"The White Turkish Man's Burden": Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey

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> Gentlemen, uncivilised people are doomed to be trodden under the feet of civilised people.[1]
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> - Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Abstract

In order to fully come to terms with the legacy of colonialism and the persistence of neo-colonial mentalities in contemporary Europe and elsewhere, the relationship between Orientalism and nationalism requires a close examination. This article analyses the connection between Orientalism and Kemalism within the framework of the Turkish nation-building project, in which a Westernised elite exalted homogenous nation-state-hood as the criteria for "Western-ness", in the process othering the ethno-religious diversity of the country as defining "Orientalness". It reads the modern history of Turkey as the denial and oppression of the Kurdish ethnic identity through state coercion and forced Turkification, and discusses how Kemalism constructed and justified its policies as a national and civilisational necessity. It shows how the persistence and rise of the Kurdish ethnic identity claim in Turkey constitutes a constant reminder to the Kemalist elite that Turkey has not achieved homogeneity, which articulates itself in increasing ethnic othering and nationalist anti-Kurdish hysteria.

Orientalism, Nationalism and Nation-building

Orientalism, as used by Edward Said (1978), referred to hegemonic patterns of representation of "Oriental" cultures and societies as "backward" and "traditional" in order to construct Europe (or the West) as "modern" and "progressive." For this reason the Orient had to constantly be stigmatised and set apart as innately different from the Occident. This othering process of drawing a strict East/West boundary became "the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on" (Said, 1978: 2-3). Orientalist images and knowledge, generated alongside colonialism in the 18th

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[1] See Atatürk's speech in the Turkish Hearth (*Türk Ocağı*) in Akhisar on 10 October, 1925 (Atatürk, 2006: 668).

and 19th centuries, have operated as a tool and a justification of cultural, political, military and economic dominance, based on the presumption of the inferiority of non-Western cultures, religions and societies in juxtaposition with the West. This understanding of Orientalism connects the rhetorical with cultural, political and economic power relations of domination and submission, both explaining and seeking to legitimise the hegemony of the West. As James Carrier has pointed out, "stylised images are not inert products […] they have social, political, and economic uses of their own, for they shape people's perceptions, justify policies, and so influence people's actions" (1995: 11).

Said's influential arguments have drawn sharp criticism[2] and generated a worldwide scholarly debate about the nature of modernity, colonialism and empire. In particular, it has been argued that Said's concept of Orientalism does not account for the potential for Orientals themselves to use Orientalism in their self-definition (Fox, 1992: 145-146). James Carrier has explained that Orientalism serves "not just to draw a line between societies, but also to draw a line within" and that "this process is likely to be particularly pronounced in societies that self-consciously stand on the border between the occident and the orient" (1995: 22-23). Therefore, one needs to examine more localised formations of Orientalist discourses *within* nation-states that operate internally and objectify, stigmatise and essentialise a particular geography, ethnicity and culture.[3] Such an analysis reveals how Orientalism functions within a country to maintain unequal domestic power relations but also bolster the wider geopolitical interests of Western powers. For example, discussing China, Louisa Schein has drawn attention to the "relation between imaging and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically" where the "'orientalist' agent of dominant representation is transposed to that sector of the Chinese elite that engages in domestic othering" (1997: 73). Within such a framework, of particular importance is the special relationship between Orientalism and nationalism and the politics of nation-building, to which practices of inclusion and exclusion are inherently linked.

Nationalism has facilitated the introduction of the political culture of European modernity to those outside of the West. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that European imperialism and Third World nationalisms have *together* achieved the "universalisation of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community" (1992: 19 - emphasis in original). Rather than being passive objects of Orientalism, nationalist "Orientals" have, even at the moment of opposition to the Western model,[4] "self-Orientalised" by deploying

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[2] The literature is vast, for a summary of various lines of criticism see Lockman (2004).

[3] Several scholars have discussed the operation of localised "Orientalisms" in different geographic contexts, see for example Bakic´-Hayden (1995); Heng and Devan (1992); Gladney (1994); Jansson (2003); Kahraman (2002); Piterberg (1996); Schneider (1998); Wilson (1981); Zeydanlıoğlu (2007).

[4] The formation of "the West" as a threat to "national indigenous values" still relies on "the West" as a model against which an "ethnic authenticity" can be created. The imagined gaze of

Euro-American Orientalist perceptions and methods in the formulation of the national-self and legitimate claims about authenticity (Dirlik, 1997: 111). Accordingly, Partha Chatterjee (1986: 30) has concluded that through an acceptance of the notion of "modernity", the basis of colonial dominance, "Eastern" nationalisms have themselves strengthened and sustained the Orientalist legacy. Colonial power was maintained by ensuring that non-Western subjects were suspended in an "in-between place", exposing these subjects to "civilised" European culture and values whilst also regarding them as savage. Operating in the cultural and ideological spheres, mimicry constitutes "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Bhabha, 1994: 85-86). Consequently, postcolonial nationalist elites in the Muslim world and elsewhere have largely operated on Orientalist assumptions in the realisation of their nationalist and authoritarian internal civilising missions, which often amounted to murderous ethnic cleansing, through the justification derived from the teleology of progress and modernity. The conceptualisation of a national history was key to the creation of the nationalist mythical origin, reproducing Eurocentric notions about the past which had underpinned the European civilising mission (see Chatterjee, 1993: 76-112). In the field of education, for example:

> The colonial era, even in countries that were never formal colonies, established a complete separation between traditional and modern education. Modern education was education in disciplines formed and based exclusively on Western scholarship. Such education required students from the non-West to ingest the constructs of Orientalism inherent and complicit in all branches of Western thought and scholarship. The history and thought of the Orient was therefore learned as it had been determined, assessed and described from superior authority by the West. It is little surprise therefore that sociological and anthropological studies conducted by scholars of and from the non-West on their own community provide a seamless continuation of the scholarship of the West (Sardar, 1999: 87).

It is because of this intimate and complicit relationship with Orientalism that nationalism has been called "the avatar of Orientalism" (Breckenridge and van der Veer, 1993: 12) and that its participation "in the hegemonic discourse is not so much of an exception as it is a manifestation of a yet continuing power of Orientalist thinking" (Soğuk, 1993: 370). Accordingly, when nationalist elites project the internalised Orientalism "inwards" as part of the nation-building process, the "native" emerges as an Other that becomes the target of "corrective" and "scientific" projects of modernity and progress. The transformation of the native is undertaken through a return to the "disciplinary narratives of the West" (Soğuk, 1993: 374).

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the West appears as the criteria of *any* judgment (see Ahıska, 2003). Moreover, many of the myths of "national origins" relied in their construction on Orientalist knowledge in the first place.

This approach should not be seen as another way of silencing the subaltern, denying him/her the space and agency for resistance or limiting the potential of negotiation and hybridity. It is instead a Foucauldian kind of pessimism, which does not exclude resistance or its possibility from the equation, but recognises the uneven dispersion of power. Instead, it acknowledges the continuing global operation and hegemony of Orientalism not only in the discourse and power of the West over the East, but its enactment within the East as well, whereby "those in power consume and reproduce the projection of 'the West' to negotiate and consolidate their hegemony in line with their pragmatic interests" (Ahıska, 2003: 366). This is important to keep in mind when we consider that despite the fall of colonialism, relationships have survived that allow Orientalist representations to persist and indeed inform policies and practices throughout the world.

Orientalism and the Kemalist Civilising Mission

The process of the reproduction of Orientalism *within* Turkey refers to the way in which the Turkish nationalist elite, the Kemalists, imagined the Turkish nation and construed the ethno-religiously diverse society inherited from the Ottoman Empire. It is the process whereby Kemalism approached the society it emerged from, and the conditions that gave rise to it, through an Orientalist and Eurocentric reasoning and logic (Kahraman, 2002: 177). Meltem Ahıska has called this process Kemalism's "Occidentalist fantasy", which "evoked a 'lack' in 'the people' upon which organised the 'desire' to fill it" (2003: 365). Put differently, one can argue that in the absence of direct Western colonialism, the Kemalists took on what I call the "White Turkish Man's Burden" in order to carry out a civilising mission on a supposedly backward and traditional Anatolian society enslaved by the retrograde influence of Islam. By assuming the Orientalist narrative and re-enacting it in the form of a Turkish Orientalism "indigenous" to Turkey, the Turkish ruling elite negated the Ottoman past for its "backwardness" and "religiosity". The Kemalists rejected the Orient and assigned to Islam the definition of Orientalness, thus equating westernisation with de-Islamisation (Sayyid, 1997: 68-69).

In the name of what the Kemalists called, "reaching the contemporary level of civilisation" (*muassır medeniyet seviyesine erişmek*), this project was carried out through the agent of the nation-state with speed and from above, eliminating the opportunity to seek change in any way other than through mimicking "the West." In this sense, the essentialisation and homogenisation of "the West" normalised the unequal power relations within Turkey, reflecting the pragmatic interests, expectations and the dominance of the secular Westernised elite, giving way to a "cognitive dissonance" between the value system of the elites and the rest of the population (Göle, 1997: 86). The civilisational divide between the modernising urban elite and the subaltern rural population assigned a paternal role to the Kemalists, who constantly perceived

the Anatolian masses as backward, primitive and infantilised Others. It is therefore not surprising that the state is imagined in Turkey through the familiar and familial image of the Father State (*Devlet Baba*), constructing and defending "the common good", punishing and rewarding accordingly, irrespective of societal consensus (Heper, 1985: 102-3; Delaney, 1995: 177-179). This power relation is constructed in accordance with the Orientalist presumption that the "natives" cannot rule or represent themselves and they therefore need to be ruled and represented. The Kemalist mantra of the 1930s, "For the people, despite people" (*Halk için, halka rağmen*) is therefore not coincidental. While exalting the ideal of the "Turkish nation", Kemalist discourse constructed the society inherited from the Ottoman Empire as "different", as "lacking" and in need of transformation, simply "that which causes defeat" (Soğuk, 1993: 374). The Kemalist elite took on the paternalistic Orientalist view that they must, as the rightful teachers, educate Islamic, ethnic, tribal and rural Others deemed to be outside the sphere of Western modernity. Nationalist intellectuals who understood positivist Western science and technology played a key role in the production and institutionalisation of knowledge and believed they held the responsibility of bringing "modernity" to the masses. In the words of the founder of modern Turkey and the "Father of the Turks", Mustafa Kemal Atatürk:

> We will live as a progressive and civilised nation in the arena of civilisation [...] We will take science and technology from wherever it is and insert it in the head of each member of the nation. There is no restriction and condition on science and technology [...] If [ignorance] is not eliminated, we will stand on the same spot [...] If something is standing on the same spot, this means that it is going backwards (Atatürk, 2006: 388).

Historically, the Kemalist civilising mission involved the creation of a homogenous Turkish nation that urgently needed to rid itself of its "Orientalness." This involved the othering of its Ottoman past, of rural and tribal structures, and in particular the ethno-religious plurality of the society (Bora, 1998: 39-42). These were constructed as anachronisms of the old Ottoman order and what made Turkey "different" from the West. The ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the society were constructed as a source of instability and a barrier to progress. The Orientalist gaze of "the West" played a foundational role in Kemalist self-definition, in the way that they imagined the Turkish nation, claimed hegemony and exercised power. As Meltem Ahıska has outlined, "the impact of the West on the Turkish nationalists was more than a mere import of Western concepts and techniques and was not just a movement of 'modernity' in time and space, but a 'performance for the imagined Western audience'" (2003: 367). The radical Kemalist reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, as the continuation of the Tanzimat reforms in the late 19th century Ottoman Empire, were implemented with this "audience" in mind and it was very important for the Kemalists that Turkey "appeared" to be Western for this panoptic gaze. The Westernising reforms were wide-ranging and non-

negotiable and their implementation was considered as a top-down process. The authorities ignored the multitude of voices that existed within the boundaries of the new state when trying to mould them into loyal nationalist citizens. The reforms involved the appropriation of "Western norms, styles, and institutions, most conspicuously in education, law, social life, clothing, music, architecture, and the arts […]" (Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997: 4). Through exposure to Kemalist nationalist discourse citizens would be influenced by the reforms and consequently reinforce the authority of the state.

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was central to the draconian reforms that aimed to eliminate the socio-political legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The caliphate, religious foundations, ministries, courts, schools, dervish orders, sects and brotherhoods were all abolished. In 1924, the Law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*), with its roots in Ottoman reforms, secularised the school system and introduced mixed sex education. The 1925 Hat Law (*Şapka Kanunu*) prohibited the veil and the traditional Ottoman headwear, the fez. The nationalist and secularist reforms signified the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation-state and from Islam to nationalism, with the "cult of Atatürk" substituting Islam as "Turkey's religion" (Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 188). Under the Ottoman Empire different Muslim ethnicities had been united by their common religion. Islam had functioned as the cohesive element in Ottoman society, but having replaced such a role for Islam in the new republic, Kemalism launched a program of Turkification. It was hoped that forced assimilation would guarantee the loyalty of the citizens to the nation-state and prevent ethnic separatism. It would also weaken European colonial influence and interference, which had resulted in the traumatic downfall and partition of the Ottoman Empire, leaving a deep scar on the minds and collective memory of the Turkish elite. It has been argued that Atatürk saw ethno-religious pluralism as a major flaw in the Ottoman system because this "had led to the search for independence and autonomy by groups such as the Armenians and the Kurds, which had resulted in self-mutilation" (Muller, 1996: 175). The authoritarian nationalist military officers, bureaucrats, academics, journalists and intellectuals who formed the nucleus of the Kemalist elite were profoundly affected by European thought and assumed with their European predecessors and contemporaries that nations were the only legitimate means of organising a state. A nation, they were convinced, could only consist of a society that shared the same ideal, language, territory and culture. Since Western modernity, superiority and strength was defined by homogenous nation-statehood and militarism, systematic Turkification became Kemalism's very own civilising mission.

The Making of the Turkish Nation and the Kurds

The creation of a homogenous Turkish nation as criteria for "western-ness", required the dilution of the largest culturally and linguistically distinct

non-Turkish people: the Kurds.[5] This "civilisational necessity" became even more pronounced when significant homogenisation was achieved by the extermination of most Armenians between 1915-1916 and the move of approximately 1.2 million Greek Orthodox Christians to Greece and 500,000 Muslims emigrating from Greece to Turkey as part of a population exchange between the two countries (Akçam, 2004; Aktar, 2000: 17-55). Here we can talk about an evolving double stigma: Not only did Kurds emerge in official perception as ethno-linguistic aliens within the national body, they were also deemed "insufficiently civilised." Prior to the establishment of the Turkish republic, Atatürk had referred to "Ottoman country being the homeland of Turks and Kurds" and emphasised the "inseparability of the Kurds from the Ottoman nation" (Yeğen, 1999: 116). He had also pragmatically talked about a possible autonomy for Kurds in order to guarantee their continued support in the War of Independence against European occupying powers (McDowall, 2000: 196). In the decades following the creation of the republic, with the intensification of the nation building process, the Kurds ceased to exist as a distinct ethnicity in official discourse and a systematic forced assimilation campaign followed.

Ernest Renan cogently remarked in 1882 that "forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation." Homi Bhabha, in his discussion on the "foundational fictions" upon which all nations are built, argues that the "strange forgetting" Renan refers to "constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative" (see Bhabha, 1990: 11, 310). In Turkey, the making of the Turkish nation went hand in hand with the "forgetting, postponing and cancelling" of the Kurdish ethnic identity (Yeğen, 1999: 120). Kurds were no longer members of a "sibling nation", but "Mountain Turks", who had "forgotten" their Turkishness or were in "denial" of their Turkish origins and who needed to be told the "truth." This had occurred because of the Kurds' proximity to Iran, resulting in a degenerate language mixed with Persian. The Kurdish language, traditional dress, folklore and any expression of Kurdish culture were banned and reconstructed as "Turkish". Kurdish peasants, who could only communicate in their own mother tongue, were heavily fined for each Kurdish word they used (Nezan, 1993: 73-74). All references to a territory called "Kurdistan", which had been widely acknowledged during the Ottoman era, were removed from maps and official documents, and Turkish names gradually replaced the names of Kurdish towns and villages. Most rural Kurds only became aware of the new Turkish names of their villages through contact with the Turkish gendarmerie. The Law on the Unification of Education, mentioned earlier, closed all religious schools and effectively banned the teaching of non-Turkish languages (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 95-96). The "fixing" of the discursive space in order to eliminate the expression of a distinct Kurdish identity was extended through the inscription

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[5] For background information on the Kurds and the Kurdish question see: Bruinessen (2000); Kirişçi and Winrow (1997); McDowall (2000).

of nationalist symbols onto the physical space, especially in the Kurdish provinces, through spatial Turkification. The "nationalisation" of the land was to assist the transformation of its inhabitants. Mountains, hills, schools and official buildings were inscribed with the symbols of the Turkish flag, the crescent and star, as well as chauvinist slogans such as "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk" (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*), "One Turk equals the whole world" (*Bir Türk dünyaya bedeldir*) and "One language, one people, one flag" (*Tek dil, tek halk, tek bayrak).* This went hand in hand with the destruction of historical artefacts or monuments that in anyway referred to the Kurds or indicated a Kurdish presence (see for example Serdî, 1994: 188-189).[6] The removal of Islam as a "social glue" highlighted ethnic divisions and Kurds came to face not only religious restrictions but also cultural and linguistic extinction. As a response to these developments, there were several Kurdish revolts which in turn intensified Turkification and brutal state coercion.[7] The revolts were interpreted and represented as the will to re-introduce the Ottoman order and as a reactionary threat to the "civilising reforms" and the consolidation of the power of the modern Turkish state. The Kurdish rebellions accelerated the nation-building process and generated a persistent image of the Kurds as culturally backward, socially tribal, religiously fanatic, economically lagging and an internal threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey.

The making of the Turkish nation and the suppression of the Kurdish ethnic identity was made possible by a state knowledge-production that relied on European Orientalist constructs and racial theories. Etienne Copeaux has underlined that Turkish historiography and linguistics are "children of Western Orientalism; they are its products; this is because the period at the turn of the century were replete with studies and arguments whose authority could not be questioned […]" (Copeaux, 1998: 52).[8] As Edward Said pointed out, racial theory, rising imperialism and the incomplete and inadequately assimilated

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[6] It goes without saying that other ethno-religious groups such as the Laz, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Syriacs and Arabs etc were also targeted by this systematic program (see for example Aktar, 2000; Yıldız, 2001).

[7] Of the 18 rebellions that broke out between 1924 and 1938, 17 were in the Kurdish provinces and 16 of them involved the Kurds (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 100). Regarding the nature of the Kurdish rebellions, Hamit Bozarslan has succinctly explained that the tribes and religious brotherhoods, which provided the human and material resources to the rebellions, rejected the Turkish State "not because it was Turkish but because it was State." Yet, their en-masse refusal strengthened the Kurdish nationalists, "who rejected the state not because it was state but because it was Turkish" (2000: 17).

[8] Orientalism as a field of study and its sub-branch of Turkology played an immense role in encouraging ethnic awareness and assisting early Turkish nationalists in formulating the idea of the Turkish nation (Timur, 2000: 140-173). It is not by coincidence that one of the first books Ziya Gökalp, the founder of modern Turkish nationalism, bought as a young man was the influential French Orientalist Leon Cahun's *Introduction á l'Histiore de l'Asie: Turcs et Mongols, des Origines á 1405*, published in 1896. Cahun's popular work was characterised by the argument that Islam and Arab culture had a retrograde impact on the Turkish race. Gökalp wrote: "It was as if this book had been written in order to encourage me to labour over the ideal of Turkism" (Gökalp, 1968: 10-11).

sciences reinforced each other and the image of *the* Oriental produced by this conglomeration was almost undisputed (1978: 230-233 – emphasis in original). Turkish Orientalism was crystallised in the Kemalist theories of the Turkish History Thesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) and the Sun-Language Theory (*Güneş-Dil Teorisi*), formulated at The First Turkish History Congress and The First Turkish Language Congress, both held in 1932. These pseudo-scientific theories argued that Neolithic Turks had founded *all* the great civilisations of India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome and that Turkish was the source of *all* the civilised languages of the world. However, under the influence of Arabic and Persian Turkish had been contaminated and therefore needed purification (Beşikçi, 1997; Ersanlı, 2003). It was the burden of the Turkish race as a member of the "Great White European Race" to bring civilisation to "backward peoples" in order to civilise the whole world (Aydın, 2001: 358-362). These theories were disseminated widely through out the society, especially in school textbooks, and still continue to influence the discourse of Turkish nationalism today (see Copeaux, 1998).

In the case of the Kurds, the Turkish History Thesis and the Sun-Language Theory made it possible to refute their existence, language, ethnic identity and the geographical area of Kurdistan. Through knowledge production that established the Turkish race as founder of the Anatolian civilisations, a solution was found to the problem of placing Kurds within the Turkish nation. Kurds were Turks who had forgotten their "Turkishness". This "scientific fact" became part of the Turkish state's official discourse on the Kurds, and through forced Turkification, they hoped to "integrate" Kurds into the Turkish core.[9] For example, a Turkish dictionary published by the Turkish Language Institution (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) in 1936 defined the word "Kurd" as: "Name given to a group or a member of this group of Turkish origin, many who have changed their language, speaking a broken form of Persian and lives in Turkey, Iraq, Iran" (Beşikçi, 1977: 167). However, as Martin van Bruinessen has put it, "the embarrassing question why it was necessary to Turkify a people who were said to be Turks already was never answered" (2000: 80).

State sponsored knowledge production and journalistic accounts in this period constructed the rebellious Kurds as the representatives of the dark Middle Ages and the Turkish Army as symbolising the embodiment of Enlightenment. Kemalist discourse constructed Kurdistan, the hidden and

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[9] The theoretical and the pseudo-scientific foundation for the Turkification of Kurds had already been laid by Ziya Gökalp, who himself was of Kurdish origin. Gökalp's inverted Orientalist discourse on the Kurds deployed a representational hierarchy in which the "Bedouin Arab" emerged as the most demoted category and representative of the "Orient." Gökalp divided the Kurds into two types, those who were "nomadic" (*göçebe*) and those who were "settled" (*mukîm*) (1980: 130). Kurds who lived close to Turkish cities and culture had benefitted greatly from this proximity. Not only had they liberated themselves from tribalism and nomadism but also feudalism, and shown great "success in a civilised life" (Gökalp, 1980: 132).

invisible "Orient" of Turkey, as a region of dissent and banditry, ruled by superstition and in need of a heavy dose of civilisation. Representing and objectifying the imaginative Kurdish landscape in this manner made it susceptible to certain kinds of management. A report prepared by the Interior Minister Cemil Ubaydin after the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925, called the "Eastern Reform Plan" (*Şark Islahat Planı*), proposed that a public inspector govern the Kurdish region "in a colonial way" and that the region be Turkified through forced re-settlement (Bayrak, 1994: 256-257). As part of the plan, the "Settlement Law" (*İskân Kanunu*) was passed in the Turkish parliament in 1934 and divided the Turkish society into groups and zones for the purpose of deporting Kurds. Article 11 of the law ordered Kurds to be distributed thinly so that they constituted no more than 10 percent of the population of any district to which they were sent. Dispersed Kurdish families across Turkey were not allowed to have contact with each other to break up their social cohesion, while some children were sent to boarding schools where they would exclusively speak Turkish (Yıldız, 2001: 242-253). It is clear that the deportations were part of the Kemalist social engineering and nation-building process and enabled the authorities to "adjust" the demographic composition through forced assimilation.

Kemalist Trauma and the Kurdish Question in Contemporary Turkey

Waves of intensive Turkification and state violence have effectively resulted in the Kurdish provinces being under emergency rule for the best part of the modern history of Turkey. Despite the transition to multi-party politics after 1945, repressive and assimilationist policies were reinforced with the military interventions of 1960, 1971 and 1980, where Turkey's powerful Kemalist military intervened to protect the status quo from the "threat within" and keep the country securely on Atatürk's path of civilisation. Immediately after the 1960 coup, 485 prominent Kurds were detained without trial for nine months in a concentration camp in central Turkey. The Forced Settlement Law No: 105 (*105 No'lu İskân Kanunu*) that came into force the same year deported the 55 of the most influential detainees to Western Turkey (Nezan, 1993: 65). The law stipulated that this was done in order to "carry out certain social reforms, demolish the order of the Middle Ages that exists in Turkey, and eliminate bodies such as aghas, sheikhdoms […]"(*Radikal*, 19 January, 2007a). In 1961, General Cemal Gürsel, the head of the military regime, lauded a book based on the Turkish History Thesis, which claimed that the Kurds were in fact of Turkish origin (McDowall, 2000: 404).[10] Turkish radio stations were set up in order to discourage the listening of broadcasts in Kurdish from neighbouring countries (Nezan, 1993: 65). Other measures involved registrars rejecting the

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[10] This was the same General Gürsel who stood on an American tank in the early 1960s in Turkey's largest Kurdish city Diyarbakır and declared, "There are no Kurds in this country. Whoever says he is a Kurd, I will spit in his face" (quoted in Muller, 1990: 177).

registration of Kurdish child names as well as setting up boarding schools in the Kurdish region where children, separated from their families and milieu at a very young age, could be Turkified. By the 1970s, of the total 70 boarding schools in Turkey, 60 were located in the Kurdish provinces (Beşikçi, 1970: 552-553).

The systematic repression and assimilation of the Kurds reached its peak with the 1980 coup, which specifically singled out the Kurdish region as a particular threat to national unity. The majority of the Turkish army was based in the region following the coup, with responsibility for the administration of a wide-ranging plan of Turkification during which 81,000 Kurds were arrested (McDowall, 1997: 414). The military presence secured the prohibition of Kurdish cultural and political representation by closing down newspapers, publishing houses, charitable organizations and NGOs and by seizing books about Kurds, Kurdistan and Kurdish nationalism.[11] Systematic torture was used in military prisons not only to subdue and terrorise Kurds but also to turkify them.[12] These practices were legitimised by the 1982 Constitution, which reinforced Kemalism (*Atatürkçülük*) as "central for both the state doctrine and the official 'syntax' of power in Turkey" (Bozarslan, 2000:20).[13] The new constitution banned the Kurdish language,[14] Kurdish names for children (Law 1587), and stipulated that all citizens of the Turkish Republic are "Turks". By 1986, 2,842 more Kurdish villages had been given Turkish names (McDowall, 2000: 425). Hakan Yavuz has remarked that "the 1980 coup and its oppressiveness helped to create a siege mentality among Kurds, compelling them to think that their future was constrained and contained by the Turkish state" (2001: 12). Nurtured by rapid urbanisation and the radical social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the Kemalist policies of denial and destruction produced the opposite effect by politicising the Kurdish ethnic identity, giving way to the largest Kurdish insurgency in the modern history of Turkey. The immensely destructive civil war that ensued between the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkêren Kurdistan, PKK*)[15] and the Turkish army, with an estimated death toll of more than 30,000 mostly civilian Kurds,

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[11] For example, in 1982, the education minister ordered folk songs in the Kurdish region to be sung only in Turkish since they could be exploited for separatist purposes (McDowall, 2000: 424).

[12] For a discussion of torture as a tool for Turkification in this period see Zeydanlıoğlu (2008).

[13] For example, Article 2 stresses that the Republic of Turkey is bound to the nationalism of Atatürk.

[14] Article 28/2 specified, "No publications or broadcasts may be made in any language prohibited by law." These were "languages other than those which are the primary official languages of states recognised by the Turkish State" (Law 2932) meaning in particular Kurdish. Law 2932, which was not annulled until 1991, stipulated that "the mother tongue of Turkish citizens is Turkish." See the website of Turkish Constitutional Law for details: http://www.anayasa.gen.tr.

[15] In its struggle for autonomy for the Kurds, the PKK gained notoriety not only through violent opposition to the Turkish state, but also against other Kurdish organisations and "collaborators" and has been involved in political assassinations and the indiscriminate killing of civilians (for more details see Bruinessen, 2000: 239).

only came to an end with the kidnapping of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, although sporadic clashes and military operations continue to this day.

During the civil war the Kurdish provinces were transformed into a militarised zone by the Turkish army.[16] In collaboration with paramilitary and extremist groups and intelligence organs, Special Forces (*Özel Timler*) murdered thousands of Kurdish intellectuals, human rights activists, politicians and terrorised the population at large (McDowall, 2000: 441). Similar to the resettlement programmes of the early decades of the republic, the 1990s saw mass-scale village evacuations where Kurdish peasants were exposed to "degrading behaviour, arbitrary arrest, violence, torture, extra-judicial killings, sexual violence or threats of violence and the wanton destruction (or plunder) of moveable property, livestock and food stocks" (McDowall, 2000: 440). According to Hamit Bozarslan, close to 9,000 settlements were destroyed and 3 million displaced (2001: 45). The internally displaced Kurds currently face immense hardship in shanty towns surrounding large cities with no prospect of economic or social integration. The "Kurdish question" has now become a "Turkish question", in the sense that the conflict and its impact is also increasingly present in the daily lives of urban Turks who might otherwise have been fairly immune to the conflict. These developments further fuel feelings of invasion by Turks and entrench prevalent discourses on Kurds as backward, violent, tribal and criminal. Mainstream media plays a crucial role in flaming fears and stigmatising the Kurds. A recent study of the representation of Kurds in Turkey's largest daily *Hürriyet* concluded:

> Ultimately, Kurds are kept silent in media coverage (discussion is "about" them not "with" them), are mostly associated with terrorism (the PKK), and are portrayed as divisive and as putting forth unreasonable demands. The framework of the coverage is very nationalistic and regards Kurds as enemy Others, belittling and discrediting their existence and cultural values […] Democratic behaviour by Kurds is presented as deviant. The deviance is not what they do lawfully or unlawfully; it is their Kurdishness and the activities in which they engage in expressing it […] The findings demonstrate that the coverage was an indirect tool of oppression rather than an agency of change that challenged the prejudices and hostility towards Kurds by the country's elites (Sezgin and Wall, 2005: 795).

In some urban centres, the conflict is increasingly turning into a Kurdish-Turkish one as problems become intractable. Funerals of soldiers

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[16] In 1985, the Turkish state introduced the "Village Guards" (*Korucular*), employing about 100,000 paramilitary Kurds to fight the PKK (Bozarslan, 2000: 24). McDowall has argued that persons with a criminal record were recruited from the outset (2000: 421-424). In addition, the State of Emergency (*Olağanüstü Hal*), which was in force between 1987-2002, vested the governor with extraordinary powers such as imposing restrictions on the press, relocation of public employees, evacuating villages and supervising proceedings in civil trials against members of the security forces and ordering provincial governors to take "necessary measures" (Gunter, 1990: 83).

killed in clashes with the PKK frequently turn into anti-Kurdish hysteria and frustrated nationalist sentiments have recently reached such levels that there were 20 cases of lynching attempts against Kurds and leftist activists between 6 April 2005 and 30 August 2006 in Turkey (*Turkish Daily News*, 18 September, 2006).[17] These practices are encouraged and normalised by military officials, academics, politicians and journalists who define nationalist hysteria and violence as "reactions by concerned citizens" and encourage them to respond.[18]

One can clearly talk about an increasing Kemalist trauma deriving from the failure in successfully assimilating *all* Kurds. The Kurdish ethnic identity claim and the rise of Kurdish nationalism, energised by oppressive and brutal state policies and strengthened by the global transformations of the post-Cold War world, constitute a traumatic reminder that Turkey has not successfully achieved the making of a homogenous nation-state of Turkish speakers.[19] The realisation of this "failure" casts dark clouds over Turkey's "Western-ness" in Kemalist thinking and articulates itself in anti-Kurdish nationalist hysteria. Although policies of assimilation continue in schools, the army and elsewhere as a matter of standard practice, Kurds are increasingly being construed as ethnic Others and it is becoming difficult for the Kemalist elites and certain sections of the population to imagine the Kurds within the boundaries of "Turkishness" (Yeğen, 2006: 82-88). This is also evident in the recent emergence of an exclusionary media discourse that attaches the phenomenon of "honour killing" to the Kurdish ethnic identity as an essential and innate "trait" and geographically to the Kurdish provinces as a rural, traditional and fanatic backwater.[20] In order to claim modernity, legitimacy and Western approval, the Turkish state creates an "axis of barbarity" consisting of Eastern "tradition" (*töre*), "religious reactionism" (*irtica*) and "separatist terror" (*bölücü terör*), and projects this essentialism to the barbaric, Islamic, Kurdish corners of the

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[17] On 23 December, 2006, following violent clashes between Turkish and Kurdish students in Mersin University in southern Turkey, the Human Rights Association of Turkey (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*) felt the need to issue a press release warning that clashes in universities along ethnic lines could rapidly extend to society as a whole (*Radikal*, 23 December, 2006). In October, 2007, following a PKK attack from bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, which killed 12 Turkish soldiers, several cities across Turkey saw large "anti-terror" demonstrations some of which resulted in shops owned by Kurds being ransacked (*Radikal*, 28 October, 2007b).

[18] For example, on 8 June, 2007, a statement by the Turkish General Staff invited the "Turkish nation" to show its "national reflex" en masse against "terror". In an earlier statement on 27 April, in which the army threathened the government with a coup, it was made clear that "Those who oppose Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's understanding of 'How happy is the one who says I am a Turk' are enemies of the Republic of Turkey and will remain so" (See the website of the General Staff at: http://www.tsk.mil.tr).

[19] Zafer Yörük (2007) has explained in psychoanalytical terms that the contemporary Kurdish political challenge and resistance implies the reappearance "from the corner of the Turkish subject's eye" what had been expelled through denial from the reality of modern Turkey during the constitution of its identity: the Kurds. "The idea of the existence of another nation within Turkey, in their historical geography, Kurdistan, was in itself a traumatic threat of dis-memberment, very similar to the threat of castration."

[20] As an example among many, see Özkök (2006).

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East (*Doğu*), in contrast depicting the Kemalist elites as civilised and enlightened. The objects of these stylised images are not allowed to advance in time or breakout out of the grip of their origins or "Oriental essences". Dicle Koğacıoğlu argues that this "enables other parts of the country to be imagined as somehow immune to the problem" and allows for the military to intervene and implement order and stability (2004: 130).

The historical Kemalist onslaught on the ethno-religious diversity of the Anatolian society in the name of modernity and civilisation has been framed by hegemonic patterns of representation that reproduce Orientalism within Turkey. Turkish Orientalism benefits Kemalist elites located at the profitable junctures of power networks and allows them to exercise power and legitimise state-coercion. This process creates and re-creates its discursively inflated Others as existential and civilisational threats. The slow and precarious transition from the denial of the Kurdish ethnic identity to its "recognition" has not necessarily resulted in permanent political or cultural rights, but instead the entrenchment of the notion of Kurds as a "problem" and trouble-makers, and ultimately an obstacle to Turkey's natural progression toward Western modernity. This "failure" heightens Kemalism's trauma and inferiority complex under the omnipotent imagined gaze of the West.

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