Imagining the Turkish nation through 'othering' Armenians*

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ABSTRACT. National identities are *socially constructed* and *inherently relational*, such that collective imagination depends on a dialectical opposition to another identity. The ontology of otherness becomes the necessary basis of social imagination. National identity can hardly be imagined without a narrative of myths, and the Turkish nation is no exception. This article argues that the Turkish nation was *imagined* as a modern nation with territorial sovereignty after the erosion of traditional Ottoman *umma* (religious community) identity. During the process of this imagination, the Armenians became the first 'others', whose claims over eastern Anatolia were perceived as a real threat to Turkish territoriality and identity. Based on the analysis of modernist theories of nationalism, the methodological concern of this study is twofold: to explore the causal link between the policies of Ottoman modernisation and the emergence of Turkish nationalism; and to incorporate the self and other nexus into the relationship between the emergence of Turkish nationalism and the process of 'othering' the Armenians.

Introduction

Every nation claims to be unique and to have a different identity from others. National identity can hardly be imagined without a narrative of myths, and the Turkish nation is no exception. The homogeneity of a nation is itself a myth that becomes the basis of many nationalist ideologies. Challenging these myths requires a critical approach to understanding history and nationalism. The past we accept as an integral part of our social memories and collective identities is subjective and selective in accordance with the requirements of nationalist ideologies. The theoretical departure point of this article is that national identities are *socially constructed* and *inherently relational*, such that collective imagination depends on a dialectical opposition to another identity. The ontology of otherness becomes the necessary basis of social imagination.

This article argues that the Turkish nation was *imagined* as a modern nation with territorial sovereignty after the erosion of traditional Ottoman *umma* (religious community) identity. During the process of this imagination, the Armenians became the first 'others', whose claims over eastern Anatolia were perceived as a real threat to Turkish territoriality and identity. Such an argument challenges one of the historical myths of official Turkish nationalism which argues that the Turkish national consciousness emerged during its struggle against the Greek invasion of western Anatolia, which caused the Greeks to be considered as the 'other'.

Official Turkish historiography and nationalism have been challenged by a number of 'revisionist' scholars since the 1980s (Berktay 1983; Ortaylı 1983; Deringil 1993; Timur 1994; Kadıoğlu 1996; Akçam 1994 and 1999; Heper 2001; Canefe 2002; Göçek 2002; Kasaba 2002). These scholars started a new debate to challenge official nationalism and its engagement with 'politically correct history', which implies the rejection of the Ottoman past and its selective explanation of Turkish nation-building. The revisionist school emphasised not only historical continuity between Turkish nationalists under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal and the Young Turks in pursuing the goals of nationalist ideology, but also societal factors that contributed towards the emergence of Turkish nationalism. Revisionists argued that the Ottoman Empire's transition to a modern Turkish nation-state should be identified as 'Turkish nationalism or revolution', rather than 'Atatürk nationalism or revolution'. This differentiation emphasises the fact that the ideology of Turkish nationalism was originally developed by Namık Kemal, Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura, whereas Atatürk nationalism presents itself solely as a product of Mustafa Kemal's determination to lead Turks to a national independence movement and denies its connections with the Ottoman past.

Revisionists challenged various aspects of orthodox Turkish historiography on the following issues: the continuity and change between Ottoman and Turkish policies (Ortaylı 1983; Timur 1994; Deringil 1993; Heper 2001), the question of the Armenian genocide (Akçam 1999; Berktay 1983); the ethnic origins of the Turkish nation (Canefe 2002; Kasaba 2002) and the construction of official Turkish identity (Kadıoğlu 1996). This article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by analysing the role Armenians played within Turkish nation-building. There are two premises to be explored in supporting the novel interpretation of Turkish nationalism. The first premise is that the emergence of Turkish nationalism can be more accurately explained by modernist theories of nationalism – based on the work of Benedict Anderson, John Breuilly, Ernest Gellner, John Hall and Elie Kedourie – which establish the causal link between Ottoman modernisation and Turkish nationalism in order to explain the transition from an Islamic identity to a secular one. The second premise is that Armenians became the first 'other' during the construction of the Turkish nation. The relationship between the creation of a homogenous Turkish nation-state in Anatolia and Armenian claims to have a historic homeland over the same territory will be analysed to

find out what constituted the otherness of the Armenians. While the first part of this article offers a theoretically and historically informed analysis of Turkish nationalism, the second part critically examines the role of Armenians during the social construction of the Turkish nation.

The modernity of Turkish nationalism and the nation

Given that there is a vast amount of literature on nationalism it would be misleading to make generalisations on different theories of nationalism such as modernism, primordialism/perennialism and ethno-symbolism. They may share many basic assumptions but there can be as much diversity among scholars in each approach as there is between these various theoretical schools. Although each modernist scholar's approach reflects different causal explanations, they all conceive of nationalism as a political and ideological movement and a by-product of modernity. There are also two contradictory explanations of how the relationship between nationalism and modernity came into existence. On the one hand, most modernist scholars argue that nationalism was, originally, an unintended consequence of modernity. In this understanding, nationalism is closely related to the major developments of the modern epoch such as industrialisation, print capitalism, literacy, urbanisation and social transformations (Gellner 1994; Anderson 1991; Breuilly 1996; Hobsbawm 1990). Liah Greenfeld's analysis of English, French, Russian, German and American nationalisms not only challenges the commonly assumed links between modernisation and nationalism by seeing modernity as defined by nationalism but also explains how these nationalisms derived their particular characters from identity crises during the process of modernisation (Greenfeld 1995). On the other hand, the modernity of nationalism has not been accepted by all scholars. Anthony Smith, one of the leading scholars of ethno-symbolism, does not define nationalism through its modernity. However, Smith makes some contradictory points about the relationship between the two phenomena since he also argues that nationalism acts 'like a prism' through which some of the historical continuities and the transformations of modernity are preserved in new changed forms (Smith 1998: 44). Thus, most theories of nationalism clearly differ over not only the relationship between modernity and nationalism but also the causes of nationalism.

The modernists argue that there are three main causes behind the reality of nationalism: the psychological losses of identity caused by the erosion of tradition; the needs of modernisation and industrialisation; and the development of communication and print capitalism. The site of investigation for modernists encompasses the economic, political and ideological levels within the social formation of each national ideology. Furthermore, they suggest that there is no single, universal theory of nationalism through which to understand every single case in world history (Hall 1995: 8; Waldron 1985: 420). For

the most part, they accept nationalism as an ideology; a modern phenomenon to create a collective identity; an example of social and political engineering, which constructs a powerless and unreal 'imagined community' through the agency of a nation-state. I claim that modernist theory provides a better explanatory framework for the understanding of Turkish nationalism for the following three reasons: the need to belong to a separate Turkish nation was the result of the erosion of the traditional Ottoman identity; the emergence of Turkish nationalism coincided with the need for modernisation in the Ottoman Empire; and a separate Turkish national consciousness gradually developed in parallel with the use of print capitalism as part of modernisation policies. I will now turn to explain each reason in detail.

The erosion of the traditional Ottoman identity

Historically, the traditional Ottoman identity was based on the *millet* (religious community) system, characterised by the religious autonomy of different groups rather than ethnic ties or language.[1] Each religious group was allowed free practice of its religion. Within this system, there was differentiation between Muslim (Turks, Kurds, Arabs) and non-Muslim *millets* (Christians – Greeks and Armenians – and Jews) of the Empire but no official differentiation among the Muslim *millet* by ethnicity or language. The number of *millets* changed throughout Ottoman history. New *millets* were created as a consequence of pressure from the European great powers. For instance, while there were nine recognised *millets*, of which six were fairly large in 1875, there were seventeen in 1914 (Karpat 1973: 88–97).

For Muslim *millets*, the religious character of the Ottoman state meant that the primary mark of self-identification was *umma* as the great community of believers. Islam as a proselytising religion that claims universal validity is not compatible with the local and inward-looking character of ethnic identities. Hence, Islam was a stronger unifying force than ethnic ties in the definition of the traditional Ottoman identity. Ethnicity was an alien concept and, thus, not a determining factor *per se* in defining Turkish identity (Heper 2001: 4). Moreover, ethnicity as the basis of nationalist ideology cannot explain how institutions such as the church or a dynasty play a major role in developing a modern national identity. These issues are crucial in exploring why nationalism emerged first among the non-Muslim *millets* of the Ottoman Empire and why it was delayed for Muslim *millets*. When the Empire abandoned its Islamic proselytising mission in its European territories formal regional autonomy was allowed to Christian churches, which became natural institutional vehicles for autonomist movements in the nineteenth century (Breuilly 1996: 151–3). Religious sentiments were deliberately used by Christian churches to create Balkan (Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek) and Armenian national movements; however, Muslim *millets* did not have similar means to develop a separate nationalism since there is no institutional equivalent of the church in Islam.

In addition to these institutional disadvantages, the idea of being a 'Turk' was also an alien concept to the Ottoman elite, who saw themselves as *Osmanlılar* (Ottomans) rather than Turks until the end of the Empire.[2] The name of the state was *Osmanlı Devleti* (the Ottoman state) and it was insulting to refer to the Ottomans as Turks, since the Turks were regarded as uneducated Anatolian peasants within the Empire. The state language was *Osmanlıca* (Ottoman language), which was a mixture of Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Turkish was the local language of Anatolian peasants whereas Arabic was the sacred language of the *ulema* (Muslim clergy). Even those who spoke Turkish did not identify themselves as Turks and almost never used the term consciously until the beginning of the twentieth century (Güvenç 1994: 22–3). However, there has been a tendency among Western scholars to use the geographical term 'Turkey' in referring both to the state identity of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Ottoman and Turk are not the same political identities. The equation of these two terms became apparent only when Turkish nationalism emerged in the twentieth century (Smith 1971: 56). The dual usage creates confusion about the political identity of the modern Turkish state and nation. If we accept Ottoman and Turk as the same identity, the process of transition from an Islamic empire and *umma* identity to a modern state and secular identity is obscured, leaving us with an incomplete understanding of Turkish history and nationalism.

The traditional Ottoman identity on both state and societal levels was eroded by the collapse of the Empire. Turkish nationalism emerged in parallel to the idea of constructing a new political identity represented by a modern nation-state. This development did not materialise in *tabula rasa* as a sudden consequence of socio-political circumstances brought by World War I. It was a result of a long historical process that was based on the Ottoman modernisation and socialisation within the European state system. After the first major defeat of the Ottoman Empire by the Christian powers at Carlowitz in 1699 the Ottomans were the first to acknowledge the fact that Muslims might learn from the previously despised infidel, which prompted military modernisation and the Empire's socialisation in the 1700s and 1800s. Despite the early attempts of the Ottoman Sultans to catch up with more advanced European military technology, Selim III (1789–1807) and Mahmud II (1808–39) were the first genuine reformers. The military ambitions of Selim III initiated the political modernisation of the Empire, which had progressed through four historical phases: the first period (1789–1836) was characterised by the era of military and administrative reforms that reached its peak when *Nizam-i Cedit* (New Army) replaced the army of Janissaries in 1826 (Ahmad 1993: 4). The second historical period (1839–65) was the era of the *Tanzimat* (the political reforms). The movement of *Genç Osmanlılar* (the Young Ottomans) presented the third historical phase of modernisation (1865–76) and its final stage between 1908 and 1918 was characterised by the revolutionary *Genç Türkler* (the Young Turks), who not only overthrew the absolutist Abdulhamid regime (1876–1909) but also became the forefathers of subse-

quent Turkish nationalists. During this long historical process, modernisation policies gradually brought about the Empire's disintegration and paradoxically contributed to the emergence of Turkish nationalism, which brought the Empire's end with the declaration of the Turkish Republic as a modern nation-state in 1923. Thus, although the whole process of the Ottoman modernisation spanned almost two centuries, the emergence of Turkish nationalism was specific to the twentieth century as a modern political ideology. It is the task of the next section to explain this relationship.

The paradoxical relationship between Ottoman modernisation and Turkish nationalism

The Turkish experience in constructing a nation-state has been accepted by both Turkish and Western scholars as a good example of modernisation theory (see Kili 1995; Mardin 1991; Ward and Rustow 1964). In one of his last books Ernest Gellner argued that Turkey deserves the special attention of anyone who is interested in the future of liberal societies, economic development and Islam. Among the Asian states, Japan, India and Turkey, with their success in constitutionalism and democratic elections, provide grounds for optimism for Western liberals. Within this trio Turkey stands out in several important aspects: Turkey was the first state to embark on the road to building a constitutional government despite its Islamic character. Gellner furthermore argued that Turkey's commitment to modern political ideas was a result of an endogenous development, rather than being an exogenous imposition. Turkey was never colonised and Turkish nationalists achieved political modernity by choosing their own destiny. Yet, there is a dilemma arising from Gellner's analysis, because he argued that Turkish commitment to modernisation of the polity and society had *both* an Ottoman and Islamic quality (Gellner 1994: 81–3). It leaves open the question why Turkish nationalists preferred the Western type of modernisation and the construction of a modern nation, to the Ottoman system and the religious communities of Islam.

This point can be addressed in the following way: the Turkish nationalists' commitment to modernisation was based on an oppositional relationship with their predecessors. Although there was a historical continuity between the modernisation attempts of the Young Ottomans, the Young Turks and the nationalists, Turkish and Ottoman modernisers operated differently. While it was inevitable that Ottoman modernisation adopted some aspects of the Western experience, Turkish modernisation was by definition opposed to the Ottoman-Islamic experience and accepted Westernisation as a totality. With the emergence of Turkish nationalism, the modern Turkish nation's past was Ottoman and Islamic, but its future was secular and European. Turkish nationalism successfully cut its ties with the Ottoman past but it was not easy to change the Islamic character of the Empire. This is probably why Gellner emphasised the Ottoman and Islamic character of Turkish modernisation. I

challenge Gellner's conclusion on two grounds: first, the Turkish nationalists aimed to have a clear-cut break with the Islamic character of the Ottoman state and change it in accordance with the secular character of European states. Second, although Turkish modernisation was not only a result of internal developments, Gellner downplays the role of external factors such as pressures from European powers on the Empire. The Turkish nationalist elite's commitment to modernisation was a consequence of both internal and external developments. The emphasis on the role of external factors helps us to understand the relationship between the policies of Ottoman modernisation and the emergence of Turkish nationalism.

As explained earlier, after the first Ottoman defeat in 1699 policies for the modernisation of the Empire were intended to be limited to military reform with the primary purpose of strengthening state power. However, military technology gradually required the importing of other 'infidel' developments and ideas by the beginning of the eighteenth century. For instance, the first printing press of the Muslim *millets* was established by Ibrahim Muteferrika in 1729 (Lewis 2002: 28). The press was closed in 1742 until it resumed printing in 1784 by the order (*ferman*) of the Sultan Abdul Hamid I (1774–89). Its publications covered fields such as Ottoman history, geography and language. After Sultan Selim III took power a state-sponsored printing press was opened in 1795 in conjunction with other reform policies. Nevertheless it was clear that the limited military and technological reforms were not enough to prevent the decline of the Empire with its anachronistic socio-political institutions. In seeking to modernise the Empire neither Sultan Selim III nor Mahmud II anticipated the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the rise of nationalism within the Empire. In fact, Mahmud II's reforms signalled the beginning of the decay of the *millet* system that he had promoted to recognise the certain fundamental rights and freedoms of his subjects, which were partially accomplished by the imperial decrees of 1839, 1856 and the 1876 Constitution (Ahmad 2003: 33–7).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the forces of nationalism slowly infiltrated the Empire's *millet* system in conjunction with the forces of modernisation. A key document in this process was the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu* (Imperial Degree of the Rose-Chamber) of 1839, marking the beginning of the *Tanzimat* era in Ottoman history. After the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856, external pressures from European states to modernise the Ottoman system speeded up the rise of nationalism within the *millet* system. It was after this treaty that the Ottoman government – *Bab-ı Ali* (The Sublime Porte) – was forced to develop closer economic, political and ideological relations with the European states in order to preserve the Empire's status quo in the international system. In particular, the Ottomans accepted the three main demands of the European states. First, the Treaty of Paris forced the Sublime Porte to repudiate the Islamic character of the state. Second, the Sublime Porte had to accept modern arguments on the principle of nationality, or of national self-determination. Third, if the Empire wanted

to be part of the European state system on equal terms, it was under pressure to observe European international law (Davison 1986: 56–9). The *Islahat Fermanı* (Reform Decree) of 1856 was a reflection of these external pressures in domestic politics. The document emphasised full equality for all subjects (Kedourie 1992: 37; Matran 1995: 110–13). 'Surely, the Ottomans did not offer equal rights to their subjects – a meaningless anachronism in the context of that time and place. They did however offer a degree of tolerance without precedent or parallel in Christian Europe' (Lewis 2002: 33). The Ottomans accepted these requirements in order to modernise the Empire and become an equal member of the European system. Paradoxically, these attempts in return put the Empire's integrity in danger by contributing towards the disintegration of its *millet* system. An analysis of the development of print capitalism helps us to understand the last causal link between Ottoman modernisation and the emergence of nationalism.

The development of print capitalism and national self-consciousness

As part of modernisation policies, the use of print capitalism and a standardised language played a crucial role in the emergence of nationalism within the Ottoman Empire. Printing was first permitted for the non-Muslim *millets* in Hebrew, Greek, Armenian or other European languages, mainly French. The Greeks were the first non-Muslims to enjoy the benefits of publishing and teaching in their own language (Kitromilides 1990: 27–8). Although most Greek texts were about religious issues at the beginning of the nineteenth century the ideas of the French Revolution changed the agenda of the Greek print media by drawing attention to secular issues. Through the circulation of the discussions about the Balkan Christians' right to liberty and the visions of an independent Greek nation it became possible to foster a movement toward independence from the authoritarian Ottoman rule. The Greek independence of 1832 served as an example for the Ottoman Armenians, who were also allowed to use their language in the print media earlier on.

   The first official newspaper of the Ottoman Empire, *Le Moniteur Ottoman*, in 1832 had a section in Armenian language (Göçek 2002: 42). *Hayastan* (the homeland of the Armenians), the Armenian newspaper in Istanbul, was an influential channel in setting the ideological parameters of Armenian nationalism, which called for the Armenian nation to wake up and follow the examples of other enlightened nations in the 1840s (Libaridian 1983: 76). In addition, the Armenians had another advantage that Anatolian Turkish peasants did not have: many Ottoman Armenians were prosperous enough to send their children to Europe for religious and secular education. Armenian students in St Petersburg and Moscow produced and distributed brochures about the success of the Greek and Bulgarian revolutions to gain political independence from the Ottomans. The spread of these ideas bore fruit and Armenian revolutionary discourse and activity spread between the 1860s

and 1890s (Nalbandian 1963: 140–1). These internal developments were interwoven with the pressures from European powers on the Empire's modernisation and the liberal policies of the *Tanzimat* era, as explained earlier.

Not surprisingly, opposition to the *Tanzimat* era came from the Young Ottomans, who perceived the reforms as a direct threat to the integrity of the Empire. For the first time they emphasised the importance of mobilising the 'Ottomans' as a conscious group and the use of print media as a means of spreading their ideology (Mardin 1991: 89). A real shift in policy away from the *Tanzimat* ideas occurred when Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909) took power and prioritised the policy of pan-Islamism – favouring Islam at the expense of the Empire's other religious communities – over Westernisation, as a reaction to the pressures from European powers, which was intended to preserve the Empire's integrity (Landau 1994: 9–10). Despite its authoritarian character, this era witnessed the declaration of the first constitution in 1876, another key document in the modernisation of the Empire, and accepted Turkish as the official language of the state for the first time in Ottoman history (Deringil 1993: 167). Within this context, the concept of Turkism did not have any connotation in a modern sense but was seen as compatible with the concepts of Ottomanism and Islamism.

The Young Ottomans had an important impact on another group, the Young Turks, who were the forefathers of Turkish nationalists in the twentieth century. The new alternative of a Turkish national consciousness as opposed to the Ottoman traditional identity became widespread after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 (Trimberger 1978: 86). The Young Turks' movement accelerated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by intruducing the ideology of nationalism to Muslim *millets* in Anatolia. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the political organ of the Young Turk movement, in particular realised the importance of print capitalism and standardised language. In 1911, the CUP decided to employ the Turkish language in all the schools of the Empire, with the aim to 'denationalise all the non-Turkish communities and instil patriotism among the Turks' (Göçek 2002: 43). The reformation of the state schooling system and of language by the compulsory use of demotic Turkish aimed for the linguistic homogenisation of society. Similarly, the importance of language to produce new meanings and visions of a modern nation would be recognised by the Kemalist nationalism later in 1928 through the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin.[3] Clearly, the standardisation of Turkish language aimed to sever the link with the Ottoman language and past in order to create a new sense of Turkish nationhood. During this process, the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 played a crucial role in the emergence of a new sense of territoriality and identity. The Balkans were the first geographic region where the Ottomans lost both territories in Europe and this, in addition to its multi-religious character, created a trauma leading to a deeper preoccupation with the survival of the state in Anatolian heartland (Bora 1995: 104). The Young Turks' focus was

on the Anatolian territory as the basis of a national consciousness yet the nation was not yet described as Turkish.

The CUP government's reaction to the loss of the Balkan territories was a formulation of drastic policies that combined their enlightened authoritarianism with 'chauvinist nationalism'. The CUP leadership was the first group to implement policies of 'homogenisation and Turkification' which were reinforced by the conditions of World War I (Rae 2002: 151–3). The first implementation of the CUP regime's goal of creating a homogeneous nation was the elimination of the Armenians from Anatolia in 1915. The Armenians were accused of collaborating with the Russians against the Ottomans despite the fact that they were called the *millet-i sadıka* (the most loyal subjects) of the Empire. It was a prerequisite for homogenisation in the name of modernisation that both internal and external conditions served to justify their policies under the rhetoric of state security and interests. The question that automatically comes to mind concerns the reason for the change in the perception of the Armenians from being loyal *millet* to being subjected to the policies of elimination by the Young Turks, as will be dealt with in the second part of this article.

Although the CUP regime set the stage for the creation of a homogeneous Turkish nation, it could not complete the transformation from an Islamic empire to a secular nation-state. After World War I, the nationalist group under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk eventually 'brought the process of nation-state building to a logical end, having also profited from the mistakes of their predecessors' (Mardin 1991: 201). On the leadership level, the new nationalists emerged from the intellectual cadres of the Young Turks and inherited the modernised Ottoman institutions such as the parliament, political parties and the print media (Ortaylı 1983: 183). The nationalists made a radical break from their predecessors on the definition of the national project, which led to the complete rejection of the Empire as a political entity. Priority in the national project was given to two areas: the definition of a territorial state and the creation of a homogenised Turkish nation. When Ottoman territory was under Allied occupation in 1918 the main question for the Anatolian people to solve was what should be done after its final disintegration. Specifically, Ottoman territory encompassed various cultural and religious groups in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East and the emergence of more than one new nation-state was almost inevitable. As the Balkan peoples in Europe and the Arabs in the Middle East chose to decide their own destiny separately, the Ottoman territory in Anatolia became the major arena of struggle among its inhabitants: mainly Turks, Kurds, Armenians and Greeks. The Turkish national movement was opposed to the various claims of these others on Anatolian territory. Despite the cultural and linguistic differences, the religious tie between Turks and Kurds, that is Islam, united them against the 'others' – the Armenians and the Greeks.

According to official Turkish nationalism, the invasion of western Anatolia by Allied and Greek forces in 1918–19 created an urgent need for a *raison*

d'être of the state. In particular, the occupation of *Izmir* (Smyrna) by the Greek forces on 15 May 1919 triggered a Turkish resistance in Anatolia (Atatürk 1929: 1). The day on which Mustafa Kemal landed at Samsun, 19 May 1919, has come to be understood as the starting date of the national movement. In contrast to this orthodox account of the factors which are related to the rise of Turkish nationalism, I argue that the threat of an extended Armenian state in eastern Anatolia united the Turks to act as a national group. The subsequent part of this article critically explores the reasons that led to the policies of exclusion and, thus, changed the perception of the Armenians from being 'loyal *millets*' to the 'others' in Ottoman/Turkish social history.

'Othering' the Armenians during the social construction of the Turkish nation

The process of 'othering' the Armenians was a result of three historical factors, which were also connected to the relationship between modernisation and nationalism. First, the early development of Armenian nationalism: the Ottoman Armenians developed a strong national consciousness through the channels of church and standardised language, as explained in regard to the use of print capitalism in the nineteenth century. Under the new policies of modernisation, they demanded more socio-political rights and to be regarded as equal subjects of the Empire, which was not acceptable to the Ottoman ruling elite. The Armenians were not equal to Muslim *millets* and had always been considered as the others.

Second, the European intervention in Ottoman domestic politics on behalf of Christian minorities, as the Empire became weaker: the refusal of Armenian demands gave legitimacy to Western interference in Ottoman internal affairs during the modernisation period. The Ottoman elite was suspicious of European pressures to the extent that they actually intended to weaken the authority of the Sultan and the sovereignty of the Empire. Great power interventions had helped the Greeks to gain independence, and this had to be prevented in the case of the Ottoman Armenians.

Third, the demographic and geopolitical composition of the Armenians led to their 'othering': historically, the Armenians were a divided people by a divided land during the rule of the Persian, Russian and Ottoman Empires (Nalbandian 1963: 2–3). After the Ottomans lost the districts of Kars, Ardahan and Batum (*Elviye-i Selase*) to the Russians in the war of 1877–78 the Ottoman–Armenian frontier remained the main bone of contention. The Armenian claims that the six Ottoman provinces – Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Harput, Sivas – which had been named 'Turkish Armenia' by the Armenians and the Europeans, constitute an important part of the historic homeland and further complicated the dispute between Turkish and Armenian nationalists in post-Ottoman politics (Kurat 1990: 203–4; Hovannisian 1971: 447). While the Armenian elite regarded the unification of Ottoman and

Russian Armenians as a necessary condition for the creation of a united identity, their Turkish counterparts perceived this as an actual threat to their own interests. Consequently, Turkish nationalists prioritised two tasks of creating a homogenous nation-state in order to tackle the 'Armenian question': to declare Anatolia as the Turkish homeland, which clashed with Armenian territorial claims, and to gain the international recognition of Turkish sovereignty over this territory.

The clash of Turkish–Armenian territorial claims over Eastern Anatolia

Turkish nationalists took advantage of the establishment of an independent Armenian state in the South Caucasus (Russian Armenia) in May 1918 and regarded this new state as the representative of Armenian identity and interests. The crucial issue to begin with was the territorial dispute between the two sides. In June 1918, the Batum Agreement determined the Turkish–Armenian border to be that of the former Ottoman–Russian border of 1877–78 and the Armenian government in Erivan renounced claims to the six Ottoman provinces in Eastern Anatolia. As soon as the Ottomans signed the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918 the Erivan government repudiated the Batum Agreement and resumed their demands for Ottoman Armenia (Kazemzadeh 1951: 286; Kurat 1990: 477). For the Armenian leaders, the security and survival of the new Armenian Republic could not be achieved without regaining 'Turkish Armenia'.

Almost at the same time as the Greek invasion, on 28 May 1919, the Erivan government passed the Act of United Armenia, which claimed national restoration by uniting the two parts of 'historic Armenia' (PRO: Archival Research).[4] The Armenian leaders knew that immediate unification was impossible, but they used the Act as a legal basis for making representations on behalf of an integrated Armenia and the diaspora (Hovannisian 1982: 1). The consequences of the Act were not foreseen. Its aim of creating a combined independent political Armenian identity failed, and it led to a drastic reaction by the Turkish nationalists. The Kemalist leadership regarded the annexation of Turkish Armenia as a declaration of war and claimed that the Turkish national integrity was inconceivable without the six Ottoman provinces in eastern Anatolia (Kazemzadeh 1951: 286). This reactionary policy was further reinforced by the internal and external developments of Turkish nationalist policies in 1920.

In internal affairs, priority was given to the establishment of a national authority in Anatolia. Two important events had a direct impact on this development: the declaration of a National Pact (Misak-ı Milli) and the occupation of Istanbul by the Allies. First, the Turkish National pact expressed the determination of the Kemalist group to regain the full national integrity and independence of the Turkish people. The pact clearly spelled out five major goals: to liberate Ottoman territory from foreign invasion; to unite Elviye-i Selase (Kars, Ardahan and Batum) with the Turkish homeland; to

gain control of Istanbul; to protect the rights of Muslim minorities in neighbouring states; and to secure the complete sovereignty of the country. It not only became a key document of modern Turkish history but also laid the basis of nationalist foreign policy, which would soon be directed against the Armenians.

Second, the Allied occupation of Istanbul on 16 March 1920 constituted a fatal blow to Ottoman sovereignty and became a catalyst for the establishment of a national assembly in Ankara. The Grand National Assembly (GNA), declaring the establishment of the Ankara government, was opened on 23 April 1920. The GNA declared itself to hold legislative and executive power, based on the sovereignty of the Turkish people, stating that there was no power above the Ankara government (Atatürk 1929: 380). The crucial test for the replacement of the Istanbul government by the Ankara government would take place in the realm of foreign relations, given the importance of international recognition to both statehood and the legitimacy of a government. When the Allies signed the Treaty of Sèvres with the Istanbul government on 20 August 1920 it was clear that they did not recognise the Ankara government. Consequently, the nationalists were determined not only to take over the Istanbul government's exercise of power in foreign affairs but also to prove to the Allies and the protectorate Armenians that there was no possibility of a united Armenia.

I maintain that the Treaty of Sèvres served as a catalyst for Turkish nationalism by uniting the Muslim peoples of Anatolia to act as a national group under the leadership of the Kemalists. The treaty was also described as *the origin of Turkish nationalism* in a British Foreign Office report, indicating that foreign observers understood that the European decision over the future of Anatolia at Sèvres escalated the nationalist feelings among Turks (PRO: Archival Research).[5] Therefore, the European-backed territorial claims of the Armenians over eastern Anatolia played a more determining role than the Greek invasion of *Izmir* in the development of a *raison d'être* of the new Turkish state.

One methodological concern at this juncture of my analysis is how to incorporate the self and other nexus into the relationship between the emergence of Turkish nationalism and the process of 'othering' the Armenians. As explained earlier, the Kemalist leadership was determined to establish a nation-state based on the existing European model, in which the state and its borders have two main functions: first, the clear definition of boundaries helps to create a homogeneous imagined community within the territorial state. In this understanding, nationhood and statehood are defined territorially since political identity crystallises around borders as well as transcends them. Second, the nation-state has the power to secure its national identity by recognising the other, so as to be constituted and recognised itself as a political entity at the same time. I argue that the Turkish nationalist leaders chose the Armenians as the 'other' both to claim Turkish sovereignty over the proclaimed Anatolian territory and also to be recognised as the

legitimate authority by the 'other' in order to secure the new Turkish national identity. Indeed, Turkey is a good example of the process of constructing nationhood through delineating the state's territorial borders, with homogenising space and population as an integral part of defining a unified political identity. However, the meaning of Turkish nation itself was vague and needed to be defined on behalf of the Muslim subjects of the Empire in Anatolia. On the one hand, it was accepted that 'a "Turk" could be anyone who belonged to the Muslim *umma* during the Ottoman time' (Karpat 1973: 100). On the other hand, one was accepted as a Turk as long as one called himself/herself a Turk within the boundaries of the sovereign secular state. Hence, the definition of the new state's boundaries became crucial where the claims of Turkish and Armenian homelands clashed.

This is why I maintain that the indirect occupation of eastern Anatolia by the Armenians through the articles of the Treaty of Sèvres was a key factor for Turkish nationalism: the establishment of a united Armenia posed a direct threat to the integrity of Turkish territory and identity. While the Armenian demands were satisfied by the stillborn Treaty of Sèvres, which in principle gave Armenia a large part of north-eastern Anatolia (the boundaries would be drawn by President Wilson), this in return reinforced Turkish nationalist feelings. Turkish policy towards Armenia from that time on would be based on the rejection of ceding any Turkish soil to the Armenians (Akçam 1999: 499). It also served to strengthen Turkish national consciousness by allowing Turks to differentiate themselves from the Armenians. There was no place for the Armenians in the new Turkish nation, defined in territorial and religious terms. The crucial stage of invalidating the Armenian claims was to gain international recognition of Turkish sovereignty in Anatolia and, therefore, priority was given to foreign affairs.

The recognition of Turkish sovereignty in Anatolia

The nationalist leaders designed a dual policy to assert their sovereignty in foreign affairs, and also to solve the 'Armenian question'. On the one hand, they established diplomatic relations with the Bolsheviks to decide on the border between the two new regimes in eastern Anatolia; on the other hand, they pursued a military campaign against the Armenians in order to force them to reject the Treaty of Sèvres. Hence, the treaty became a catalyst not only for Turkish nationalism but also for the Turkish–Bolshevik rapprochement in 1920–21, which brought Lenin and Kemal together against the Allied policies in Eurasia.

The pragmatic rapprochement between the two leaders of the newly emerging regimes in Ankara and Moscow was based on taking advantage of the weak positions of the small nations in the South Caucasus. When Bolshevik control was consolidated in Azerbaijan on 28 April 1920 Turkish nationalists stated that they were determined to restrict their policies within Turkish national borders and Azeris were not part of this national project.

Afterwards, Soviet control was established in Armenia on 2 December 1920. Interestingly enough, the last act of the outgoing independent Armenian government in Erivan was to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol (*Gümrü*) with the Turks on 3 December 1920, which recognised the eastern boundaries of the newly emerging Turkish state.[6] It was not a historical coincidence that Turkish nationalists decided to put pressure on the independent Erivan government as the first foreign authority to recognise the sovereignty of the Ankara government. The treaty ranks as the first official agreement undertaken by the Ankara government with a foreign state. Turkish scholars have neglected the role of the treaty in their analyses of Turkish nationalism and nation-state building since it was never ratified. Despite the fact that the treaty did not have any legislative power it still played an important role in Turkish nation-state building for the following reasons:

First, the Armenians were chosen as the first 'other' state which had to recognise the authority of the new Ankara government. The Treaty of Alexandropol indicated the willingness of the Turks to recognise the political existence of the Armenians as the 'other' as long as they did not have any territorial claims in Anatolia. It was a deliberate act that the Ankara government signed the treaty on behalf of the 'Turkish' GNA and defined, for the first time, the political identity of the Ankara government in terms of the territorial delineation of Turkey. Second, the treaty demarcated the Armenian–Turkish border in accordance with the principles of the Turkish National Pact of 1920. The Ankara government regained all the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire which had been lost to Russia after the war of 1877–78. The border was later finalised by the Treaty of Kars between Turkey and the Transcaucasian Soviet republics under the supervision of Moscow in 1921, and this border between the modern Turkish and Armenian states remains today (AMDP Vol. 1 Doc. 97: 571–9; PRO: Archival Research).[7] Third, the victory against the Armenians created ardent nationalist feelings among the Turks arising from the impression that the nationalists had the necessary political will and material capabilities to fight against the foreign invaders. In foreign affairs, both the Bolsheviks and the Allies changed their policies towards the Ankara government after its victory over the Armenians.

Official Turkish nationalism ignores the possibility that if Turkish nationalists had not eliminated the Armenian threat first on the eastern front in 1920, there would most probably have been no victory against the Greek forces on the western front in 1922. Although the Greek advance into Anatolia had been in progress since June 1920 the Turkish nationalist forces were not strong enough to undertake an offensive against the Greek army. They first secured victory on the eastern front and gained Soviet support in their struggle against the Greeks. Subsequently, on 30 August 1922, the reinforced Turkish army defeated the Greek forces at the end of the Great Offensive (*Büyük Taaruz*). The liberation of Anatolia from the Armenian and the Greek forces was part of a national plan to unite the Turkish nation under the sovereignty of the Ankara government. Following the defeat of the

Armenians and the Greeks, the nationalists were in a strong position to utilise their relations with Moscow to influence the Allied policy in relation to the Turkish peace settlement.

The formation of the modern Turkish nation-state thus became contingent on its recognition on a broader international level. The Allied invitation of the Ankara government to the peace conference at Lausanne was the first sign of Western recognition. The Ankara government gained full sovereignty for the Turkish nation-state within the agreed territorial boundaries with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923. Furthermore, the homogenisation of the Turkish nation within the new modern state progressed further as a result of the exchange of Greek and Turkish minorities, which was agreed in a separate treaty at Lausanne in 1923. Upon securing this exchange, and when the new Constitution declared the Turkish state a 'republic' with sovereignty derived from the nation on 29 October 1923, there existed a homogenised 'Turkish' community. Within the new imagination, one was recognised as a Turk as long as s/he spoke Turkish, shared Turkish values and called herself/himself a Turk within the boundaries of the sovereign Turkish state. The Turkish nation was not based on *ethnie* and/or race. On the contrary, the Turkish nation was defined as a 'nation' with *de facto* territorial sovereignty. Moreover, religious minorities – specifically the Jews – were allowed to become citizens as long as they did not have any territorial claims on the Turkish territory. The Lausanne settlement was the zenith of Turkish nationalism in international relations since there was no word of a united independent Armenia as designated in the Treaty of Sèvres. The legacy of the Ottoman past and the Allied plans for Anatolia in the 1920s led to the 'Sèvres syndrome' which represented the misperception and distrust of the Western intentions towards Turkey, which made the Turks very sensitive about the protection of their territorial integrity and national identity.

Conclusion

The Turkish nation, like any other modern nation, is not only socially constructed but is also burdened by its history. Nationalist ideologists are free to use and misuse history when creating their myths and justifying their claims. Two important implications emerge from this article's reinterpretation of Turkish nationalism and history. First, the emergence of Turkish nationalism was a consequence of the policies of Ottoman modernisation. The Ottoman Empire was the first Islamic state to be modernised within the European system. The initial aim of the Ottoman reformers was to catch up with the European military and technology. During the Empire's engagement with European modernity, three interrelated factors – the erosion of traditional Ottoman identity, the need for socio-political modernisation of the Empire, and the development of print capitalism – cumulatively contributed to the disintegration of the *millet* system and the emergence of

Turkish nationalism as a modern ideology. Examining the paradoxical relationship between Ottoman modernisation and Turkish nationalism also draws attention to the origins of the Turkish nation that lie outside ethnic categories. It was argued in particular that the religious character of the Ottoman Empire and its *millet* system prevented the utilisation of notions of ethnicity in defining the meaning of Turkishness. Islam represented a stronger unifying social force that superseded ethnic differences at the early stages of the Turkish nation-building.

Second, exploring the causal link between modernisation and nationalism also explains the process of nation-building, within which a nation is constructed in relation to the other. In this context, the role of the Armenians was revealed to be far more significant than the role of the Greeks during the emergence of Turkish nationalism, and this needs to be understood in relation to the social construction of a homogenous nation and the recognition of state sovereignty over a territory. This article has argued that it was the Armenian claims over the Eastern provinces of Anatolia that created a threat to the new Turkish identity and became the basis for differentiating between the Turks and the Armenians as their other. In this context, the process of 'othering' the Armenians is based on the Turkish threat perception of Armenian territorial claims. This perception will continue to serve Turkish politicians' ideological interests if Armenian nationalists also continue to insist on claiming that Armenians must return to their historic homelands. The dialectical relationship between the construction of the Turkish nation and the change of the Armenians' status from being '*millet-i sadıka*' to the 'other' encapsulates the modernity of Turkish nationalism.

Notes

1 The Ottoman Empire was a multi-religious, multilingual, multicultural but not multi-national Empire as we understand it in modern terms. The usage of 'nation' for *millet* misrepresents its religious connotation.

2 Interestingly enough, the name *Turchia* (*Türkiye* – Turkey) was given to the Anatolian territories – Asia Minor – and people by Westerners during the Crusades in the eleventh century.

3 The basic principles of Kemalism were introduced through the symbolic 'Six Arrows' – republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism and reformism – of the Republican Peoples' Party and made part of the Turkish constitution in 1937. The main emphasis of Kemalism was on the subordination of Islam to the secular character of the Turkish nation-state and Kemalist nationalism served to this end.

4 FO371/4965/E15106/134/58, Communication by League of Nations, No. 20/40/56E, dated 26 November 1920.

5 FO371/6269/E 8378/8378/58, Outline of Events in Transcaucasia from the beginning of the Russian revolution in the summer of 1917 to April 1921.

6 There is a disagreement about the day on which the Turkish–Armenian treaty was signed since it was signed after midnight on 2 December.

7 FO371/6274/E13062/116/58, From Sir H. Rumbold (Constantinople), No. 1061, Agreement between Angora and Caucasian Republics of 13 October 1921, dated 22 November 1921.

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