

## Chapter 10

PART III  
THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CHALLENGE

Chapter 10  
Defining the parameters  
of a post-nationalist Turkish  
historiography through the case  
of the Anatolian Armenians

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In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne or Memory was the mother of all the Muses, including Clio, the mother of History. When modern historiographers discuss how History came into the world as a discipline, they often evoke this myth of origin and then proceed to the controversies that developed after the birth, for the child grew up to usurp many of the functions of the mythical grandmother. If one of History's functions is indeed to get societies to remember their pasts, what does contemporary Turkish society remember about 1915? It is the dismal answer to this crucial question that necessitates not only a critique of current Turkish nationalist historiography, but also its eventual replacement by a post-nationalist one.

In this article, I attempt to start to develop such a post-nationalist Turkish historiography. After undertaking a discussion of the discipline of historiography, I criticize current Turkish historiography particularly in relation to two of its inherent elements, the hegemony of nationalism and the hegemony of the year 1915. I then propose the possibility of an alternate 'post-nationalist' historiography that seeks to eliminate these hegemonic elements.

**The development of historiography as a discipline**

The development of historiography, namely the analysis of the specific forms of thinking and writing about history (Fuchs and Stuchtey 2002), in 19<sup>th</sup> centu-

ry Europe was embedded in the project of modernity. The discipline faced interrelated empirical and theoretical problems from its inception, however. Empirically, its embeddedness in the project of European modernity generated problems in the construction of historical knowledge. And theoretically, the licence it assumed in the processes of thinking and writing about history created issues in the interpretation of historical knowledge.

Theoretically, the main problem with historiography emerged during the phase of the 'thinking and writing' of history, in that it was through this thinking and writing that the elements of *memory*, namely ways of remembering the past, and *narrative*, namely placing that which was remembered in the form of a story were introduced into historiography. Hence, while historiography proceeded in the form of a scientific discipline treating empirically verifiable historical facts or events, it necessarily required the intervention of imagination, first to confer with memory to select some facts in preference to others, and second to order the actors and events in a particular manner so as to create a coherent story. In the process, then, a fictional element entered into the historical narrative.

Scholars increasingly drew attention to the inherent biases this fictional element in historiography might contain. Hayden White, for instance, stressed the pre-modern form of historiography as he noted in particular (1978: 123) that "prior to the French Revolution, historiography was conventionally regarded as a literary art. More specifically, it was regarded as a branch of rhetoric and its 'fictive' nature generally recognized ... many kinds of truth, even history, could be presented to the reader only by fictional techniques of representation." This emphasis on the fictive and the fictional in historiography was further developed by Michel de Certeau, who in turn accented the discursive aspect, stating that (1988: xxvii) "Historiography (that is, 'history' and 'writing') bears within its own name the paradox – almost an oxymoron – of a relation established between two antonymic (?) terms, the real and discourse."

Historiography as such, according to White and de Certeau, contains fictive and discursive dimensions; even though it indeed engages in history writing, it does so with plenty of interpretive license. Their analysis in turn of the dynamics of this interpretive license highlights the significance of the current historical *context* within which the particular historiography is constructed; it is after all the present that informs and reforms the past in accordance with its own ideological interests. The post-modern projects of deconstruction White and de Certeau engaged in did not attempt to dismantle the past through factual contradiction, but rather to analyze the context within which the facts were situated so as to tease out the ideological underpinnings of the existing accounts.

Empirically, the positivist notions of scientific objectivity that emerged during 19<sup>th</sup> century modernity attempted to instill claims of factual fixed historical truth in historiography, thereby overlooking its constructed nature. Yet in the aftermath of the two World Wars, especially as the human tragedy of the

Holocaust made people aware of how much evil humans are capable of bringing upon themselves, scholars started to approach these historical narratives critically to reveal the ideologies they concealed in the name of objectivity. Once those ideological underpinnings became evident, scholars then started to pay increasing attention to the significance of historical context, and especially to the impact of wider sections of the population and their social and economic conditions on how knowledge is constructed. Contemporaneous political trends were particularly influential in affecting the manner in which historiography narrated particular historical events and the actors involved in them. The most significant ideological underpinning of modernity revealed by these critical deconstructions was the one which had wreaked so much destruction in the first place, namely nationalism.

During the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, the main components of historiography, namely its time frame, selection of historical events, and historical sequencing, were all employed to legitimize nationalist projects. The people were mobilized, as they were alerted selectively to remember particular historical events in their pasts in relation to particular periods of time. It was especially with historical sequencing that certain historical facts became deliberately, systematically, even intentionally highlighted, while others were suppressed and still others fabricated. A historical sequence constructed in this manner did not induce discussion, in that it did not present an argument about history but rather bluntly stated it as uncontested historical reality (Bolle 1987: 261-262). By imagining a past that did not exist, historiography thus acquired the characteristic of a national myth. As past historical events became endowed with special meaning and significance for the present, this national myth also reinforced the power and authority of those currently in power.

Yet probably the most significant dimension such a nationalist historiography acquired was, as one scholar has noted (Ben Yehuda 1995: 282-283), its moral character: nationalist historiography became suffused with “an attitude of sacredness, a high degree of symbolization, a dimension of morality in the form of an instructive lesson ... a simple narrative where the good and bad are clearly differentiated.” The historical narrative was also frequently adjusted to fit the moral theme and lesson so that the myth continued to be credible, consistent and coherent. It should be stressed here that historiography employed in this manner was not interested in understanding the past, but rather in imposing upon the past the moral interpretation contained in the national project, which clearly identified the good and the bad before it even started to engage in any historical analysis. Nationalist historiography thus “meant to create attitudes, stir emotions, and help construct particular social realities conducive to the purposes of those transmitting the myth ... Myths become particularly important in times of beginnings – for example, in the early stages of a process of the formation of a nation (Ben Yehuda 1995: 283).” It is ironic that the moral tone inherent in the nationalist historiographies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries was ultimately challenged by what nationalism brought upon humanity in the name of modernity, namely the Holocaust. It was the portrayal of this dark side of modernity and the ideologies it fostered through the violence of the Holocaust that enabled scholars first to engage in criticism of the project of modernity and then to start to deconstruct the nationalist historiographies it harboured. Yet such deconstruction brought with it another epistemological quandary. The subsequent writing and rewriting of the Holocaust (Young 1988: 15) revealed that when such a uniquely violent event as this was brought into the historical narrative, it either became normalized and integrated as a historical event within historiography, thereby losing its particularity, or instead ended up monopolizing the historiography and rupturing it in such a manner as to render scholarly analysis almost impossible. The trauma of the Holocaust, though powerful when unmediated, unframed and unassimilated, was revealed anew when it was written into the historical narrative. Some scholars have argued (Young 1988: 37) that this epistemological problem could be resolved to some extent if, in the first place, scholars turned to the information on the violent event of the Holocaust not for evidence but for knowledge, and then, in the second place, made a separate decision as to when to act or not upon this knowledge.

#### **Existing hegemonies in current Turkish historiography**

When current Turkish historiography pertaining to the Armenians is critically analyzed within the context of the literature on historiography reviewed in the previous section, Turkish nationalism and the violent events of 1915 emerge as the two elements that need to be critically examined and deconstructed. Hence one can argue for the need for a post-nationalist Turkish historiography solely on the grounds that the application of the contemporary criticisms of historiography to the Turkish case reveal two hegemonies, namely 'the hegemony of nationalism' and 'the hegemony of 1915.' The domination of the ideology (read Turkish nationalism) and the event (read 1915) that has infiltrated much of the existing scholarship on Turkey remains unexamined, as scholars approach historical sources uncritically and often accept textual rhetoric as historical reality.

Yet such histories epistemologically manipulate the role and significance of certain social groups (read Sunni Turks) at the expense of all others, through their selective employment and deployment of history. In so doing, they eliminate outright certain possible choices and trajectories (read non-nationalist solutions) not only from history but also, by implication, from scholars' analyses as well. They thus introduce a certain historical determinacy whereby the nationally triumphant groups (read the now secularized Turkish elites) always soar to historical success against all odds, and the vanquished (read the rest of Turkish society including all the minorities) seem doomed to failure. A case in point is the process through which the point of origin of the official historiography of the Turkish Republic was constructed.

### The hegemony of Turkish nationalism

I conjecture here that it was the famous Speech (*Nutuk*) delivered by Mustafa Kemal in 1927 at the Second Congress of the Republican People's Party, which he had founded and now led, that laid the foundation stone for the official historiography of the Turkish Republic. In that speech, Mustafa Kemal narrated his own historiography of the Turkish War of Independence for three days straight; his historiography eventually became that of the nation. The first sentence of Mustafa Kemal's speech in fact declared the starting point of his own historiography – and therefore, by implication, of all the official historiographies thereafter as follows: "I landed in Samsun on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1919." The ensuing text not only covered the events from the year 1919 onward, but did so from the vantage point of 1927, four years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the suppression of various revolts throughout Anatolia. It is noteworthy that at the particular historical juncture when Mustafa Kemal took to narrating his version of this new nation's past, all the minority groups in Turkey, including the Armenians, had already been very effectively marginalized. Given these epistemological parameters, it was virtually impossible, within the confines of Turkish nationalist historiography predicated on such a historical framework, ever to recover and fully recognize the agency of such ethnic and religious groups in Turkey.

And the ensuing Turkish nationalist discourse neatly categorized these ethnic and religious groups according to strictly maintained boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. It defined the Turkish secular elites, who were included, as historically triumphant and then proceeded to integrate their norms and values into society as 'historical reality.' The nationalist ideology also idealized the emerging Turkish secular elites, as it simultaneously allocated them exclusive determining power over the course of Turkish history and also cleansed them of all the vices they had ever engaged in by censoring history; it thus presented the Turkish elites morally and metaphorically as 'white.' By the same token, Turkish nationalist ideology articulated and narrated the excluded minorities as the vanquished, and then proceeded to attribute to them the exactly opposite characteristics: the excluded were stripped of most of their agency, and the very little they were permitted to exercise was of course depicted within parameters defined by the triumphant group, thereby appearing totally subversive and immoral. Turkish nationalist ideology thus embellished history by selectively employing only those historical events that portrayed the excluded minorities in a negative light, thereby impregnating them with vice. It ended up representing Turkish minorities morally and metaphorically as 'black.' And if scholars, themselves socialized within the Turkish nation-state where such an ideology was predominant, did not treat this highly selective representation of Turkish history critically, their accounts ended up contributing to the maintenance of Turkish nationalist historiography. By so doing, these scholars directly or indirectly reproduced historical actors as either black or white, with no

consideration at all either of the possible intermediate shades or of other colours.

### **The hegemony of 1915**

The hegemony of 1915 refers to how the historical events that resulted in the ultimate removal and destruction of the Armenians from their ancestral homeland by the Turks was endowed with a particular historical narrative in which this unfortunate event was a natural outcome. 1915 thus attracted all existing Turkish historiographies to itself with insurmountable force and, in so doing, obliterated all critical historical analysis, eliminating all events, institutions and social groups that might have suggested that another outcome was possible. In the particular case of official Turkish historiography, which was predicated on an unfortunate denial of the extent and intentionality of the Armenian massacres of 1915, the historical events before 1915 were thus selectively retold in a way that both legitimized what befell the Anatolian Armenians, and also took pains to demonstrate that the same fate, if not worse, befell the Turks as well. Hence the Anatolian Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were portrayed in history as an initially wealthy and contented 'loyal' social group who turned ungrateful and treacherous mostly at the instigation of the Great Powers; the same Powers were also narrated, by the same stroke of the pen, as aggressors against the Turks in attempting to wrest the Empire away from its 'rightful owners.' As a consequence, both the Turks and the Armenians were depicted as suffering 'equally' during the First World War, which was brought upon them by the Great Powers. In all, then, 1915 was expanded to subsume both the subsequent and the consequent historical events, and giving them a moral dimension which involved all humanity.

In official Turkish historiography, both the hegemony of Turkish nationalism and the hegemony of 1915 ended up dramatically limiting the historical repertoire of scholars engaged in research into Turkey's past. The official use of history thus portrayed very selectively the social conditions of the Ottoman Empire, the agency of various social groups within it, the repertoire of choices these groups had, and the range of historical events they encountered. Given this state of affairs, I argue here that it will not be possible for official Turkish historiography to make any significant empirical and methodological advances without reconstructing its framework through engaging in critical analysis. I propose to reconstruct such a historiography by reconsidering in particular its periodization, so that this periodization is not based solely on the nationalist history of the Turks that came to seem natural and eventually emerged as hegemonic, but rather on the intersections of the experiences of both the Turks and the minority groups, in this case the Anatolian Armenians, of the Empire.

### **The alternative periodization of a post-nationalist Turkish historiography**

The alternate periodization of a post-nationalist Turkish historiography, as it is proposed here, needs to comprise, in relation to the Ottoman *millet* and

imperial structures, the following stages: (i) the Formative Period, 1453-1639; (ii) the Institutionalization Period, 1639-1834; (iii) the Reform Period, 1834-1902; (iv) the Nationalist Period, 1902-1982; and (v) toward a Post-Nationalist Period, 1982-2004.

### *I. The Formative Period, 1453-1639*

Even though the origins of what became the Ottoman Empire could be traced to the establishment of the Ottoman principality in the Iznik region around 1299 and even the interaction of the semi-nomadic Ottoman Turks with the non-Muslims residing in Anatolia a century earlier, it was probably with the conquest of Constantinople from the Byzantine empire that the Ottoman Turks started to develop not only the ideal but also the realization of an imperial structure populated by social groups from multiple ethnicities and religions. It is thus then that the first outline of a policy regarding the conditions under which non-Muslims were to exist within the confines of Ottoman lands started to form (Braude and Lewis 1982).

According to this policy, the non-Muslim minorities were organized into religious communities termed *millets*, where the Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities comprised the main categories. Each *millet* community was organized around its religious institution and headed by its particular elected religious leader, who oversaw the internal administration of the community and was legally responsible for it, especially in terms of the payment of communal taxes, to the Ottoman Sultan. Under this arrangement, even though the non-Muslim minorities possessed economic rights, they lacked significant social and political rights in that they could not bear arms, travel on horseback within cities, or hold administrative office, except when appointed by the Sultan. Since their civic rights were based on their religion, they also could not marry Muslims without undergoing religious conversion and, if they chose to do so, they lost their legal rights within their own communities. As a consequence, during this formative period, given the conditions under which they functioned, the Ottoman minorities ended up becoming active and prominent in the one sphere – the economic one – where they faced a minimum of restrictions. They thus specialized in particular professions and utilized their multi-lingual skills, especially in inter-imperial trade.

The fact that the Ottoman minorities suffered restrictions in relation to their social interaction with the rest of the population, however, produced significant repercussions throughout society. The Ottoman social system, as it was established, ended up integrating the superiority of the Muslims, in that no such social political, social or economic restrictions were placed upon them; they could bear arms, hold office, and also live in a society that operated within the Islamic legal framework. In short, one can claim that during the formative period, the social system allowed the Ottoman minorities to coexist peacefully with members of other religious communities – a quite advanced state of affairs, given the persecutions of religious minorities throughout Europe but

one which, in the last instance, favoured the Muslims. 1639 marks the end of this formative period because of a change that then occurred in the particular position of the Armenians within the empire: it was with the treaty of 1639 between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires that the location of the Armenians in the Ottoman social system became finalized (Libaridian 2004: 13).

I should comment here on how this periodization differs from that currently provided by Turkish nationalist historiography. The latter's portrayal of this period is one of continuous peace where it was 'Turkish magnanimity and Muslim benevolence' that granted rights to the religious minorities living in the Turks' midst; the narrative thus imputes the agency of religious minorities by implying that they in turn became and remained peaceful 'out of gratitude.' Hence the moral tone of benevolence on the part of the Turks and gratitude on the receiving side of the minorities is already established. Turkish nationalist historiography then proceeds to carefully select and frequently mention other contemporaneous historical events with the intent to demonstrate the superiority of the Ottoman treatment of minorities over others; one such event which is frequently mentioned involves the violence inflicted by the Spanish Inquisition upon religious minorities, resulting in their death or deportation. That the Ottoman Sultan welcomed such minorities into his empire further strengthens the nationalist narrative. Hence the initial positive moral tone set by the domestic treatment of the religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire is extended to establish moral superiority over contemporaneous European empires.

In developing the above-mentioned narrative, Turkish nationalist historiography thus selectively highlights the favourable dimensions of the minorities' existence in the empire. Yet, in so doing, it also, again selectively, fails to mention other aspects of Ottoman minority existence. Specifically, Turkish nationalist historiography underplays or keeps silent about the obligations the Ottoman minorities had to fulfill in return for what they received, namely the additional taxes they were obliged to pay, and also the legal, social, political and administrative restrictions they faced within Ottoman society because of their religion. In addition, Turkish nationalist historiography assumes the natural dominance of the Ottoman administrative perspective, as it too treats the Ottoman minorities as one undifferentiated, rather stereotyped, social group; it thus fails to take into account, for instance, the internal dynamics and divisions of the religious minorities such as the ones that existed between residents of the capital and inhabitants of the provinces, or the inter-communal strife among them, that was also present from the outset. Also overlooked at this particular historical juncture is the tension that existed between the Ottoman Muslims and minorities because their interests often came into conflict. The absence of these factors in Turkish nationalist historiography idealizes and thereby dehistoricizes the relationship between the Muslim and minority communities; in so doing, it indirectly sets the stage for the later mythification of

Muslim and minority relations. It is therefore no accident that with the advent of domestic strife in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman society, this selective representation 'naturally' leads to blame for the social strife being placed on the ungrateful Ottoman minorities and their treachery.

### *II. The Institutionalization Period, 1639-1834*

This period focuses on how Ottoman social structure started to take shape as the now established relations between the Muslims and minorities were reproduced over centuries (Gocek 1996). Even though the Ottoman Muslim and minority communities indeed coexisted relatively peacefully, they continued their transformation not as one social unit, but as two separate communities, one Muslim and the other non-Muslim, that evolved within themselves and in quite limited interaction with one another. Hence the initial legal separation based on religion became institutionalized in the Ottoman social structure, creating a very strongly defined and maintained bifurcation: as the Ottoman subjects subsequently practised their religions within their own communal spaces, their social networks and networks of communication developed most strongly with each other rather than across the divide; as the same subjects could not marry or inherit across the religious divide, their transfer of knowledge, wealth and resources also occurred within their own communities, separately from one another. In particular, the restriction placed upon minorities, as non-Muslims, of not being allowed to bear arms excluded them from the Ottoman military profession which became the exclusive domain of the Muslims. Even though this restriction proved quite advantageous to the Ottoman Muslims during the Empire's expansion, in that it brought them not only material wealth but higher social standing as well, it nevertheless started to work to their disadvantage in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Empire stopped expanding. As the Ottoman army then started to face increasing defeats, the Ottoman Muslims manning the military not only failed to acquire wealth and status through warfare, but began to lose their lives at alarmingly high rates.

What limited Ottoman imperial expansion during the same historical period was the rising West. It was the emergence of European powers now equipped not only with the products of the industrial revolution but with new military warfare techniques that established a strong position on the borders of the Ottoman Empire. This Western transformation, which disadvantaged the Ottoman Muslim subjects, provided new opportunities for the Ottoman non-Muslims. Because of the European economic expansion consequent on the industrial revolution, European trade with the Ottoman Empire escalated and the Ottoman minorities, who had for ages been directed to specializing in trade and the economy at home, acquired, unlike their Muslim counterparts, increased advantages because of their linguistic, cultural and religious affinities with Europe. The Ottoman sultans made use of the skills of some Ottoman minorities by appointing them to significant administrative posts, often relying on either their domestically developed economic skills or their linguistic

skills; hence many ended up heading Ottoman economic institutions or engaging in diplomacy with European powers on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan. Yet, the minorities manning these high-level administrative posts differed from their Muslim counterparts in one significant respect: the Ottoman Sultan often established control over the Muslim office-holders by marrying them to women from his own household, so as to guarantee their loyalty, or the Muslim office-holders were able to resist the Sultan's control by networking with their powerful relatives or passing their advantages on to their children. Since the Ottoman office-holders from the minorities were located socially outside of such family and marriage networks, their hold on the power they acquired was much more precarious position and often did not extend beyond their own lifetime.

The political developments in Europe in the form of the Enlightenment and the ensuing French Revolution also affected the Ottoman social structure and with it, the Ottoman Muslims and minorities, in quite different ways. The most significant outcome of this Western political development was undoubtedly a discussion of the rights of individuals as citizens rather than as Imperial subjects. A world where rights were preordained was gradually replaced by one where individuals operated in a society within which they acquired contractual rights and responsibilities to become citizens of equal standing. As such, these citizens wanted to make the societies they lived in their own and, when prevented from doing so, they undertook revolutions to realize their visions – which are often termed 'visions of modernity.' It is no accident that the penetration of these European visions into the Ottoman Empire occurred indirectly through education and directly through the Ottoman minorities who had both the closest economic contact with Europe through trade and also often sent their sons to Europe to be educated, so as to sustain the economic advantage they had been able to build up in the Empire. And not surprisingly, the Ottoman minorities became conscious of and increasingly dissatisfied with their position within the Ottoman social system. After all, the Ottoman minorities and Muslims coexisted within an overarching Imperial culture and their language, music, architecture and arts had been influenced by one another through the centuries.

For instance, Armenian architects built mosques, Greek musicians composed musical pieces, and Jewish artisans created clothing. Yet while all that was produced by Muslims and minorities created the Ottoman public space, the cultural ownership often ended up getting attributed to the socially, politically and legally dominant Muslim community. What the Ottoman minorities produced was only theirs privately; because of the societal restrictions placed upon them, they did not have as much claim on public ownership, and no particular space of their own within the Ottoman public sphere other than their carefully defined communal space. Even though the Ottoman minorities increasingly participated in the creation of the Ottoman public space, they were not pub-

lily recognized as a part of it; instead, they were obliged to retire to the privacy of their own communal space.

Hence, as a consequence of these political and economic developments in Europe and the concurrent Ottoman internal transformation, the positions of Ottoman Muslims and minorities became affected in different ways. The interaction between the external and internal dynamics affected the Ottoman minorities more favourably than the Muslims. While the Ottoman minorities were advantaged by the economic developments, the new political ideas increasingly highlighted their disadvantaged location within Ottoman society. The Muslims increasingly lost the advantages of their normalized dominance in society as Ottoman Imperial expansion tapered off and they too became dissatisfied with their location within society. It was in the next historical period that both social groups, especially the younger generations educated in Western-style institutions, turned to reforms in an attempt to redefine their locations; both parties noted that the problems were embedded in the existing Ottoman social system, both identified the preordained nature of Ottoman Imperial rule as the possible origin of such problems, and both started to work for the introduction of an Ottoman constitutional government that would, in theory, ensure them larger public space for increased political participation.

Once again, I need to comment on how this periodization diverges from the narrative provided by Turkish nationalist historiography. In the nationalist narrative, there is no differentiation of the formative and institutionalization periods of Ottoman social structure in relation to the lives of its Muslims and minorities. Ottoman history is instead divided into the 'classical period', that covers the whole of the roughly five hundred years (1299-1839) preceding the 19<sup>th</sup> century European impact, and the ensuing 'reform period' of about eighty years (1840-1922), that articulates the Ottoman transformation occurring as a consequence of this impact until the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The lack of differentiation of the Ottoman classical period produces two consequences: it further dehistoricizes the societal locations of Muslims and minorities by ignoring the transformations they underwent in the course of the four centuries; how the disparate locations of the Muslims and minorities gradually become embedded in the Ottoman social structure, and how the two religious communities produced a deeply embedded structural divide, are overlooked. It also mythifies the characteristics of Ottoman minorities by treating them as unchanging over the course of the centuries, whereby the initial nationalist assessment of Muslim benevolence and minority gratitude continues unchallenged.

As a consequence, the only source of change the nationalist historiography highlights is not internally generated, but externally enforced by the expanding West. The increasing involvement of European powers in the Ottoman Empire is therefore interpreted negatively as the intervention of these powers in Ottoman internal affairs in general and their pressuring for reforms favouring

the Ottoman minorities in particular. The interaction also assumes a moral character as it is clearly defined, in line with nationalist rhetoric that categorizes all as being either good or bad for the nation, while the latent intention of Western powers is to weaken and destroy the Ottoman Empire from the start. The economic and political impact of Europe is also selectively highlighted in relation to the unrest it produces among the Ottoman minorities alone; the negative impact of the European transformation on the location of the Ottoman Muslims in relation to the minorities is overlooked. The Muslims enter nationalist rhetoric only in terms of the increasing tension between the Ottoman Sultan who holds on to his power and the newly emerging Western-style educated Muslims who want to share that power.

It is within this epistemological context that the historical analysis of the reform period, the period of visible Western European impact on the Ottoman social structure, commences. From the outset, however, Turkish nationalist historiography treats the Western impact on Ottoman Muslims and minorities as two independent, rather than interdependent, phenomena, thereby ideologically reading into the text their subsequent failure to transform peacefully along the same lines.

### *III. The Reform Period, 1834-1902*

It was toward the middle of the 19th century that both the Ottoman minorities and the Western-style educated Muslims started to process and interpret the political, social and legal ideas generated in Europe within the dynamics of Ottoman society. Especially the younger generations of both the Ottoman minorities and the Muslims observed the West, where they increasingly received their education, and most importantly, in order to reproduce the military and economic success of the West, started to establish educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire along similar lines. In the educational and social reforms they undertook, the Ottoman minorities were primarily supported by the emerging class of merchants and tradesmen who benefited from the increasing economic and trade relations with Europe, while the Ottoman Muslims were helped by the Ottoman state. The disparate nature of this support had varying effects on the Ottoman social structure: the reforms pertaining to the Ottoman minorities were successful mostly when undertaken by the minorities themselves and, as such, they remained confined within the boundaries of the minority communities. The reforms carried out by the Ottoman state, which targeted in theory both the minorities and the Muslims, mostly succeeded in the case of the Muslims but failed to overcome the institutionalized structural divide in society between the Muslims and the minorities in practice. Still, the reform period was marked by intense efforts among all parties, namely the Ottoman state administration and the existing Muslim elites, the minorities with their local governance structures, and the Western-style educated Muslims with their new political visions, to reform the empire into a form that would fit all their needs.

The Ottoman imperial administration spearheaded the reform efforts (Armaoglu 1964) by undertaking administrative legal reforms approximately every two decades (1839, 1856, 1876) to ensure equal rights for the Ottoman Muslims and the minorities. The persistence of these efforts shows several things, I think. First, it reveals how deeply ingrained Muslim-minority inequality was in the Ottoman social system; even after three unsuccessful tries it was not overcome. Second, Muslim dominance in the Ottoman social system was clearly so deeply ingrained that each time the reform efforts had to be introduced as alleviating problems with the social locations of *both* the Muslims *and* the minorities, whereas in essence they attempted to bring the status of the minorities up to the level of the Muslims.

According to the first Ottoman Reform Proclamation, the *Tanzimat*, which was promulgated on 3 November 1839, the individual rights of both the Muslims and the minorities of the Empire were recognized together equally for the first time. What is noteworthy in it is the novel legal treatment of both social groups under a single decree which was bound to highlight the legal inequalities existing between the Ottoman Muslims and the minorities, especially when they were placed side by side rather than being treated as two structurally entirely separate categories. The following Ottoman Reform Proclamation, the *Islahat*, promulgated on 28 February 1856, further attempted to negotiate and bring about equality between the Muslims and the minorities of the Empire. As noted above, the need to proclaim a second reform approximately two decades after the first suggests how profound was the structural adjustment to the Ottoman social system required to alleviate the sources of inequality: these extended from equal opportunity in recruitment to educational and administrative institutions, to equal representation in the courts, and to equal opportunity for membership in provincial assemblies. These reform proclamations had to be followed by a third almost two decades later when, on 23 December 1876, a more drastic legal reform, the *Mesrutiyet*, was undertaken with the declaration of the Ottoman constitutional system and the formation of an Ottoman National Assembly. Even though European powers interpreted this Ottoman move as a pre-emptive move to relieve the European pressure placed upon the Empire for reforms, it nevertheless did permit all subjects some degree of representation in an assembly and led to the first elections in the Empire. I think that the Ottoman state did indeed try to reform the empire along Western lines, in an attempt to capture European patterns of imperial success, but it failed when it was unable to overcome the deep structural divide that had developed in Ottoman society between the Muslims and the minorities. The difference in societal reaction to these state-initiated reforms was noteworthy in that there were strong generational differences in reception among both the Ottoman minorities and the Muslims. Most of the younger generations in the Ottoman minority communities welcomed the potential improvement to their legal status and their closer integration into the

larger Ottoman society that these reforms implied, but they were frustrated with the slow pace at which the reforms were executed and the resistance they faced both within their own communities and also from Ottoman Muslims. The older generations in these communities predicted that these legal reforms would increase the sense of loss of communal identity, as their communities became more and more integrated into Ottoman society at large; they wanted to retain their special language, legal system, local practices, and special privileges even when these sometimes brought with them practices of exclusion from the larger society. The reactions of the Muslims were also complex; those younger generations of Ottoman Muslims educated in Western-style institutions embraced the Western European ideology of the brotherhood of all men under equal rights in theory and in principle; they therefore realized and supported these reforms as a necessary component of modernity. As their dominance in the existing system came naturally to them, they were not yet aware how this equality would directly affect their lives in practice. The older generations of Ottoman Muslims protested vociferously, stating that they did not want to destroy a system that had worked so well for so many years, and some even proclaimed that they did not want the Ottoman minorities who had been subordinate to them for so many centuries to be elevated to the same legal status as theirs.

The Ottoman minorities participated in the Ottoman state-initiated reforms as individuals and in the reforms of their own local administrations as groups (Artinian 1970). Probably the reform initiated by the state that had the most influence on the Ottoman minorities was the 1839 Ottoman Reform Proclamation, in that it enabled the establishment of mixed tribunals in the *millets*. Previously, the local administrative bodies of the Ottoman minorities had been dominated by the power of religious leaders, but this reform created space for lay members in these tribunals who in turn introduced new ideas and reforms into their particular *millets*. The participation of the laity in religious affairs dynamized all three minority communities of the empire, namely the Jews, Greeks and Armenians (and the Syrian Orthodox?). Moreover, the concurrent changes in the Ottoman taxation system also contained in the reform edict enabled Ottoman minority merchants and artisans to participate more fully in their local *millet* administration, thereby providing increasing support to the reformist elements and their new ideas. It was also during this period that the first stirrings of nationalism were felt, as Greece was established as an independent state in 1830 and all the communities struggled with the issue of defining their identities within an Imperial framework in a world still structurally dominated by empires. The ensuing rebellions in Wallachia, Moldavia, Montenegro and Serbia in the 1850s, and the increasing influence of the Russian empire in the Balkans and the north and north-east in the 1890s put the Ottoman Empire more and more under pressure for reforms to improve the rights of its Christian subjects.

The interpretation by Turkish nationalist historiography of this period of Ottoman reform is marked by a deep ambivalence. For while it has to recognize and legitimize the Western ideas and institutions of reform that later provided the founding stones of the Turkish Republic, it must criticize the Western powers who instigated those ideas and institutions. Nationalist historiography therefore treats the recipient elements of Ottoman society selectively; it does not recognize any differentiation within the Ottoman minorities because it treats them as one stereotyped unit of analysis that has no agency of its own, and so their reaction vis-à-vis the reforms is interpreted in terms of how they fell under the influence of Western powers to turn against the Ottoman Empire. The contributions of those minorities who helped Westernize Ottoman society are also overlooked. In relation to the Ottoman Muslims, those older generations that reacted adversely to the reforms are dismissed as 'traditional religious' elements that did not have the interests of the Empire at heart. In so doing, nationalist historiography also obfuscates and dismisses the most significant criticism of reform advocated by this group, that it eliminated the natural dominance of Muslims in Ottoman society. The only Ottoman group that emerges triumphant with its agency unscathed is the young Ottoman Muslim reformists, as these were the intellectual forebears of the Turkish nationalists. In this case too, however, the nationalist historiography treats historical facts selectively by employing the most significant methodological fallacy of nationalism: the rhetoric of the Muslim reformists is treated as historical reality. Even though the Ottoman Muslim reformists did pay lip service to legal equality in theory, their record becomes much more chequered when one analyzes the degree to which such reforms were carried out in Ottoman society. As I noted previously, there was significant structural resistance to the application of reforms.

By overlooking the discrepancy between the rhetoric and reality of reforms and by treating the rhetoric as reality, Turkish nationalist historiography manages to portray the impact and reception of reforms much more favorably than they actually were. In the narrative of nationalist historiography, if problems with reforms did exist, the culprits were either the Western powers who applied too much pressure or the Ottoman minorities who wanted too much too soon; the reactions of the Ottoman Muslims are overlooked. Hence it is only the agency of reform-minded Ottoman Muslims that is recognized within Ottoman society.

#### *IV. The Nationalist Period, 1902-1982*

Even though the seeds of the nationalist period were sown earlier, during the latter half of the 19th century when many rebellions occurred in the Empire, from the Balkans to Syria, Lebanon to Jeddah, I propose the historical event of the 1902 Congress of the Ottoman Opposition Parties in Paris as the starting point or origin of the nationalist period because it was then that political parties belonging to the Muslims and minorities of the Ottoman Empire met in

Paris to discuss their common future if there was to be one. As participants in the Congress, they all had a fair chance to become significant players in determining the future of the Empire and history had not yet eliminated some for the benefit of others.

If the 1902 Congress as a starting point is compared with the starting point of nationalist historiography, the Turkish War of Independence in 1919, it becomes evident that two social factors were eventually dropped from nationalist historiography. The first factor to be eliminated was the ideology of nationalism that had started to take shape among some of the Young Turks; it disappeared in the ensuing Turkish historical narrative by becoming totally assimilated into it. The second factor to be lost was the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic structure of the Ottoman Empire reflected in the various groups participating in the Congress; it was gradually marginalized in Turkish historical narrative as these groups lose their agency to survive except as the 'Other.' It should also be noted that these two elements were intimately connected as well: the gradual marginalization of the ethnic and cultural groups was justified and legitimized by the escalating nationalist rhetoric embedded in the same narrative. The physical removal of these groups, often by force and violence, accompanied this symbolic disappearance. When one approaches the events of 1919 from such a standpoint, it becomes evident that in that particular period, those who had committed themselves to fight a War of Independence, including Mustafa Kemal, were already ambivalent about where ethnic and religious minorities of the empire would fit into the ensuing state they aimed to establish in their fatherland; in addition, two such minorities, namely the Anatolian Armenians and Greeks, had already been uprooted once from their ancestral lands for the good of the 'homeland' upon the orders of the Committee of Union and Progress. Yet this initial uprooting could only be brought into the narrative through an already ideologically mediated historical framework.

Any discussion of the historiography of the nationalist period needs to include the interventions of two historians, Erik Zürcher (1992) and Gerard Libaridian (1978), both of whom contest Turkish nationalist historiography from different vantage points. Zürcher provides a very articulate discussion of how Turkish historiography is based on a celebration of the foundation of the Turkish Republic and how the version of history presented by its founder, Mustafa Kemal, has therefore often been accepted without much criticism (1992: 238-9). He himself analyzes the social background, organizational characteristics and ideology of the Union and Progress leaders and the leaders of the newly founded Turkish Republic in order to demonstrate the significant continuities that existed between these two groups (1992: 241-7). The striking parallels that exist in the historical phases of these groups' transformations lead Zürcher to propose a historiography covering three parallel phases: 1906-1908 and 1919-1922; 1908-1913 and 1922-1925; 1913-1918 and 1925-1945. This in turn leads him to conjecture that "modern developments in Turkey, especially the changes

which took place after World War II” can best be understood if the Kemalist movement is interpreted as a continuation and extension of the Young Turk one (1992: 250-252). I fully concur with his argument and suggest 1982 as the end of this period, because the subsequent introduction of neo-liberal reforms altered the social, political and economic landscape of Turkey.

Libaridian commences his article with a commentary on the historiography of the Armenian massacres proposed by Gwynne Dyer which he criticizes on the grounds of its inability to distinguish the standpoint of the society from that of the state, its failure adequately to periodize different historical phases, and once again its incapacity to contextualize events within the periods when they occurred (1978: 79-82). What is most pertinent, however, is Libaridian’s criticism of reading the political formation of modern Turkey into the history of the Ottoman Empire; he argues (1978: 83-4) that such a reading reduces Ottoman history to the history of the Turks, and equates the interests of the Ottoman ruling class with those of the subjects, thereby obviating the need to discuss critically whether those interests corresponded to the needs of the very diverse groups of subjects. Hence nationalist historiography, as such, reduces Ottoman history to the narrative not only of the Turks, but particularly of the Turkish elite. I also concur that one needs to be wary of the nationalist rhetoric of ‘representing the nation’, for although many groups during this period did indeed talk and execute many violent acts on behalf of the nation, they were often small groups of leaders who assumed such roles without being popularly elected to them.

Let me now articulate the parameters of this nationalist period. The events of 1902 present a different framework, one where nationalism and its destructive treatment of minorities have not yet left their marks on the historical narrative. In 1902, the historical repertoire of the Congress still included all the ethnic and religious groups of the Ottoman Empire, and the ideology of nationalism was one among the many that were feverishly discussed. Such a point of origin would enable one to map out the many possible paths of social transformation that Turkish nationalism eradicated by suppressing, deporting or eliminating various ethnic and cultural groups in the Empire; it would also capture the agency of such victimized groups as they attempted to resist this nationalism on its own terms. In 1902, the Ottoman social groups still came to the Paris Congress as groups within an empire, but they demonstrated both there and soon thereafter that peaceful coexistence was to prove impossible, because the Muslim-Turkish element was not willing to forego what it regarded as its natural dominance in the Ottoman social structure and the *millet* system had generated a Muslim-Christian divide that was beyond repair. The environment was too polarized for the various social groups to come together to act in unison, for they had been separated communally for so long. It was at this Congress that the Young Turk movement started its transformation from an intellectual endeavour into a political entity, a process which eventually pro-

duced the 1908 revolution, when the Committee of Union and Progress, formed by a segment of the Young Turks, seized power from the Ottoman Sultan.

The period as a whole was thus marked not only by the nationalisms of the Ottoman minorities, but also by the nationalism of the dominant Muslim group directed against them, which eventually wrought havoc on them, through forced deportation in the case of the Armenians, forced population exchange in the case of the Greeks, and gradual attrition in the case of the Jews. From the point of view of the history of the Muslims and minorities, the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was not a very significant turning point, in that the minorities retained their rights according to the Lausanne Treaty, while their acquisition of the rights and responsibilities of Turkish citizenship remained mostly limited to responsibilities rather than rights. Even though they *rhetorically* acquired full rights, they did not do so in practice, as is demonstrated by the following incidents all instigated by the Turkish state at intervals of about a decade. Before and during the Second World War, the Turkish Jews were forcibly deported from Thrace to prevent their possible collaboration with the enemy, all three minorities forcibly conscripted into the army to work as labourers, and soon thereafter targeted to pay a Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) that literally wiped out all their resources; a decade later, the state surreptitiously set street mobs on to the minorities in Istanbul to destroy their shops, houses and churches (6-7 September 1955); and still another decade later, during the Cyprus events in 1963-64, the minorities were forced to emigrate, and only allowed to take savings not exceeding the equivalent of \$100. It is at the end of this nationalist period that the minorities were almost totally destroyed and the path of destruction wrought by Turkish nationalism was nearly complete.

By mapping out the nationalist movement from its Ottoman inception to its Republican phase, this period brings narrative coherence to the historical events that occur and also connects the trauma of 1915 with its nationalist aftershocks into the 1960s. This periodization of course differs dramatically from the nationalist historiography, which refuses to recognize the significant historical continuities between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic and in so doing fragments the narrative history of state-sponsored prejudice and violence against the minorities in the name of nationalism. The exclusion of 1902-1922 from the nationalist historiography blots out the most virulent formative stages of Turkish nationalism that proceeded almost totally unchecked under the Young Turks. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and the ensuing radical Westernization the Kemalists set on foot, Turkish nationalism became neatly enfolded – and hidden – in the Western civilizational project. Turkish nationalists gained much more international recognition and respect as ardent Westernizers and pursued their national projects under this guise. Their sustained prejudice and violence against the

religious minorities in Turkey were also justified in the name of this civilizational project; all social groups who criticized state projects were immediately accused of obstructing Turkey's path through Western civilization toward progress.

*V. Toward a Post-nationalist Period, 1982-present*

The advent of the new era toward a 'post-nationalist period', in terms of Muslim-minority relations, starts in 1982 with the neo-liberalization of the Turkish economy, media and communications under the Turkish President Turgut Ozal. This liberalization process created pockets of public space not controlled by the Turkish state, where social groups finally started to discuss the societal transformations on television on their own terms. The political oppression forced upon society by the military at exactly the same time may even have helped this societal implosion along, by getting people focused on 'non-political' topics such as identity formation. It was also during this period that a substantive amount of Armenian, Greek and Jewish minority literature was translated into Turkish, and memoirs of members of the minorities also made their appearance for the first time. Even though the Turkish state was literally forced into this neo-liberalization due to its changing location in the world political situation at the end of the Cold War, the result was nevertheless that new plots of public space not controlled by the state were created in Turkey. Whether these plots have the potential to transform into political space capable of empowering minorities in Turkey remains to be seen.

The official Turkish minorities of Jews, Greeks and Armenians are currently so decimated in number that they no longer possess their former social, political and economic significance. The Turkish state recognition of, and apology for, its policies of prejudice and violence against these communities would therefore have symbolic significance at best. The most significant unofficial minority, the Kurds, is still not fully recognized by the Turkish state in terms of its rights. Yet the rights of all social groups in Turkey vis-à-vis the state – as opposed to their responsibilities, which they have always been forced to fulfil – have recently become significant on the national agenda in relation to Turkey's impending European Union membership. The recent public discussions around these and other social issues and the often violent reactions of nationalist elements, however, have demonstrated how deeply ingrained and integrated nationalism still is in contemporary Turkish society. The next decade in Turkey will witness the attempts of the liberal elements in society to counter the nationalist hegemony and bring in what may hopefully be termed, in dominant-minority relations, the 'post-nationalist European period'.

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#### Chapter 10 (pp. 80-98)

##### Defining the parameters of a post-nationalist Turkish historiography through the case of the Anatolian Armenians

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