resistance movement in Anatolia after 1918, for example, make it abundantly clear that the movement for the continued independence and unity of Ottoman Muslims.” (Zürcher 2010, 148) It was not until 1922 that the movement became secular as the war for independence had been won and mass mobilization was no longer needed.

Instead an immense effort at nation-building within the borders of the new republic was made, based on the idea of a ‘Turkish’ nation. Although Turkish nationalism was territorial and based on a shared Turkish language and culture (with nationality being open to anyone willing to adopt these), a romantic idealization of the Turkish national character, with racist elements became more and more important in the 1930s. In practice, the adoption of Turkish nationalism led to the forced assimilation of the 30 per cent or so of the population, which did not have Turkish as its mother tongue. (Zürcher 2010, 149)

Religion was to become a private matter instead of an ideology on which to base the running of the government. “Mustafa Kemal insisted that Islam was a ‘rational’ religion and adaptable to the contemporary world, but there was no attempt to turn a ‘purged’ Islam into a major constituent of the republican ideology.” (Zürcher 2010, 149)

The new republic was not completely disconnected from the Ottoman Empire though. The political leadership “were all products of the modern educational establishments of the empire, created by the Tanzimat reformers of the nineteenth

century.” (Zürcher 2010, 143) They had all lived through the multiple upheavals of the past decades. Many of them had been members of the CUP. The army that allowed Mustafa Kemal to gain control over his country was still the army of the late empire. Much of the Ottoman bureaucracy remained, and allowed the government to raise taxes and conscript soldiers. Unfortunately, structural adjustments were not all that was used to unite the new Turkish Republic. The identity of the population itself had to be changed.

### **Tension in Religion**

The first wave of nation building in the Ottoman Empire began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was accompanied – after 1908, in particular – by massive levels of violence. The current Turkish state is the product of this first wave of nation building in Anatolia, and in this sense, it appears to have been founded upon it. Despite all of the nationalist characteristics, this first wave of nation building was actually experienced as fundamentally deriving from religious sources. (Akçam 2004, 116 - 117)

Before the official creation of the Republic of Turkey the emphasis on a Muslim state was much stronger as it was the “Muslim population that the regime had to appeal to in order to legitimize their rule.” (Bayar 2013, 115) However, after the end of the War for Independence, Mustafa Kemal’s reforms began the move toward a secular republic. One obstacle he faced was the unification of the sultanate and the caliphate. In November 1922, through the Grand National Assembly, Mustafa Kemal separated them and the sultanate was abolished. The last sultan, the successor to Abdülhamid, Mehmed VI left Istanbul and his cousin Abdülmecid II was chosen as the new spiritual leader of Sunni Muslims. Sixteen months after the creation of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal also abolished the caliphate. This move

demonstrates the transformation of a government run on religious principles to a secular one.

### **Population Exchange**

Population exchange is “the forced movement of a large group of people from one region to another by state policy or transnational authorities.” (Üngör 2011, 107) This movement is a method of ridding a country of a group of people that are not deemed acceptable to be citizens. An example of the continued influence of religion on Turkish nation building is the population exchange that happened with Greece in 1923. As part of the Treaty of Lausanne Muslims living in Greece were exchanged for Christians living in Turkey. Ethnicity did not affect who was traded. Around 1.2 million Orthodox Christians left or were not allowed to return if they had already left Turkey and around 350,000 Muslims migrated to Turkey. (Gürsoy 2008, 95)

For the people who were transferred they were suddenly in a completely unknown country. Many did not speak the language. Despite being of the same religion they were still viewed as foreigners. These transfers helped further homogenize the population, at least in terms of religion. “Whereas, before the war, 80 percent of what became Turkey consisted of Muslims, according to the 1927 census, that number increased to around 98 percent.” (Gürsoy 2008, 99)

## **The Kurds**

As Sunni Muslims the Kurds were considered 'Ottoman Muslims'.

Abdülhamid II created the Hamidiye regiment in 1891. The regiment was composed of Kurdish tribesmen, but was difficult to control. They participated in the massacre of Armenians in eastern Anatolia. In the war against Russia, Kurds fought in the Ottoman military and some of the founding members of the CUP were Kurds. However, as a Turkish identity became more influential non-Turkish Muslims were viewed with increasing distrust. After the start of World War I the relationship between government structures and the Kurds began to disintegrate. The CUP worried that the Kurds were conspiring with the Russians. They also worried that Kurdish nationalism would hinder the creation of a homogenous nation state. The refusal of the Kurds to assimilate and adopt the Turkish language and customs was perceived as a threat.

The Kurdish population in Eastern Anatolia experienced three waves of deportation. The first was in 1916; in the middle of World War I. Huge groups were relocated. Much of it occurred in winter, which thus increased the dangers of travel. They were then settled in areas where the population didn't want them. As many of the Kurds had been pastoralists they were unable to support themselves in the urban areas where they were forced to live. Although there are no reliable statistics for the number of people who were deported, most researchers believe it was about 700,000 and up to half that number died as a result of the deportation. The first phase came to an end with the end of World War I, however, the policy of deportation would soon continue. Despite assurances by Mustafa Kemal that he would respect the rights of

minorities and the new state would be a state for Kurds as well as Turks, he would continue with the CUP's policies of homogenization.

During the second phase of deportation in 1925 Kurds were deported from the eastern provinces while Turks took their place. The secularization of the government “was perceived as an eschatological intrusion into the collective identity of the Kurds, the state, and the fraternity between Muslim groups.” (Üngör 2011, 123) The Kurds revolted after the government refused to listen to their demands. Despite heavy fighting within a few months the revolt was defeated. In response the Turkish government marched on several villages and massacred all the residents, through methods similar to the Armenian genocide a decade before. “Young Turk officers viewed the population of the eastern provinces as inherently treacherous and anti-Turkish, hence threats to security.” (Üngör 2011,130) Kurdish political elite were arrested. The Turkish government “would cast a wide net to rid society, not only of Kurdish intellectuals who indeed posed a threat, but of those who might do so in the future.” (Üngör 2011, 130) The Young Turks also tightened control over the rest of the country through increasing the length of time the country would be under martial law, and further tightened restrictions on the press, and silenced all political opposition. This paranoia even extended to members of the Young Turk movement.

In 1934 the third wave of deportations began. The Great Depression had hit the fragile Turkish economy hard and the country was suffering, especially in the eastern provinces. Again, a discourse of purifying the Turkish nation was used to justify the

violence. The law organizing the deportations blamed the Kurdish 'problem' on the failure of the Ottoman Empire to properly assimilate minorities during its long period of supremacy. (Üngör 2011) The Turkish government would now achieve this to "safeguard, consolidate, and homogenize our national body' because 'it was time to pursue and implement a population policy crafted by government hand to develop...in quality and quantity, population masses suite for our national culture and modern civilization'." (Üngör 2011, 150) The Ottoman Empire was juxtaposed as the backward empire whose people were saved by the creation of the Turkish Republic. These deportations continued until the Young Turks were removed from government in 1950.

The three waves of deportations are examples of the violent population policies the Turkish government subjected the heterogeneous population of the Ottoman Empire to in order to transform it into a homogenous Turkish nation state. "The Kemalists sought to increase the relative size and power of the dominant ethnic group, the Turks, at the expense of ethnic minorities." (Üngör 2011, 153) While both the Armenians and the Kurds experienced violence that was employed as population policies the end goals were not the same. As Üngör argues, the Armenian population suffered genocide and was to be completely eradicated from Turkey. While the government killed the Kurdish elite, they still wanted the rest of the Kurdish population to assimilate and become loyal Turkish citizens.

The violence perpetrated against the minorities of the Ottoman Empire was a top down approach to homogenize an ethnically and religiously diverse population. The violence began in the Ottoman Empire, through World War I, and after the creation of the Republic of Turkey. It is still affecting modern day citizenship, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

#### 4. The Republic of Turkey

The Republic of Turkey is still struggling with many of the same issues that plagued it when it was first created. “After the Ottoman Empire, which grappled with the forces of modernity throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, slowly dissolved, the Turkish nation-state that was erected in its place continued the struggle into the twenty-first century.” (Göçek 2011, 13) A diverse population challenged and still challenges the ideal of a homogenous national identity. Continuing the practice of the founders, the government and ruling elite still attempt a top-down approach of trying to make the population fit their ideal of national identity. While in some areas the presence of minorities has become more accepted, they are still not seen as full Turkish citizens. “Since the 1980s, Turkey has witnessed a clash between the official understanding of citizenship, based on duties rather than rights, and holding that society can only be formed under the unitary identity of ‘Turkish citizen’, and demands for a more liberal understanding based on the prioritization of rights over duties, and the recognition of differences within a new definition of citizenship.” (Ince 2012, 137) The changing definition of citizenship within Turkey has opened the way for policies of ethnic inclusion and exclusion however the definition is far from consistent. This difficulty in following a firm definition is caused by, in part, an unclear definition of Turkish nationalism itself. Some ethnicities could become Turkish but many still felt like second-class citizens. How has the modern definition of citizenship affected the experiences of ethnic minorities and their location within Turkish nationalism? While the population policies of the early republic helped

construct nationalism they continue to affect Turkish citizenship today in the form of national memory. The remnants of the Ottoman Empire also continue to impact Turkish nationalist claims despite attempts to disregard its influence in Turkish history. Religion has also helped define modern nationalism.

In this chapter I will examine citizenship policies of exclusion and inclusion from the inception of the Republic. I will argue that the identities of minorities are still being excluded from the national community through the creation of history and memory. This exclusion is a continuation of the population policies discussed in the previous chapter. I will also look at how the suppression and selective representation of certain historical events and the creation of national memory are being used to enforce the national identity and further exclude minorities from being considered full Turkish citizens.

### **Citizenship - Inclusion and Exclusion**

“Citizenship has been defined as one’s participation, or membership, in a common community typically understood as a political community.” (Ince 2012, 19)

Citizenship involves both practices of inclusion and exclusion. Who is granted full rights as a citizen and who isn’t has a large influence on nationalism. “In most countries, there are significant groups, usually marked by race, by ethnicity or religion, which are denied full participation as citizens. Although they may have the right to vote, social economic and cultural exclusion denies them the chance of gaining political expression or of having any real say in the decisions that affect their

lives.” (Ince 2012, 19) Members of minority communities are able to become influential members of the Turkish government and ruling elite, however, only if they give up all elements of their identity as a minority. “Turkish citizenship has, from the beginning of the Republic, oscillated between an ethnic and a political definition of the (Turkish) nation.” (Yegen 2009, 597)

Controlling and limiting citizenship is another method of defining nationalism. “From the eighteenth century onwards, citizenship has been bound closely to the institution of the nation-state and therefore in practice has acted as ‘a powerful instrument of social closure’.” (Ince 2012, 19) “The theory and practice of citizenship in Turkey have defined Turkishness as a category which is simultaneously open and closed to non-Turks. When, in principle, it was open to non-Turkish Muslim inhabitants of the country it was closed to non-Muslims.” (Yegen 2009, 13) Despite reforms attempting to create a secular state, religion is still a major factor in determining Turkish identity. Like the population exchange through the Treaty of Lausanne, religion is more of an influence than ethnicity.

From 1923-1946 a single party governed the Republic of Turkey. The Republican People’s Party “distinguished between citizenship (being a Turkish citizen) and nationality (Turkishness) and tied citizenship rights to nationality.” (Ince 2012, 39) As discussed in the previous chapter only certain people were deemed to be ‘Turkish’ enough and were granted citizenship rights. All others were removed from the nation through exportation or death. To decide on who could be a Turkish citizen

the Republican People's Party judged membership on religious, cultural, and ethnic criteria. Different criteria were utilized at different times and in different areas. Muslims were generally considered to be Turks while non-Muslims were non-Turks. "One language, one culture, one ideal." (Ince 2012, 39) Mustafa Kemal, through his collection of ideals that came to be defined as "Kemalism" and remain directly linked to national identity, promoted a secular state. However, these authoritarian reforms were not completely successful in separating religion from the state, as religion remained a major unifying element for the population.

The Democratic Party won the general elections on May 14, 1950, ending the domination by a single party. "The definition of secularism, and of nationalism, which is the most important part of Turkish identity and citizenship, became much more moderate throughout the multi-party period." (Ince 2012, 87) The free election of the Democratic Party proved that the people had power and in many ways was a 'bloodless revolution' as written by Bernard Lewis. (Ince 2012, 89) However, after improvements in their first four years in power, the DP began to ignore the people who had elected them and lost support. After increasing authoritarian measures against opposition parties, the military stepped in on May 27, 1960. "The first Turkish experiment with political democracy had ended with military intervention." (Ince 2012, 90)

In the period between 1960-1980 individual and citizenship rights were expanded and representation of marginalized groups increased. This increase allowed

for “the beginning of political parties’ acceptance of the Kurdish issue, a taboo subject since the establishment of the Republic.” (Ince 2012, 114) Secularism also became more moderate, allowing for different religious sects to claim their constitutional rights. Despite the increasing liberal views Muslim minorities such as Kurds and Alevis, in practice, still continued to be seen as second-class citizens. On September 12, 1980 the government was overthrown by another military coup. Despite promises to return power to a democratically elected government, when the turnover of power did happen, only a few parties were allowed representatives in the elections. A revised constitution was implemented in 1982 to replace the one from 1961. “The limitations of rights and freedoms in the 1982 Constitution made citizens in Turkey more passive, created a less participatory democracy, and served to depoliticise the system.” (Ince 2012, 142) Even though the Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, religious courses were made requirements in school, however, these were limited to the traditions of Sunni Islam. Despite political stability from 1983 through 1993 “during the 1980’s, the attitude of the state towards Alevi, Kurdish and non-Muslim citizens’ identity claims was not promising, as the state continued to ignore differences among citizens.” (Ince 2012, 137)

The strong influence of the military in state affairs is consistently demonstrated in military coups since the inception of the republic. The military safeguarded the nation and protected Atatürk’s legacy. Any deviation from Kemalist principles was ‘corrected’ by military intervention. As with the population policies discussed in the previous chapters, this is another example of the top-down tactics used to impose the

national identity on to the nation. The military officers claimed that the coup was to protect democracy and the state. When it appeared that religion was once more becoming a threat to Kemalist principles in 2007, the military threatened, once again, to overthrow the government to protect the ideal of a secular state.

In the 1990's citizenship was once again transformed. In 1996 the Islamist Welfare Party had control of parliament and the Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan was made prime minister. However, a year later he and his government stepped down due to military pressures as the military once again intervened when it seemed that religious principles were becoming too much of an influence. The Constitutional Court closed down the Islamist Welfare Party in 1998 "for infringing the Republic's principle of secularism." (Ince 2012,139) Even though subsequent Islamist parties claimed to be more moderate and less ideologically driven, many were shut down.

In 2002 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was elected with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as prime minister. Erdoğan argued, "being Turkish means belonging to a sub-identity encompassed by the larger supra-identity of Turkish citizenship." (Ince 2012, 2) This change occurred in response to the "challenge that powerful ethnic, religious, and sectarian movements pose for the official view of Turkish citizenship, which is based on one language, one culture, and one ideal." (Ince 2012, 2) Minorities demanded recognition and not just policies of assimilation. "Legal citizenship as a formal status has never been the sole marker of Turkishness in

Turkey.” (Yegen 2009, 597) Even though they are citizens, Muslim minorities are not recognized as being fully Turkish.

### **Ethnicity in National Identity**

Since the population policies of the early Republic, ethnic minorities have had few occasions to voice their demands for recognition. When the Democratic Party came to power in 1950 its leaders spoke about moving away from Kemalist ideals of a mono-ethnic Turkey identity, however, they never made any real attempts to follow through. After the military coup in 1960 more political parties emerged, some of which relied on support from ethnic minorities. In the following decades an Islamic identity began to gain more power, and with it a tolerance, to a certain extent, for a multi-ethnic identity. This tolerance did not always translate into changes, however. Guerilla warfare between the PKK and the Turkish government dominated post 1980 ethnic issues. “Moreover, the use of terrorism by the PKK stigmatized any multiculturalist reform as a concession to terrorism, making even more difficult.” (Akturk 2012, 38) However, with the rise in power of Islamist parties, came a rise in the tolerance of ethnic minorities. This rise in tolerance is similar to the Ottoman identity in which ethnicity was not the determining factor. Despite this rise in tolerance, though, there are still many issues that need to be dealt with for equal citizenship, especially as many citizenship policies have included policies of assimilation instead of acceptance of ethnic minorities.

## **Kurds in Modern Turkey**

The ambiguity of the definition of Turkish citizenship has made it difficult for ethnic Kurds to be considered fully Turkish. “There always has been a gap between “Turkishness as citizenship” and “Turkishness as such.” (Yegen 2009, 597) As argued by Mesut Yegen, Kurds are ‘prospective-Turks’. They exist both as Turkish citizens but not Turkish. Sometimes the perception of Kurds as not being Turkish citizens takes over and they are subjected to discriminatory citizenship policies. They are vulnerable to the exclusionary policies of citizenship as well as occasionally have the inclusionary aspects open to them. However, the rise of Kurdish nationalism has become a major threat to Turkish nationalism. “Up until the last ten years, conventional academic literature in Turkey typically rejected seeing issues regarding the Kurds as an ethno-political problem and reduced it to either a general problem of economic development or an issue of military security.” (Saracoglu 2014, 54)

As pointed out by Mesut Yegen, in the general population there is the emerging belief that Kurds are no longer ‘prospective-Turks.’ Even though the official view of the state is that Kurds can be assimilated into Turkishness, recent signs “suggest that even the Turkish state is no longer a firm believer in the idea that the Kurds are prospective Turks.” (Yegen 2009, 14) Kurdish nationalism was a military threat in the 90’s and now “many Kurds seemed to have developed a very strong consciousness of being different from the Turkish mainstream.” (Yegen 2009, 16)

## **Denial of the Armenian Genocide**

The Turkish government has continued to deny the Armenian genocide. 21 countries<sup>3</sup> recognize the genocide and a number of international organizations<sup>4</sup>. The United States continues to waver. Currently about 60,000 Armenians live in Turkey, most in Istanbul. Since 1990 there has been a large increase in translating Armenian works from Armenian to Turkish. The Turkish state would use this as an example to show that tolerance within Turkey is increasing, on the other hand, Armenian scholars dismiss “it as a feeble attempt at tokenism to divert attention from more serious denials by the Turkish state.” (Göcek 2011, 186) Both articulate opposing viewpoints and neither fully explains the situation. However, this is an example of the re-writing of the past in a way to shed the best light on the present.

“The contemporary refusal by Turkish state and society to recognize the gravity and severity of Armenian losses makes this collective violence additionally traumatic. The official Turkish argument states that contemporaneous Armenian revolutionary activities led to a substantial loss of Turkish lives, making the destruction and suffering mutual.” (Göcek 2011, 212) By alleging that the Armenians killed Turkish citizens the Turkish government can avoid blame. If that tactic doesn’t

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<sup>3</sup> Countries recognizing the Armenian genocide are Argentina, Armenia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Lebanon, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vatican City, and Venezuela. (Armenian Genocide Blog)

<sup>4</sup> International organizations recognizing the Armenian Genocide include, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, World Council of Churches, Human Rights Association, European Alliance of YMCAs, Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, Mercosur, International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), International Center for Transitional Justice, and Ellie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity. (Armenian Genocide Blog)

work, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently did as described in the introduction, the blame can be passed off to the Ottomans. However, the denial is not only about the Armenian genocide. “The Turkish Republic’s memory politics towards the Armenian genocide was and is characterized by denial. But, not unlike the genocide itself, this too was part of a larger campaign, namely to exercise all violence from the memory of society.” (Üngör 2011, 247) As shown in the previous chapters the Turkish Republic relied on violent tactics to enforce the national identity. Any part of their history the Turkish government does not like, it simply takes it out of the history books.

### **Religion in National Identity**

Before 1922 there were still attempts to retain an Ottoman Muslim framework as a unifying identity. After the creation of the Republic of Turkey, however, this national identity changed direction, at least on the surface. “The agents of political nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s were the Republican elite, who favored a top-down model of social change and imposed their secular vision of nationalism through various means.” (Erken 2013, 172) The violence against Christians and various ethnic groups represent the Young Turks’ attempt to create first an Ottoman Muslim nation, and then the nation state of Turkey.

Following the war for independence Mustafa Kemal instituted reforms to transform the Turkish state into a secular one as discussed in the previous chapter, but many of the reforms did not manage to truly separate church from state. “Turkish state

secularism was unable to publicly marginalize the significance of religion in Turkish society; its nationalism was likewise unable to fully assimilate the diversity of the populace.” (Göçek 2011, 2) However, not all Muslims could be considered Turkish. “The politics of memory reproduced a specific perception of Islam, centered on the distinction between “good” and “bad” Muslims, which has been at the very root of Kemalist secularism.” (Azak 2010, 176) The Islam of the Ottoman period was not considered true Islam. It was portrayed as time of decadence and moving away from the true principles of Islam. In this evolving Turkish discourse certain followers of Islam in Turkey were then shown as good Muslims.

Currently the Turkish population is nearly 100 percent Sunni Muslim. The government realizes that in order to maintain a cohesive nation, they must appeal to the Muslim population. “The pro-Islamic AKP government and the state have replaced the previously adversarial tones between the state and Islam with a new partnership and dialogue.” (Turam 2007, 135) However, tension exists due to the desire to avoid associating with what is viewed as the backwards practices of the Ottoman Empire.

### **Remembering the Past**

The continuation of the early population policies can still be seen in the construction of nation’s memory. While attempting to construct the ‘ideal’ Turkish citizen the government carefully selected which events to include in the national history. In the early days of the Republic the elite focused on those aspects of history that allowed them to construct the narrative that the Turks were the rightful heirs to the

Anatolian region. Much of this was pre-Islamic and the Ottoman Empire represented only a minor element. (Erken 2013, 172) This version of history has dominated ever since. Education has been an important way of implanting national identity. “The current social studies texts emphasize duties more than rights; connect ancient civilizations and the Turkish nation; emphasize similarities between Muslim countries and Turkey.” (Ince 2012, 181)

In the beginning of the Republic “its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk commanded the Turkish nation not to focus on the past, but rather to concentrate on the present with the intention of securing its future.” (Göçek 2011, 214-215. However, despite the insistence of the creation of a new Turkey, the effects of the Ottoman Empire still linger. The leaders of the Young Turk revolution had all been educated under the Tanzimat reforms. Modern Turkish policies related to are religion similar to Abdülhamid’s. “Both limited the freedom of action of the religious authorities, integrated them further in to the state machinery and politicized them.” (Zürcher 2010, 282-283) The debate surrounding the interpretation of religion has continued through the different regimes. “The Hamidian regime, the Young Turks, the Kemalists, and the neo-Kemalists all employed the means at their disposal to argue the case for *true* Islam: loyal to the Caliph in Abdülhamid’s case, open to science in that of the Young Turks, private and non-political in that of the Kemalists, and nationalist with Evren.” (Zürcher 2010, 283)

One of Mustafa Kemal's contributions to Turkey was a secular nationwide education system. "Atatürk's ambition was to educate Turkey. Education was the means by which the country would catch up with contemporary civilization and then go forward with it." (Mango 2007, 157) This system was controlled by the state. It taught the glory of Turkish origins and the failure of the Ottoman Empire. It was yet another mechanism in which national identity could be enforced on the population. Much of the history taught only briefly focused on the Ottoman Empire and when it did it was negative. Instead, history was taught in a way to emphasize that Anatolia was the true homeland of the Turks. (Ince 2012)

The day of Atatürk's death, November 10<sup>th</sup>, is a national day of mourning. "Although Turkish citizens unanimously agree on his role as savior of the country, commander-in-chief of the national liberation army, and founder of the republic, they debate the appropriateness of his reform policies that replaced Islam with a secular-nationalist doctrine." (Ökten 2007, 95) The emergence of this debate is only a recent occurrence. The Turkish population is beginning to question their past but it is an uphill battle.



## **5. Conclusion**

The population of the Ottoman Empire was comprised of different religions and ethnicities. Despite reforms by the Sultan attempting to strengthen the Ottoman identity, separate nationalist movements began to emerge. Soon, sovereign nations were breaking off from the Empire. Eventually the Young Turk movement and a Turkish identity gained control of the Anatolian region and the new nation of Turkey emerged, although it would always be affected by its Ottoman past, no matter how reluctant the government is to admit it.

The transformation of the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey involved reforming the government, redefining the relationship between the population and the ruling elite, and navigating ethnic and religious identities and how those identities affected the national identity. Unfortunately, these processes were accompanied by the suppression of religious and ethnic minorities, deportations, violence, and murder.



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