

**THE LAUNCHING OF THE TURKISH THESIS OF HISTORY:
A CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

**by
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ABSTRACT

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The following is a dissertation on the Turkish Thesis of History, focusing specifically on a certain instant in its development, namely the First Turkish History Congress in which the Thesis was fully formulated.

Taking its lead from the ideas of Benedict Anderson, the dissertation is based on the assumption that the nations are imagined cultural constructs; and that it is primarily the style in which it is imagined that gives a nation its distinctive character. Developing these ideas, the work turns its attention to the methods of such imagination and incorporating the ideas of Anthony D. Smith on national myths, devises a conceptual framework for making sense of the interrelations among the formation of nations, the writing of national histories and the creation of national myths.

In light of this theoretical framework, the papers of the Congress are analyzed in detail in order to trace clues of the distinctive characteristics of Turkish nationalism –its peculiarities which were to a large extent dictated by the limits (real or imagined) in reaction to which Turkish nationalism developed.

ÖZET

TÜRK TARİH TEZİNİN ORTAYA ÇIKIŞI: BİR METİN İNCELEMESİ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: milliyetçilik, tarih, Türkiye

Ekteki tezin konusunu genel anlamda Türk Tarih Tezi oluşturmaktaysa da, asıl odaklanılan bu Tezin gelişiminde belirli bir andır: Tezin tam anlamıyla ortaya atıldığı Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi.

Benedict Anderson'ın teorilerini temel alan tez, milletlerin hayali cemaatler olduklarını ve milletlere ayırdedici özelliklerini kazandırmanın bu tahayyülün farklı tarzları olduğunu varsayar. Bu fikirlerden hareketle, dikkatini bu tahayyül tekniklerine çevirir ve Anthony D. Smith'in milli efsaneler hakkındaki düşüncelerinden de faydalanarak milletlerin oluşumu, milli tarih yazımı ve milli efsanelerin yaratımı arasındaki ilişkileri anlamlandırmayı mümkün kılacak bir kavramsal çerçeve oluşturmaya çalışır.

Bu teorik çerçeve ışığında, Türk milliyetçiliğinin ayırdedici yönlerini ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla, Kongre'de sunulan tebliğler detaylı bir incelemeye tabi tutulur. Bu incelemede karşılaşılan özellikler genelde Türk milliyetçiliğinin muhalif olarak geliştiği gerçek ya da hayali bir takım kısıtlara denk gelmektedir.

To friends –especially Saygın and Alper-
who have turned an otherwise dull life in Sabancı University into memorable times;
to my family;
and to Furkan,
who has so gracefully put up with all my thesis-writing-break-downs.

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INTRODUCTION

There is an ever-growing literature on the emergence, development and nature of nationalism(s). Given its political power and the normative standing it has acquired over the last century, this is only natural. Yet, the quantity of the theories devoted to this issue does not necessarily translate into qualitative differences. All the allegedly fervent conflicts of opinion usually turn out to be nothing more than claims to an established academic career/territory on the behalf of the individual theorists.

There seems to be no argument among the academic circles that nationalism –at least, in the form we know it today- is a modern phenomenon. There is also no denying its close ties with the state –though there may be disagreements about which one preceded the other. Yet for our current intents and purposes, what matters most is its constructed nature.

Nationalism, as well as nationality, are not essentials but rather constructed categories. There are those who believe them to be socially-constructed; those who believe them to be politically-constructed; and those who deem them discursive constructs.¹ Whichever theory one may choose to adopt, two things seem to be clear: that they are historically-constructed and that they require a good deal of imagination. The first proposition seems self-evident –nationalism is an historical movement. It is the product of a specific historical period; and has developed under certain historical

¹ As an example of a state-centered approach, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press, 1995; as examples of an approach based on socio-economic transformations, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, and Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983; for an example of an approach that regards nationalism as a narrative, see Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990; and *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 2004.

conditions ever since its first appearance. If we listen to Smith, it is also “profoundly ‘historicist’ in character”² –not only historians abound among its creators and critics alike, but also there is no denying the historicist world-view it imposes on its followers –that is a world-view based on the existence of distinct nations with distinct characters, all marching down their own path of development. Moreover, it is evident that various socio-economic and political developments, which might be singled out as the carriers of the germ of nationalism are all specific to a certain historical period, i.e. the (European) modernity. So are different narrative strategies that we associate with nationalism. It is now to the second proposition that we turn our attention.

1. Imagining the Nation

If nation, nationality and nationalism are not natural, essential and unchanging, forcing themselves on people, who do nothing but passively submit to them; ‘imagining’ –better than any other verb- captures the soul of the activity involved in their construction. This term has been coined in 1983, by Benedict Anderson in his brilliant work, *Imagined Communities*³ and has been quite popular ever since. Of course, there have also been fierce opponents of the idea –among the nationalists themselves to say the least. Opposition has also been voiced in academic circles. Yet behind all the sound and the fury, when dust settles down, there seems to be no disagreement on the idea that nations should be imagined.

The most refined criticism to Anderson’s thesis comes from Anthony D. Smith, who has –quite unfairly- been called a primordialist by many and whose ideas about nations and nationalism, along with those of Anderson’s, will provide the main structure of this work. Thus, before going any further, it seems appropriate to reconcile the ideas of these two theorists who have been relentlessly working to differentiate their positions.

² Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians”, in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed), *Mapping the Nation*, London: Verso, 1996, p. 175.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1990.

Basically, Smith claims that the nations are build on pre-existing *ethnies* (ethnic categories) and thus one cannot hope to understand nations and nationalism without first coming to terms with this fact. Notwithstanding his insistence on the ethnic origins of nations, in some places, he comes close to admitting that the nations are to a large extent imagined. While claiming that “nations always require ethnic elements”, he grants that they may “be reworked; they often are”⁴. Yet it is not clear how that reworking is any different than imagining. As a matter of fact, among the modernists – and later on, the post-modernists- (including Anderson himself), there is no one who would claim that nationalism does not require any prior cultural material to work on, or that it can simply will nations into existence without any reference whatsoever to material reality. For instance, Gellner claims that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist –but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on, even if... these are purely negative”.⁵ Smith argues that his insistence on the presence of “ethnic elements” is enough to prove that the nation has something real about it –as opposed to the fictive nature that the modernists ascribe to it. Yet, when he goes down one level and examines what he calls the “ethnic elements”, he is forced to admitting that ethnicity can itself be “‘constructed’, ‘reconstructed’ and sometimes plainly ‘invented’”.⁶ Thus he ends up telling us the same old story in a different level. Finally, he finds a way out: while admitting that “many nationalisms seek to create nations where none existed” –referring to Gellner’s original formulation-, he nonetheless argues that the nations that are most stable and enduring are those that are based on prior existence of strong “ethnic elements”.⁷ Keeping in mind that elsewhere, he had commented on the unplanned nature of the Western European nationalisms and on how all other nationalisms were “created by design”⁸; it is as if he is considering non-Western nationalisms as exceptions to the rule/norm –which will prove important in examining the Turkish case.

Actually, there is no need to hunt for clues in order to arrive at the conclusion that Smith’s position on the emergence and the development of nations and nationalism(s) does not conflict with Anderson’s “imagined communities”. To see how,

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 40.

⁵ Quoted by Smith, *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶ Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians”, p. 193.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of the Minorities”, in *Smith Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 190.

⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 100.

it is enough to go over, in brief, over the main propositions of his theory. Smith defines the nation as “a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common laws”⁹. Evidently, what differentiates a nation from an ethnic community is its political organization; an ethnic community with a congruent state organization will be a nation. Yet, one should not assume that the qualities that go into the making of the ethnic community and the characteristics that come with a modern state organization simply add up to produce the nation. The nation does not place itself easily on the ethnic community which meanwhile retains its previous character; the state rather transforms the ethnic community and turns it into a nation. As Weber claimed, it is “political action, more than anything” which can “transform ethnic communities into nations”.¹⁰ So, what we should really concern ourselves with are the ethnic communities –as there can be no argument against the amount of construction and imagination that is necessarily involved in politics. Smith provides six elements that go into the making of an ethnic community (*ethnie*): a collective name; at least one differentiating element of common culture; a myth of common ancestry; shared historical memories; an association with a specific ‘homeland’; a sense of solidarity –at least for a significant portion of the population.¹¹ Except for the second one, all the other elements are subjective ones. Moreover, all are, in some way, related to myths. A name is always imagined/invented/constructed –all those things which Smith claims the nation not to be; there can be no argument on that. By saying that its name is one of the elements that make a group of people an *ethnie*, he hints at some form of imaginary activity taking place. As Hans Blumenberg posits, “all confidence in the world begins with names about which a story can be told”.¹² Thus a name is the starting point for a myth-making process. All the other elements are directly linked with such a process; for nations preserve/reconstruct their memories primarily through myths and national solidarity is to a large extent the result of myths of ethnic descent. Moreover, the way to establishing a ‘homeland’ also goes through myth-

⁹ Anthony D. Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 107.

¹⁰ Smith, “Nationalism and the Historians”, p. 180.

¹¹ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 21.

¹² Quoted in Riekmann, “The Myth of European Unity”, in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997, p. 63.

making.¹³ The only “objective” element we are left with is a differentiating element of culture; yet Smith himself argues that “it is only when such markers are endowed with diacritical significance that these cultural attributes come to be seen as objective, at least as far as ethnic boundaries are concerned”.¹⁴ This final criterion has an objective reality, yet it is the subjective understanding of -and the experience people associate with- this objective reality that goes into the making of the nation. Thus, it can also be regarded as a somewhat subjective element.

Hence, an amount of imaginary activity is a must for the development of a nation. Yet, as Smith asserts, there are limits to such an activity. Then again, imagination is never boundless. There are also limits to what one can imagine. Imagination does not entail creating things out of the blue and without limits; rather it signifies a creative endeavor. Moreover, it does not necessarily require intention – though it may. Thus, all myths need to be imagined but there is no guaranteed outcome; one can try to tailor a myth but there is no guessing the final form it will take. So is the case with the nations, which all require myths. Social engineering and conscious efforts on the behalf of the rulers to produce a nation are not meaningless; though there is no guarantee that they will attain the intended results. That is probably the reason why the name of Anderson’s book is *Imagined Communities*, rather than say, *Imagining Communities*. There sure is an imaginary activity going on but it is not necessarily conscious or purposive; and there is no telling who the subjects and the objects of this verb are. Each and every one of us imagines himself as part of a certain nation and in doing so make and remake that nation. Yet, this is something that we are made to do –as a conclusion of the social and political context within which we are situated-, as much as something we do ourselves.

We will assume that nations are imagined communities –yet no less real for that; and that myths are crucial in the construction of nations. We will examine the First Turkish History Congress as an attempt at construction –or at least, guiding people in

¹³ For lengthy analyses of these different kinds of myths, see Anthony D. Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, in John Hutchinson and Smith (eds.), *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol. 4, Routledge, 2000; “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*; and “Nation and Ethnoscape”, in Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*.

¹⁴ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 23.

the construction- of certain myths, which will eventually go into the construction of the Turkish nation and its identity.

Before moving on to the analyses of the papers presented and the discussions that took place in the congress, we will go over the details of the works of Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith –with occasional reference to other theorists of the field- and try to highlight the ways in which they apply to our case.

2. Imagined Communities

Anderson claims that nations should be evaluated not on the basis of their genuineness or artificiality but rather with reference to “the style in which they are imagined”.¹⁵ After all, if we believe –with Anderson- that nationalism and nationality are merely “cultural artifacts of a peculiar kind”¹⁶, there is no such thing as an authentic nation but only a variety of nations imagined in different –and not so different?- styles. We can say that all societies that depend on the functioning of institutions are imaginary; that is, they are “based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the traces of an immemorial past”.¹⁷ In this context, the genuineness-artificiality dichotomy breaks down for only the imaginary communities can be real or vice versa.

According to Anderson, the nation is “an imagined political community –and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”.¹⁸ It is imagined because the members of a nation will only get to know a very little portion of the people that make up that community; thus they should constantly imagine and assume each other’s existence in order for a bond to develop among them. It is a community –rather than a society- because it is experienced by its members as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” based on the ideal of fraternity.¹⁹ In a similar vein, Gellner describes nationalism as “a phenomenon of *Gesellschaft* using the idiom of *Gemeinschaft*: a mobile anonymous

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology”, in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader*, p. 138.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

society simulating a closed cozy community”.²⁰ It is limited because the very existence of an “inside” presupposes and necessitates the existence of an “outside”. A nation can best be described through those “others” who do not belong with that community. It is sovereign, because it has emerged in an historical period, in which the older sources of legitimacy and sovereignty –the church and the dynasties- were losing ground and there had developed a crisis of legitimacy which had to be overcome in order to make it possible for any form of sovereignty to be exercised.

If we turn our attention to Turkish nationalism, we can see almost a perfect match with this definition. The early Republican period in Turkey witnessed the construction of the Turkish nation and the national solidarities in various ways. Aside from constant references to the sanctity of the *Misak-ı Milli* (National Oath) frontiers and emphasis on Atatürk’s adage “peace at home, peace abroad”, the boundaries that separated the inside from the outside and Turk from its various others were becoming more defined and rigid as a consequence of certain physical policies such as the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece. By then “popular sovereignty” had already become a catchword. In Republican propaganda, popular sovereignty had taken the place of the sovereignty of the Sultan/Caliph, who had supposedly betrayed and abandoned the nation. Former loci of power and legitimacy –be they real or symbolic- (such as the Sultanate, the Caliphate, the dervish lodges) and their various instruments and/or symbolic remnants (such as the Arabic script, the lunar calendar, the old system of measurement and laws) were done away with in the first decade of the Republic.

According to Anderson, the preconditions for the emergence of a community, which will define itself as a nation, are the loss of faith in prior loyalties and forms of identification –that is, a situation in which men can no longer make sense of their existence within a system based either on religion or on dynasties (or both)-; and the transition from a religious/mythical time to a calendar time.²¹ Identification with a nation provides a framework within which men might find meaning in the fatality and contingency of everyday life and the transitory nature of all physical things. It supplies people with a feeling of continuity and a purpose in life in a world in which loyalty to the Church or to the King can no longer help people situate themselves; a world definitively disenchanted by the impact of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The

²⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, p.74.

²¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 20-37.

nation seems –to the nationalist- as if it has been there from time immemorial and as if it will remain intact forever. This myth of the nation-as-out-of-time provides the people the security they seek in a hectic world. Accordingly, Anderson argues, the nation should be understood not strictly as a consciously-held political ideal, but rather as analogous to religious imaginings.²² This experience of nationhood, constructed primarily through the consumption of the same or -at least- similar printed materials with the people with whom one shares a “homogeneous empty time”, is a modern mode of human existence –though the nationalists claim it to be anything but modern. Historically, it is linked with the demise of religious beliefs (which in a way includes the decline of the power of the dynasts, for their sovereignty was to a large extent based on a form of religious legitimation), that is, with the 18th century European history. Anderson uses the notion “homogenous empty time” in the way that Benjamin does –to refer to a time marked by temporal coincidence and measurable with calendar and clock. The transformation of the perception of time in this direction is what was mentioned before as the abandonment of religious and mythic time. This is what makes it possible for people to imagine themselves as part of a nation while reading their morning newspapers –with the knowledge/belief that other members of their community are reading the same news at the same time.²³

While explaining the historical causes and the development of the notion of “nation” and of nationalism in length, Anderson emphasizes the emergence of print-as-commodity and standardized print languages.²⁴ It is basically through these two that the nation is imagined. On strikingly similar lines with Anderson, Yusuf Hikmet Bey makes the following comments about the role of printing in the development of nationalist sentiments:

Milliyet hissi...evela aynı lisanı konuşan ve aynı kitapları ve gazeteleri okumakta aynı zevkleri duyan, aynı tarzda düşünmeye alışan, aynı hadiselerle müteessir olan, aynı mazi ile iftihar eden, istikbal için aynı ümitleri besleyen insanları birbirine bağlayan hislerdir. Bundan maada, menfaat ve ihtiyaçlarını basılmış kitap ve gazeteler sayesinde daha çabuk ve anlayışlı bir surette takdir eden insanların birbirine karşı duyduğu tesanüttür.²⁵

²² Ibid., pp. 18-9.

²³ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 41-9.

²⁵ “The sense of nationality...is first and foremost about the sentiments that bind together people who speak the same language and who get similar pleasure, get used to thinking in the same way, feel grief at the same events, take pride in the same past, have

Moreover, the bureaucratic middle classes, who were indispensable for the nation-states that had been established as a norm in the international arena by the end of the Great War, had been consolidated through the use of print languages. As opposed to all the prior ruling classes –which depended on personal loyalties and kinship ties for their reproduction-, the bureaucratic middle classes imagined themselves through the use of common print languages; they were the first classes to achieve solidarities on a predominantly imaginary basis.²⁶ The Turkish bureaucracy was no exception to that rule; the Turkish bureaucrats were all educated in the new western style institutions of education –which began to supply the personnel of the government starting from the mid 19th century- and they all studied the same -or similar- textbooks.

Anderson also provides a historical typology of nationalisms. The original models were those of America and France and they were based on national languages. What really concerns us here is the idea that no process of nation-building/formation could have been spontaneous once the initial moment of inception had passed. The moment that the idea of nation became a concept, it had also become a model for all the others to copy.²⁷ In this regard, Turkish nationalism cannot be thought as independent from all the other nationalist movements that preceded it. The standard of becoming a nation has become a commodity in its own right through the publications on the French Revolution and has gone into circulation throughout the globe. Yet, since that model was so well defined and established, it imposed standards on the new states, “standards from which too-marked deviations were impermissible”.²⁸ There is no denying the direct and not-so-direct influences of the French Revolution on Turkish nationalism. Yet, it would be misleading to claim that Turkish nationalism modeled the French experience in every detail. There was another model which proved at least as important as the French one; it was “official nationalism”.

Anderson borrows this term from Seton-Watson and describes it as a conservative movement which developed in reaction to the popular nationalist

the same hopes for the future, all from reading the same books and newspapers. As a result, it is the solidarity felt among people who appreciate each others interests and needs in a quicker and more perceptive manner thanks to printed books and newspapers.” *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar-Müzakere Zabıtları* (from now on referred to as *BTTK*), Maarif Vekaleti, 1932, p. 511.

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-77.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

movements based on national languages. This can in a way be summarized as an attempt to reconcile and reconnect the people with the dynast.²⁹ The primary policy instruments utilized by official nationalism are state-controlled compulsory primary education, propaganda, militarism, the rewriting of (national) history by state initiative, the constant affirmation of the identity of the people and the person of the dynast.³⁰

Developing the idea that both these types of nationalism can be copied and modularly reconstructed, Anderson draws our attention to the fact that the nation-formation/building policies of most of the newly-founded nation-states combines elements from both the popular and the official variants of nationalism. Moreover, official nationalism proves most effective during the formative stages of these newly-founded nation-states. As soon as the state builders overtake the power from the old regime –that is, the first time they find themselves in a position in which they can implement the state apparatus to broaden and augment their own policies and projects-, they shift considerably away from popular -and towards official- nationalism.³¹ Then all the above mentioned instruments can be put to use to reconcile the nation not with the dynast, but rather with the state.

The formative years of the Turkish Republic provides a good example of these arguments. According to François Georgeon, Turkish nationalism combined two distinct forms of nationalism. One was developed mainly among the military and civil bureaucracy and was based on a territorial and political patriotism –what we might affiliate with the official nationalism. The other was developed by the intelligentsia and the incipient national bourgeoisie and was based on a notion of ethnic and cultural national identity; what we might affiliate with the popular nationalist movements based on vernacular mobilization.³² Beginning at the turn of the century and gaining pace after 1908 and once again after the founding of the new regime, these two variants of nationalism merged. What united the two and formed probably the most basic characteristic of Turkish nationalism, was the priority of the state. In Turkish nationalism, the political and strategic interests of the “state” –whether it was Ottoman or Republican- always took priority over all other criteria. In this context, one might argue that the merger between the lines of national thought was not egalitarian in

²⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

³¹ Ibid., p. 145.

³² François Goergeon, “Bir Kimlik Arayışı: Türk Milliyetçiliği” in Georgeon, *Osmanlı-Türk Modernleşmesi (1900-1930)*, İstanbul: YKY, 2006, p. 17.

character, but rather consisted in the taking over of the arguments and strategies of popular nationalism by its official counterpart, leading to an official nationalism which nonetheless retained some of its popular overtones.

Moreover, it is possible to see the counter-parts of all the instruments mentioned by Anderson in the early Republican Turkey. Those that are of greater importance for our present purposes are compulsory primary education, official rewriting of national history and affirmation of the identities of the leader and the people. Aside from assuring that everyone acquires the ability to read and write, which is the prime instrument in making it possible for the nation to be imagined-, compulsory primary education guarantees the diffusion of the image of the imagined nation imposed by the state on the people in the hope of turning them into a homogenous community. The poems, marches, catch-all slogan definitions pertaining to the Turkish history and the Turkish Republic that we learn (and can never forget) are all instruments of this state nationalism.

Gellner tells this story in somewhat different words. His argument is as follows: In advanced industrial societies, which depend on sustained growth and constant innovation for their survival, a man is usable only if he is educated. Since this kind of society necessitates people who can deliver and decipher messages instantaneously, sustained schooling and semantic discipline on the behalf of the people become musts. Hence, for the first time in human history, “a high culture becomes the pervasive, operational culture of an entire society”.³³ It is through the inculcation of this High Culture that schools help construct the nation. Elsewhere, Gellner argues that the attainment of High Culture is not sufficient by itself for being integrated into such a society. Aside from the mastery of the required skills, one needs to possess “personal attributes compatible with the self-image of the culture in question”.³⁴ He emphasizes the fact that High Culture is never universal but rather always articulated in a particular language and contains particular rules for comportment in life; “modern industrial high culture has an ‘ethnic’ coloring, which is of its essence”.³⁵ Likewise, Hobsbawm underlines the importance of primary education in the invention of traditions for the

³³ Ernest Gellner, “The Coming of Nationalism and its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class”, in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed), *Mapping the Nation*, pp. 106-8.

³⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994, p. 41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

nation and describes it as the “secular equivalent of the church”.³⁶ Smith, commenting on Eugene Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen*, emphasizes the central role of history teaching in nation-formation, reminding us that the period under consideration was the time when a standard history text book went into circulation throughout France – including the colonies. It had various editions for successive age groups and all French students studied that textbook.³⁷ From this perspective, if we remember that the First Turkish History Congress was convened with the explicit purpose of revising the history textbooks devised for high-school students and instructing the high school teachers in this new territory of standardized national history education, its importance becomes more lucid.

The initial cadres of the Republic were filled with people who had been educated in the Western-style schools of the late Ottoman period and who had received in those institutions a European –and especially French- style history education. Complaints about this issue were voiced repeatedly in the First Turkish History Congress. The discussants fervently argued that the textbooks translated from European languages did not serve the national interests, the knowledge they had of the Turks were deeply flawed and prejudiced and hence it was a grave necessity for the Turks to write their own history. To give but one example of the criticism directed against translated history books in the Congress, we can look at the comments of Yusuf Akçura on the issue: “Türk mekteplerinde düne kadar, dikkatsizlik eseri olarak, Avrupanın ve bilhassa Fransanın dünyaya nazarı tedris ve telkin olunmuştur.”³⁸

Yet, occasionally they referred to certain benefits of such foreign sources. For instance, it was through these books that the generations supplying the new Republic with its initial cadres, came to admire the French Revolution. Such criticisms were under way since the 1908 revolution, which reinstated the study of general history of civilizations in schools; this decision led to a need to translate in haste textbooks from European languages –especially French-, which was followed by a wave of criticism,

³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914”, in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, p.271.

³⁷ Anthony D. Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of the Nations”, in Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p. 166.

³⁸ “Until very recently, the world-view of Europe –and especially of France- was being taught and inculcated in Turkish schools.” Akçuraoğlu Yusuf Bey, “Tarih Yazmak ve Tarih Okutmak Usullerine Dair” in *BTTK*, p. 598.

the main point of which was that these textbooks were not written from a nationalist perspective and hence harmful to national interests.³⁹

During 1930s, the official re-writing of Turkish history has been systematically conducted through the efforts of *Türk Tarih Kurumu* – Turkish History Association (formerly *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti* – The Society for the Investigation of Turkish History) and that official history has been popularized through primary and secondary education. Most important and maybe the most distinctive point in this regard is that the project was far more ambitious than simply re-writing the national history; it aimed at a re-writing of world history based on the Turkish nation –what might be called a Turcocentric history.

Finally, the qualities of the people –more importantly the leader- were constantly emphasized and idealized in every possible way; and the unity and solidarity of the nation was symbolically constructed around the person of Atatürk, in whose character the qualities of the nation acquired their ultimate perfection.

Anderson also discusses in detail the post-colonial nation states, which make up a considerable portion of the nationalist movements of the 20th century. What is important for our discussion is that Turkish nationalism has great affinities with this kind of nationalism especially with regards to the techniques that they all utilize in nation-formation/building –though Turkey has never been a colony *per se*. This might be a result of the Westernization attempts of the late Ottoman period; or a consequence of Turkey’s semi-peripheral position in the world-system. Breuilly claims that though Turkey has never been a colony literally, it was nonetheless quite like one in terms of economy and culture. He argues that Turkish nationalism was an example of reform nationalism and that reform nationalisms outside Europe shared many characteristics with anti-colonial nationalisms, such as “the desire to reform indigenous society along modern lines; to reject various economic controls and western pretensions to cultural superiority; and to link both a reformed and independent state and society to a sense of national identity”.⁴⁰ The only difference between these two kinds of nationalism was one of scale: reform nationalism outside Europe had to transform the state apparatus –in addition to the cultural identity- in order to be effective, and thus the reforms undertaken had to be more thoroughgoing and practical than those of anti-colonial

³⁹ Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1983,p. 36.

⁴⁰ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 230.

movements. Breuille's ideas somewhat clarify the affinity between Turkish nationalism –as a form of anti-imperial movement, as a reaction against the domination of the world-system by the imperial powers to the disadvantage of peripheral and semi-peripheral nations- and the anti-colonial nationalisms.

If we turn to Anderson, he underlines the importance of the young generations, who knew foreign languages and who have been educated in the West.⁴¹ They related to the European history and thought by way of the education they had received, while forming feelings of solidarity among themselves. They were the ones that formed the core of the nationalist movements and, later on, the basis of the ruling cadres of the new regime; and they constantly underlined their youth in order to distance themselves from the *ancien régime* and the values it upheld. Their youth stood in stark contrast to the oldness of the regimes they have replaced. The Young Ottomans and the Young Turks movements of the late Ottoman period, as well as the emphasis on youth in Republican Turkey are good examples of this issue.

If the “nation” is a cultural artifact –which can, and should constantly, be reconstructed-, then it makes sense to try to understand nations and nationalism through the examination of cultural texts and cultural policies, such as the papers presented and the discussions undertaken in the First Turkish History Congress. Yet, all the above examples, do not take us much further than the general theoretical outline of Anderson's work. If all nations are imagined and constructed, these do not provide distinctive markers for the nation under examination. To return to the point where we started, it is not its imagined nature but the style in which it is imagined that differentiates a nation from all the others.

⁴¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 107-9.

**MYTHIC IMAGINATION OF NATIONALISM:
MYTH-MAKING AND OFFICIAL HISTORY**

Nations and nationality are imagined; and not once and for all, they have to be constantly imagined. To be able to gain insight into a particular nationalism, one should try to trace the ways in which this imagination becomes operative. There are several ways in which one can approach such a task. One of them is to assume a strong link between the nation and the nation-state and try to tackle how the state produces and reproduces the nation and the national identity. There are two primary reasons why we should be concerned with nations and nationalism –and they are interrelated: nationality forms the primary source of identification in the modern world; while the nation forms the primary source of legitimation for the states. If nationalist sentiments and ideas were not connected to real political struggles, no one would really care about them⁴²; it is their actual or potential relation to a state that makes them interesting subjects of study. Moreover, personal attachment to a nation is more or less the modern day religion, providing each and everyone with an identity. If the modern state needs to control the people, it does it less by coercion and more by what Foucault calls pastoral government –the reference being to a religious form of governing, to no surprise. Thus, the state is pretty much involved with the identities of its citizens and put a lot of work into creating a suitable collective identity for the nation it both controls and represents. Hobsbawm claims that “the ‘nation’ with its associated phenomena...rest(s) on

⁴² Breuilly, “Approaches to Nationalism”, in Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, p. 160.

exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative”.⁴³ Developing on that idea, we will try to look at a specific instance of attempted social engineering and use it as a test case for the nationalism theory in general.

We will mainly follow the blueprint provided by Smith –with occasional reference to other theorists-, since we share his concern with myths. Myth-making figures prominently in the imagination of the nations. Myths are crucial for producing and reproducing –and when need be, transforming- them. National history is another crucial element in the formation and preservation of nations and national identities. These two are intimately linked: they feed into each other, borrow techniques and discourses from each other, etc. Moreover, both can be fabricated and manipulated by the state –though the success of such an attempt is quite fleeting at times. Naturally, the newly formed nations are more eager to involve themselves in such projects of social engineering. Hobsbawm comments on the problematic relationship between the state and history in the following way: “the element of invention is particularly clear here, since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so”.⁴⁴

Assuming this proposition to be valid, we will try to see how the Turkish Republic tried to manipulate history writing in an attempt to create a nation in its formative years. We will focus on a specific instance of this project of forming a national identity through the use of national history, the First Turkish History Congress of 1932, where the official Turkish history thesis fully asserted itself.

First we will take a look at the formation of nations and try to locate the Turkish case in a theoretical typology of nationalism and nation formation. Then we will try to see the relationship between myth-making and the formation of national identity. After examining the functions of myths and their relation to history –and other associated human sciences-, we will go on to study in detail types of national myths. All this theoretical information will constantly be referred to –and checked by way of reference to- the Turkish case. Yet, before all else, a brief overview of Turkish historiography –

⁴³ Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, p. 13.

with an emphasis on the specific instances of the official history thesis and the First Turkish History Congress with which we are concerned here- is due.

1. Official History and the First Turkish History Congress

During 1920s and 30s, the formative years of the new Republic in Turkey, one can hardly speak of an ideologically and culturally monolithic society. Being but a new state and lacking in refined technologies of government, the Republic could hardly produce a totalitarian state effect approaching in its impact that of its contemporaries, Germany, Russia or even Italy. The Kemalist cadres lacked a compact ideology and a solid theory of knowledge; they were on the whole pragmatists. Yet that did not mean that there were not certain theories that they preferred and tried to incorporate into their national educational program; or that they did not chose between various theories of history; or that certain approaches to history were not better suited to the ideological needs of the new state.⁴⁵

The Turkish historiography was –and to a large extent, still is- national and nationalistic. It was a national history in that it was dominated by a meta-narrative of “Turkish History”.⁴⁶ General history figured only in reference and as appended to this meta-narrative. Moreover, Turkish History was believed to be unique and thus immune to all comparative historical approaches.⁴⁷ It was nationalistic to the extent that the whole history writing was shaped and marked by an extensive use of “we” and “our”.

This historiography was also defensive, for during its formative years, roughly from the turn of the century to about 1935, it developed in a certain historical context, which it tried to master and give meaning and which in turn dictated its nature and its limits. This historical context was mainly shaped by the European imperialism –and its cultural counterpart, Orientalism- which it had to fight against; by the Ottoman *ancien*

⁴⁵ Berktaş, “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Tarihçiliğin Durumu ve ‘Dilin Evrenselleşmesi’ Üzerine Düşünceler” in Salih Özbaran (ed.), *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları: 1994 Buca Sempozyumu*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995, p. 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁷ Christoph Neumann, “Tarihin Yararı ve Zararı Olarak Türk Kimliği: Bir Akademik Deneme”, in Özbaran (ed.), *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları: 1994 Buca Sempozyumu*, p. 103.

regime which it first had to distance itself from and then to destroy; by rival nationalisms with which it had to compete for the title to Anatolia.⁴⁸ The limits of Turkish national history and of Turkish national identity -and how those limits translated into unique configurations in both- will be examined in more detail in a later section of this work.

There were two other characteristics of the official Turkish historiography. The first one was its monumental quality, in Nietzsche's terms: it was the history of greatness -of great deeds and men. This kind of history writing resembled myths; and was devised with the explicit intention of providing the people -especially the youth- with heroic examples, stimulating them for similar heroic acts. In order to produce such ideals of greatness for emulation, the monumental history should necessarily be intentionally incomplete.⁴⁹ Not only does it avoid recounting the failures of the nationalist past to a large extent -or at least, makes up excuses for the existence of such failures-, but also does not concern itself with the causes of historical developments. Since history does not repeat itself and every historical event is bound to and determined by its context, every historical occurrence should be unique. In turning the historical events of past epochs into examples for copying -or in order to be able to do so-, monumental history severs the event from its specific context -makes it in a way ahistorical. The heroic national past is transformed into a heroic national quality which is basically out of history/time.

Second, the official history was geographical. It was strictly attached to the idea of the homeland; Turkish history comprised the Central Asian origins and the history of Anatolia. Its categories were based on geography at the expense of relevant historical criteria -including historical periodization: for instance, the history of all the different cultures of Anatolia were combined under the heading of Anatolian history; or cultures which occupied larger territories were divided into two parts and their presence in Anatolia was studied under the heading of Anatolian Civilization with total disregard of the unity and integrity of such historical entities.⁵⁰ Moreover, the official history thesis

⁴⁸ Halil Berktaş, "The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography" in Berktaş and Faroqhi (eds.), *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, London: Frank Cass, 1992, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Christoph Neumann, "Tarihin Yararı ve Zararı Olarak Türk Kimliği: Bir Akademik Deneme", p. 101.

⁵⁰ Herkül Millas, "(Türkiye'de) Etnosantrik Tarihçiliğin Pratik Sonuçları", in Özbaran(ed.), *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları: 1994 Buca Sempozyumu*, p. 130.

made extensive use of geography, utilizing its more scientific and solid credentials as a science, in order to legitimate itself. Keeping in mind that the Central Asian component of this history thesis was almost totally lacking in documents, there was a tendency to assimilate evidence from other disciplines and one of the tactics used was to resort to a form of geographical determinism to back the claims of the official history thesis – especially when it came to the issue of migrations from Central Asia.

The project of the official history thesis began in 1928 and took its final form in the First Turkish History Congress of 1932. Naturally, it did not develop out of the blue. On the one hand, it was a result of and a reaction to the above mentioned historical context and was shaped to a large extent by the limitations brought about by this context. On the other hand, it was the culmination of an intellectual heritage; it had its predecessors.

A Turkish nationalism and national history -on similar lines with its later official version- was developing by the turn of the century, especially through articles published in the popular press. For example, starting from 1896 the *İkdam* began to publish articles on Peking Turks, Kirghizs, Kipchaks, etc. which reflected a national/ethnic consciousness and an interest in Turkish language. These efforts can be regarded as a form of vernacular mobilization. Moreover, in the articles of the period, there were already references to the natural qualities of the Turkish people and the impact of Turks in the unfolding of world history.⁵¹ All these were, to a large extent, triggered by the developments in Turcology that took place throughout the 19th century and that gained speed after the deciphering of the Orhun inscriptions –dating from the 8th century- in 1892. These developments not only suggested the antiquity of the Turkish nation but also indicated a cultural unity among the Turkish speaking peoples.⁵² After the 1908 Revolution, with the immigration of numerous Russian Turks to the Ottoman Empire, the pan-Turkic ideals developed in reaction to the pan-Slavic policies of the Russian empire were imported to the Empire and these gave new impetus to the development of the Turkish nationalism, supplying it with a romantic aura.

Within this nationalist movement, there were certain people that stood out; Etienne Copeaux emphasizes three of them in particular in respect to their influence on

⁵¹ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998, pp. 23-4.

⁵² Georjeon, “Bir Kimlik Arayışı: Türk Milliyetçiliği”, p. 3; and “Osmanlı Devletinde Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Yükselişi (1908-1914)”, p. 23.

the development of the Turkish history thesis. The first one was Yusuf Akçura, who was a founding member and the first president of the *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*, which was founded in 1931 and which undertook the project of the development of new history textbooks and the convention of the First Turkish History Congress, together culminating in and representing the full maturation of the official history thesis. During the first decade of the century, young Akçura was already formulating the basic tenets of a Turkish nationalism. He argued that the Turks had retained a considerable amount of their former culture and some of their former laws after they converted to Islam. According to him, throughout their long history, Turks had shown little attachment to territory and religion, but great commitment to their language and national customs and characteristics. Among those traditional characteristics of the Turks were: patriarchy; communal ownership of the land; the concentration in the person of the leader a great amount of power which was nonetheless circumscribed by some form of law; the presence of an aristocracy; a tendency for state-building; and religious toleration.⁵³ These ideas were important in that they spoke of a Turkish identity separate from the Islamic identity –thus, a Turkish history separate from the Islamic history. In 1908, while most people were discussing the affinities between the constitutional regime and the Islamic idea of *şûrâ* in order to legitimate the new regime, Akçura was referring to precedents from the Turkic past. This was a bold move which in effect placed the Turkish national tradition on the same level with the Islamic law; hence, Islam became only one of the traditions that have affected the Turkish nation.⁵⁴

The second important ideological forefather of the official Turkish History thesis was Ziya Gökalp, who has sketched the basic tenets of this theory in 1923 in his book, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*. In this work, Gökalp defines all former political communities of Turks as autonomous, unified and institutional states. He claims that the basic common motivation of all these states was their commitment to bringing peace to the world; and that these communities were organized around principles of equality and even feminism.⁵⁵

The third character of great influence on the official history thesis was Zeki Velidi Togan, whose book entitled *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş* (1928) probably formed the germ of this thesis. In this book, he argued the brachycephalous quality of the

⁵³ Halil Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 27.

Turkic race and recounted the prehistorical migrations which this race to Italy, Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, etc. uncivilized inhabitants of which were civilized by the arrival of the Turks.⁵⁶ This strategy of equating the Turkish nation with the Turkish race; and then claiming that the diffusion of human civilization throughout the world took place with the spread of the Turkish people over the globe and their encounters with more backward races is exactly replicated in the Turkish history thesis. The following comments on the pattern of diffusion of civilization by Reşit Galip make the connection more lucid:

Diğer tiplerin kendi kendilerine dünyanın herhangi yerinde müstakil, aslî medeniyetler kurabilmiş olduklarına dair arkeolojik ve antropolojik pek müşkülâtla vesika verilebilir. Bunlardan herbiri ancak Alpli tiplerle temas geldikten ve onun yaratıcı ve yükseltici dehası ile kaynaştıktan sonradır ki yeni bir uyanışla ince ve yüksek medeni mahsuller veren unsurlar haline gelebilmişlerdir.⁵⁷

The official Turkish history project was launched in 1928 with the initiative of Atatürk. Afet İnan, one of the main promoters of the project recounts the origin of the project in the following manner:

Fransız coğrafya kitaplarının birinde, Türk ırkının Sarı Irk'a mensup olduğu ve Avrupa zihniyetine göre ikinci nevi bir insan tipi olduğu yazılı idi. Kendisine [Atatürk] gösterdim. 'Bu böyle midir?' dedim. 'Hayır, olmaz, bunun üzerinde meşgul olalım. Sen çalış.' dediler.⁵⁸

Atatürk is known to have made the following comment in the same year: "Turks could not have built an empire in Anatolia as a tribe. This should have another explanation. The science of history should reveal that".⁵⁹ These two events are important not only in providing a rough starting date for the efforts directed at the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁷ "There is hardly any archeological and anthropological document to support the ability of other types of men to develop independent and primary civilizations by themselves in any location of the world. Each one of these was transformed into an element that produced refined civilized products, only after a new awakening that followed their encounter with the Alpine type and their welding with its creative and elevating genius." Reşit Galip Bey, "Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış", *BTTK*, p. 110.

⁵⁸ "In a French geography book, it was stated that the Turkish race belonged to the yellow race and that it was, according to the European view, a secondary human type. I showed him [Atatürk]. I asked: "Is that so?" He said: "No, that cannot be, we should concern ourselves with that. You work on it." Afet İnan, "Atatürk ve Tarih Tezi", *Bellekten*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 1939, p. 244.

⁵⁹ Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 51.

creation of an official national history, but also in that they promote a myth of the process itself –augmenting what we might call the cult of the leader. The papers of the Congress abound in examples of such a mystification of the person of the leader; Atatürk is frequently envisaged as a semi-God, making possible the undertaking of great tasks by the men of the new regime, such as the writing of the national history and the convention of the Congress. Only his presence makes possible -and provides adequate motivation for- the writing of the national history.

On April 20, 1930, in the last convention of the *Türk Ocakları* –a civil organization founded with the intention of promoting research in the history and the language of Turks-, Afet İnan proposed the establishment of a standing committee devoted to the scientific investigation of Turkish history and civilization; the proposal was accepted.⁶⁰ This committee –Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti- hastily undertook the compilation of a volume on national history. Within a couple of months the first paradigmatic text of the official history thesis was completed and published, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*. In the first page of this book, the aim of the writing of national history was stated as follows:

Şimdiye kadar memleketimizde neşrolunan tarih kitaplarının çoğunda ve onlara mehzaz olan Fransızca tarih kitaplarında Türklerin dünya tarihindeki rolleri şuurulu veya şuursuz olarak küçültülmüştür. Türklerin, ecdat hakkında böyle yanlış malûmat alması, Türklüğün kendini tanımasında, benliğini inkişaf ettirmesinde zararlı olmuştur. Bu kitapla istihdaf olunan asıl gaye, bugün bütün dünyada tabii mevkiini istirdat eden ve bu şuurla yaşayan milletimiz için zararlı olan bu hataların tashihine çalışmaktır; aynı zamanda bu, son büyük hadiselerle ruhunda benlik ve birlik duygusu uyanan Türk milleti için milli bir tarih yazmak ihtiyacı yönünde atılmış ilk adımdır.⁶¹

This book was published in only one hundred copies and these were distributed to certain historians and intellectuals for reviewing. Though the book was narrowly

⁶⁰ Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de ‘Resmî Tarih’ Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*, İletişim Yayınları, 1996, pp. 147-8.

⁶¹ “In most of the history books published in our country up until now and the French history books which were their references, the role of the Turks in world history has been, consciously or unconsciously, belittled. Receiving such erroneous information about their ancestors has been harmful for Turks in terms of their self-recognition and development of their identity. The main purpose of this book is to try to correct these mistakes that have been harmful for our nation, which is restored to its natural status in the world today and which lives with the knowledge of that status; at the same time, this is the first step in the way of fulfilling the need of writing a national history for the Turkish nation, in whose soul a sense of identity and unity has been awakened with the last great events.” Quoted in Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 51.

distributed and extensively criticized and the project of turning this book into a textbook in the future never materialized, we still cannot dismiss this book as an unsuccessful undertaking for two main reasons: some of the most critical ideas put forth in this book became part of the official history thesis without revision; and a shorter version of the book –comprising primarily the parts on Central Asia- was published in thirty thousand copies and distributed in schools by the Ministry of National Education in the beginning of 1931.⁶²

On April 15 of 1931, Türk Ocakları dissolved itself; and the name of the Tarih Tetkik Heyeti –which used to be an extension of Türk Ocakları- was changed into Türk Tarih Tetkik Cemiyeti and it was brought under the control of the government. Etienne Copeaux considers this date to be a turning point in intellectual life of early Republican Turkey, signifying the absolute control of the government thereafter.⁶³ Though the claim is valid, it is nonetheless somewhat unqualified. There was a certain amount of government control over the intellectual life, but to assume that it was absolute would be an overstatement. What was also important was that it was in the interests of the Turkish intelligentsia of the period to foster theories congruent with those propounded by the state. Those two are quite different claims, maybe not in effect but in style. Yet, this should not be taken to mean that the state did not actively manipulate and, to a large extent, shape the development of Turkish nationalism. Political action supplied a further set of limits on the development of historical theories –in addition to those discussed above. If it did not do anything else, the Republic, at least, confined Turkish nationalism to the official borders of the new state –through its emphasis on *Misak-ı Milli* borders (limiting the territory of the state mainly to Anatolia and Eastern Thrace) or through forcing Türk Ocakları into focusing their work only on the Turks of Anatolia.⁶⁴

The first project of this society was the production of a textbook for high school students; and almost miraculously four volumes were ready for print by the end of July, signifying the urgency the ruling elites ascribed to the production of standardized textbooks of national history.⁶⁵

At the end of the school year (June 1932), the First Turkish History Congress was convened in Ankara with the initiative of the Ministry of Education and of Atatürk,

⁶² Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 53.

⁶³ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

in order to popularize the official history thesis, to revise the history textbooks which have been in use for a year; and to familiarize the high school teachers with the methods of modern history education and basic tenets of this new discourse of national history. Given this purpose, the overwhelming majority of the participants were teachers from secondary schools; the exact distribution of the participants was as follows: 198 secondary school teachers, 18 university professors or assistants, and 25 members of the Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti –most of which were also members of the parliament. Only 33 of these participants took active part in the discussions, while only 15 of them presented papers.⁶⁶ The Congress represented the culmination of the official history thesis, which had developed over the last three years and which would officially dominate Turkish historiography for at least until the end of the decade and history education almost from thereafter. The quotation below taken from the opening speech of the Minister of Education, Esat Bey, delivered at the Congress, provides an overview the thesis:

Türkler anayurtları olan Ortaasiyada Yontmataş devrinini milattan 12000 sene evel geçirdikleri halde Avrupalılar ancak 5000 sene daha sonra bu devirden kurtulabilmişlerdir. Diğer taraflarda insanlar henüz ağaç ve kaya kovuklarında yaşarken Türkler Ortaasiyada kereste ve maden medeniyetini meydana getirmişler, hayvanları ehlileştirilmişler, çiftçiliğe başlamışlardı. Cilalıtaş devrine tesadüf eden Cümudiye devri sonlarında buzların çekilmesiyle vukua gelen mühim tabî tahavvüller sebebiyle bir çok Türk kabileleri muhacerete başladı. Bu suretle milattan 7000 sene kadar evel çiftçilik ve çobanlığı ilerletmiş ve altın, bakır, kalay ve demiri keşfetmiş olan Türkler Ortaasiyadan yayıldıktan sonra gittikleri yerlerde ilk medeniyeti neşretmiş ve böylece Asiyada Çin, Hint ve Mukaddes Yurt edindikleri Anadolu'da Eti, Mezopotamyada Sumer, Elâm ve nihayet Mısır, Akdeniz ve Roma medeniyetlerinin esaslarını kurmuşlar ve bugün yüksek medeniyetlerini takdir ve takip ettiğimiz Avrupayı o zaman mağara hayatından kurtarmışlardır.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de 'Resmî Tarih' Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*, p. 139.

⁶⁷ “Though the Turks have left behind the Paleolithic Age by 12000 BC in their homeland, Central Asia, the Europeans were saved from this stage only 5000 years later. While in other parts of the world, men were still living in trees and caves, the Turks had already developed a civilization of timber and metal, domesticated animals and started farming. Many Turkic tribes began to migrate due to grave natural transformations that took place as a result of the receding of the glaciers at the end of the Ice Age, which coincided with the Neolithic Age. In this manner, the Turks who had advanced farming and shepherding and discovered gold, copper, tin and iron about 7000 BC, spread out from Central Asia and diffused the first civilization in the places they went; and thus founded the basis of Chinese and Indian civilizations in Asia, the Hittite civilization in Anatolia which they adopted as their Holy Homeland, the Sumerian

Afet İnan summarized the thesis in an article written in 1939 in the following manner:

Türk çocuğu... yakın bir tarihte göç etmiş olmakla bu vatanın hakikî sahibi olamaz. Bu fikir tarihen, ilmen yanlıştır. Türk brakisefal ırkı Anadolu'da ilk devlet kuran bir millettir. Bu ırkın kültür yurdu ilk zamanlarda, iklimi müsait olan Orta Asya'da idi. İklim tabii şartlar dahilinde değişti. Taşı cilalamayı bulan, ziraat hayatına erişen, madenlerden istifadeyi keşfeden bu halk kütlesi, göç etmeye mecbur kaldı. Orta Asya'dan şarka, cenuba, garpte Hazer Denizinin şimal ve cenubuna olmak üzere yayıldı. Gittikleri yerlere yerleştiler, kültürlerini oralarda kurdular. Bazı mıntikalarda otokton oldular, bazılarında otokton olan diğer bir ırk ile karıştılar. Avrupa'da tesadüf ettikleri ırk tipi dolikosefal idi. Irak, Anadolu, Mısır, Ege medeniyetlerinin ilk kurucuları Orta Asyalı brakisefal ırkın mümessilleridir. Biz bugünkü Türkler de onların çocuklarıyız. İşte Atatürk'ün tarih tezi kısaca böyle hulasa edilebilir.⁶⁸

In the same essay, Afet İnan recounts Atatürk calling those who do not support this thesis as “some non-believers” in his death-bed⁶⁹; this shows not only the emotional investment of the elite in the project and the importance ascribed to its success, but also provides an example of nationalist discourse assimilating elements of religious discourse –having doubts about the glorious history of the nation has the same gravity as having doubts about the existence of God once had.

civilization in Mesopotamia and finally Egyptian, Mediterranean and Roman civilizations; and saved Europe, whose advanced civilization we appreciate and pursue today, from a life in caves then.” *BTTK*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ “The Turkish children...cannot be the authentic owners of this homeland by having migrated here in the near past. This idea is historically and scientifically erroneous. The Turkish brachycephalous race is the first nation that has founded a state in Anatolia. The cultural homeland of this race was Central Asia which had a suitable climate at first. The climate changed due to natural causes. This population, which had discovered how to polish the stone and to make use of the metals and had reached agricultural life, was forced to migrate. It spread out from Central Asia to East and South and to the north and south of the Caspian Sea in the West. They settled where they went and founded their cultures there. In some places, they became autochthon, while in some they intermixed with another autochthon race. The race they encountered in Europe was dolichocephalous. The founders of Iraqi, Anatolian, Egyptian and Aegean civilizations were representatives of the Central Asian brachycephalous race. We, the Turks of today, are their children. This is how the history thesis of Atatürk can be summarized in short.” İnan, “Atatürk ve Tarih Tezi”, pp. 245-6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

2. Formation of Nations: from Ethnic Categories to Nations

According to Smith, as the nations are built on ethnic communities, so are the ethnic communities dependent on “ethnic categories”. He states that ethnic categories exhibit a very limited amount of self-awareness or no self-awareness at all. Then as an example of an ethnic category, he provides the Turks of Anatolia prior to 1900. He claims that they were not yet aware of a distinct Turkish identity, one which could be differentiated from a dominant Ottoman or Islamic identity, or one which could outweigh the local identities pertaining to kin, village or region. Among them “a myth of common origins, shared historical memories, a sense of solidarity or an association with a designated homeland [was] largely absent”.⁷⁰ If we remember the elements that go into the making of ethnic communities, we will see that the Turks of Anatolia – according to Smith- lacked four out of six of them: they only had a collective name and at least one differentiating element of common culture. How were they to develop within a quarter of a century from an ethnic category to a nation: Smith provides no clear answer to that. Even if we assume that Smith was exaggerating the situation of the Turks, there still remains enough reason to believe that the Turkish ethnic identity did go through a tremendous amount of reconstruction in the first quarter of the 20th century. For instance, Georgeon claims that the period between 1908 and 1914 was very crucial in the development of Turkish nationalism: it was within the span of this short period that Turkish nationalism transformed from a loosely held collection of beliefs and ideas held by a handful of writers and intellectuals into a well-formed, solid ideology. Most of the constructive work that went into making such a big leap in such a short time –at least in the cultural sphere- was involved with myth-making.

While insisting on the persistence of cultural identity to a large extent, Smith nonetheless enumerates certain traumatic events which might lead to changes in that identity –largely by way of necessitating and producing new myths that could make sense of the new situations in which the community finds itself: they include “war and conquest, exile and enslavement, the influx of immigrants and religious conversion”.⁷¹ The Turks definitely suffered from prolonged warfare in the first quarter of the century; and meanwhile kept receiving immigrants from the former territories of the old empire

⁷⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 21.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

–according to Georgeon the number of Muslims seeking refuge in the Ottoman Empire was measured in millions.⁷² Moreover, official secularism of the new state could lead to consequences resembling those of religious conversion. In short, there was no wonder that the first quarter of the century provided fertile ground for the construction and/or transformation of the Turkish nation. Among those traumatic events, probably the most important was prolonged warfare. Smith claims that warfare has a central role in the formation of nations, “as a mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, a centralizing force in the life of the community and a provider of myths and memories for future generations”.⁷³ No doubt that Balkan Wars, the Great War and the War of Independence contributed a great deal to the formation of the Turkish nation.

In Smith’s typology of nation formation, there are two kinds of *ethnies*: lateral and vertical. The first one consists of an aristocratic culture; the ruling class has no intention to diffuse its own culture throughout the society it rules, because this culture provides the basis of their position as rulers. The second is demotic; such *ethnies* have more compact boundaries and greater social depth in comparison to lateral ones.⁷⁴ In the framework provided by Smith, the lateral *ethnies* develop into territorial-civic nations by way of bureaucratic incorporation; while the vertical *ethnies* develop into ethnic-genealogical nations by way of vernacular mobilization. Actually the names speak for themselves, yet if we need to go over them in brief: the first case is concerned with a ruling elite, imposing its culture on the lower classes through the use of the state apparatus it controls and the loyalty is primarily to the land and citizenship is the overriding identity; territorial nationalism regards “the nation as a form of rational association”.⁷⁵ In the second case, an intelligentsia mobilizes an ethnic community through references to the national language and creates a solidarity based on myths of ethnic origin, common ancestry and ethnic identity; ethnic nationalism imagines the nation as a community of culture and history with a bond of solidarity that resembles the familial bond”.⁷⁶ Yet, it is important to emphasize that these two nationalisms are

⁷² Georgeon, “Pantürkist Düşler” in Georgeon, *Osmanlı-Türk Modernleşmesi*, p. 85.

⁷³ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 27. For a detailed analysis of the impact of warfare on the formation of nations, see Smith, “War and Ethnicity”, in Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, Cambridge: Polity, 2004: pp. 154-180.

⁷⁴ Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, pp. 111-113.

⁷⁵ Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities”, p. 189. For a more detailed analysis, see also Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, pp. 113-22; and *National Identity*, pp. 80-85.

⁷⁶ Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities”, p. 190.

not mutually exclusive. Actually, neither are the two types of *ethnies* on which they depend. For instance, Smith argues that the Turks formed primarily a lateral *ethnie* which also included demotic elements.⁷⁷ Following that line of argument, the Turkish nation is basically a territorial-civic nation, which comprises certain elements of ethnic-genealogical ones. In principle, the Turkish nation is based on territorial nationalism – created through the homogenization of an originally heterogeneous population by way of bureaucratic incorporation. Yet it also harvests myths of ethnic origin and tries to simulate a familial bond among its members.

1. Formation of Non-European Territorial-Civic Nations: The Case of Turkey

The formation of territorial-civic nations outside Europe can be examined under two headings: imperial and colonial. Turkey is an example of the first route. These *ethnies* lived under states that were at least formally independent, which meant that –as Breuilly has also argued- a transformation of both the political system and the cultural identity was necessary. These imperial states had four characteristics: they were dominated by an aristocratic culture –a lateral *ethnie*; they included significant ethnic minorities; their bureaucratic states were of a modernizing character; and they frequently made use of official and institutional nationalism.⁷⁸ The Turkish case satisfies all these criteria. The story goes like this: the ruling class tries to assimilate the ethnic minorities and strengthen their control over society by way of transforming the people into a homogenous nation. According to Breuilly, the tendency is to first take over the control of the state and then push through “a national revolution from above”.⁷⁹ Hence, the importance of bureaucracy and the state apparatus in the formation of the national identity. The bureaucratic state diffuses the culture of the lateral *ethnie* “down the social scale and into the countryside and inner-city areas, displacing the hold of ecclesiastical authorities and local notables”.⁸⁰ Their foremost instrument in this attempt is a nationalistic educational program; “to this end, they promote official, established ideas and images of the nation, to which everyone must conform and which preclude the

⁷⁷Smith, *National Identity*, p. 101.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-2.

⁷⁹ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 230.

⁸⁰ Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, p.125.

rise of any other ideas, symbols or imagery.”⁸¹ The First Turkish History Congress –as the culmination and the symbol of the effort to produce a national/official history- provides a good example in this regard; it was definitely an attempt at the creation of such “established ideas and images of the nation”. It was also definitely aiming at an intellectual monopoly; the “apologetic” tone of all the criticisms voiced in the Congress proves that point.⁸² The ultimate success of the Congress is a whole different issue.

Smith argues that the success of official nationalism is mainly dependent on two factors: geopolitical and social. The transformation is swifter and more successful where the dominant *ethnie* and its rulers can find ways “to divest themselves of their imperial heritage, usually by redrawing their borders”.⁸³ The new Turkish state was lucky in this regard; by the time of its formation, it was divested of most of the former Empire’s ethnic minorities. Those they still had, they took care of by way of policies like the exchange of populations with Greece. The new state distanced itself from the former empire not only in terms of demography, but also took measures to repudiate its heritage. This brings us to the second factor: the transformation was more rapid and effective “to the extent that the old ruling aristocracy has been replaced...by middle and lower classes, whilst simultaneously preserving and adapting their cultural heritage” and “too sharp a repudiation of that heritage” could build up “problems of cultural and political identity for the future”.⁸⁴ The new Turkish state could not be considered very successful in this regard; for almost all possible measures were taken to sever all ties with the Ottoman Empire in terms of cultural identity and social and political organization. Such a thoroughgoing transformation could not be effected in such a short time and without damage to the identity and the integrity of those that formed the nation –at least in the long-run. It is probably such a retrospective examination of its level of success that leads Smith to claim that “the content, if not the form, of Turkish national identity proved elusive”.⁸⁵

The civic-territorial nations thus formed by non-European nationalists have four main characteristics that stand out: territorialism; participation; citizenship; civic education. Among these four, the first and the last prove more important for our current

⁸¹ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 102.

⁸² Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de ‘Resmî Tarih’ Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*, p. 143.

⁸³ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 102.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 102.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 104.

purposes. By territorialism, Smith means a political commitment to –and an emotional investment in- particular boundaries –without any regard to how they might have been formed. The contingency of the existing boundaries –be they of colonial origin or result of wars and political settlements- should be turned into a destiny; “the patria must become an historical territory”. To this end, it is legitimate to take pride in the glory of former civilizations that inhabited the same territory with the nation-state and appropriate them in order to enhance the cultural standing of the nation.⁸⁶ The appropriation of the Hittite past of Anatolia can be a case in point. Yet, we should keep in mind that in the Turkish case, there was always a blending of territorial and genealogical elements; thus, the Hittites were also claimed to be Turks.

The other important characteristic of the civic-territorial nations is their emphasis on civic education. It is only through an education of “civic” character that the solidarity of such a nation could be accomplished. Civic education is “as much for the benefit of the national community as for the individual” and “there is far greater emphasis on the service to the community that the individual can provide and the debt that he or she incurs”.⁸⁷ We can see examples of this prioritization of the interests of the nation over those of the individual and constant references to the “debt” one has to his/her nation and the “services” he/she can provide to settle that debt in the papers presented in the First Turkish History Congress. To give some examples: “Tarih tedrisinde birinci vazifemiz milli tezin mahfuziyetidir. Milli tezimizi çürütecek mevzulardan uzak kalmak her birimiz için, muallim için, talebe için milli ve vatani bir mükellefiyettir.”⁸⁸ Or: “Cumhuriyet sistemimizin, milli ahlak ve terbiyemizin, milli vahdet ve hakimiyetimizin neslimizden beklediği vazifeler inkılap borcumuzdur.”⁸⁹

This education may be utilized “to convey through language ...history, the arts and literature a political mythology and symbolism of the new nation...that will legitimate its novel, even revolutionary, directions”⁹⁰; exactly the aim of the Congress and the official history thesis which it propounded. We can see what the state expected

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 117.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 118.

⁸⁸ “Our primary duty in history teaching is to safeguard the national thesis. To stay away from the subjects that will refute our national thesis is a national and patriotic obligation for all of us, for the teachers and the pupils alike.” *BTTK*, p. 628.

⁸⁹ “The duties of our generation required by our Republican system, our national morals and culture, our national unity and sovereignty are our revolutionary debt.” *BTTK*, p. 624.

⁹⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 119.

to achieve through implementing a standardized program of national history education and how this was connected to the construction of the nation, in the opening speech delivered by the Minister of Education, Esat Bey, who summarized lucidly not only the aims of the Congress and of the reform in education they were trying to undertake, but also how history could be utilized in legitimizing the current state of political and social life and the changes taking place in it –however drastic those changes might be:

Millet bir harstan olan insanlardan mürekkep bir cemiyet olduğuna göre harstaki birliğin tesisi için bütün hars ilimlerinin başında gelen tarihin bu noktadaki ehemmiyetini daha ziyade tefsile lüzum görmem.

Sözümü bitirmeden evel tarih tedrisatından beklenen faydalardan bilhassa milli kültürün mesnedi olan milli terbiye hakkında da bir iki kelime arzına müsadelerinizi rica ederim. Bununla ana baba ocağında olduğu gibi mektep sıralarında da çocuklarımızın dimağlarında ve kalplerinde sarsılmaz bir kanaat ve iman halinde yerleşmesi lazım gelen Cümhuriyet devri ahlak ve terbiye telakkilerinin ve Cümhuriyet sistemimizin esaslarının derin ve şerefli mazimizden kök ve kuvvet aldığını ve ahlak ve terbiyede milli his, milli ahlak, milli terbiyenin ve Cümhuriyet sistemimizde milli vahdet ve milli hakimiyetin ve ferdi hak ve hürriyetin esas teşkil eylediğini bu vesile ile de tekrarlamak isterim. Bunlar bizim medeni esaslarla daima takviye edeceğimiz milli ve tarihi seciyelerimizdir. Türklerde devlet teşkilatının kuvvetli bir merkez hakimiyeti ile halkçılık esasını telif fikrine istinat ettiğini ve mülkiyet hakkı ile nikaha müstenit bir aile sisteminin Türklerde tarihten evelki devirlerde teessüs etmiş olduğunu tarihin birinci kitabında ve Türklerin milli ve tarihi seciyeleri arasında okuyoruz. Daima hür doğmuş ve hür yaşamış olan Türk, eskiden beri kendi menfaatini milletin menfaatinde görmüş ve her müşkül karşısında asla geri çekilmeyerek büyük bir azim, metanet ve sabırla hedefine varmaya muvaffak olmuştur. Milli terbiyemizde esas olan milliyetçilik, devletçilik ve halkçılık işte hep bu milli ve tarihi seciyelerimizden doğmuştur.⁹¹

⁹¹ “Since the nation is a community composed of people of the same culture, the importance of history, which is primary among all cultural sciences, in the establishment of unity in culture needs no further explanation.

Before finishing my speech, I request your permission to present a couple of words about one of the expected uses of history teaching in particular, that is the national upbringing which is the basis of national culture. I want to use this opportunity to restate that the view of morals and manners of the Republican era and the basic principles of our Republican system, which should be established as an unwavering idea and faith in the minds and the hearts of our children in school as well as at hearth, take root and strength from our deep and honorable past; and that national sentiment, national morals and national manners form the basis of morals and manners and national unity, national sovereignty and individual rights and liberties form the basis of our Republican system. These are our national and historical characteristics which we will always reinforce with civilized principles. We learn from the first volume of the history book and under the national and historical characteristics of the Turks that the state organization of the Turks depends on the idea of combining a strong central

The matter at hand was understood to be much greater in scope than deciding the contents of the textbooks. The compilation of standardized national history textbooks was an integral part of a bigger project of transformation in social life aimed by the intellectuals and the ruling elite alike. The aspiration was to create a community which would imagine itself as a nation and be bound together by strong national sentiments; and which would at the same time feel itself to be the historical and original source of the main principles of the new regime, thus providing legitimation for the changes carried out by the ruling elite. In this framework, the basic tenets of the new political organization –like *étatisme*, nationalism and populism- which were all modern constructs, were anachronistically naturalized and normalized with reference to an underlying authentic Turkish identity.

Moreover, the participants regarded history writing as an important political act. They were intent on the idea that writing national history was a part of nation building, as well as an act of liberation and a sign of independence. The political successes of the new Republic had to be complemented by developments in national historiography. An example of this line of thought can be seen in Fuat Köprülü's following comments:

Dünyada her millet ne kadar maddi istiklaline malik olmak mecburiyetinde ise, aynı derececi ehemmiyette olarak manevi istiklaline de malik olmak mecburiyetindedir.

Gazi'nin...teşvikile başlayan milli tarihimizi yeniden yaratmak faaliyeti bizde de maddi kurtuluştan sonar bir manevi kurtuluş mücadelesine başlandığını gösteriyor.⁹²

sovereignty with the principle of populism; and that property rights and a family system dependent on marriage were established among the Turks in prehistoric times. The Turks, who have at all times been free in birth and in life, have always seen their personal interests in the interest of the nation and have succeeded in reaching their goals with great resolution, tenacity and endurance, never retreating in the face of any obstacles. Nationalism, *étatisme* and populism which form the basis of our national upbringing all derive from those national and historical characteristics of ours." *BTTK*, p. 12-3.

⁹²"The requirement of possessing moral independence is of the same degree of importance as that of possessing material independence for every nation of the world. The activity of re-creating our national history which has started with the encouragement of the Ghazi (Atatürk) shows that following the material emancipation, a struggle for moral emancipation has also started here." *BTTK*, p. 47.

3. Myths and National Sentiments

Vital for any nation is the growth and spread of a ‘national sentiment’ outwards from the centre and usually downwards through the strata of the population. It is in and through the myths and symbols of the common past that such a national sentiment finds its expression.⁹³

The national sentiment is the stuff of the four subjective elements that go into the making of ethnic communities, and in turn that of the nation; and that sentiment is to a large extent the effect of the national myths. Smith talks about what one might call a meta-myth that is of great importance for the nations and that occupies a central place in myth-making: he calls it “the myth of ethnic origins”. There are two types of this myth: the first one is that of genealogical ancestry, which is based on biology and ensures a high level of solidarity among the people that make up the nation by way of defining it as a familial bond dependent on blood relations; the second one is that of ideological descent, which is cultural and ideological in character and is based on the persistence a particular kind of virtue or ideal throughout generations –that is, an ideological heritage.⁹⁴ These two types coincide with the two types of ethnies –vertical and lateral- and the corresponding types of nations – ethnic-genealogical and territorial-civic- discussed above. The myths of ethnic descent that the Turkish nationalists embraced were both genealogical and ideological.

Historically, ethnic myths emerge in three junctures in the life of a community. The first one is prolonged warfare –which we have mentioned before, drawing attention to its role in the formation of the Turkish nation. The second one is incipient commercialization leading to the termination of the society’s isolation and to its integration into a global economic network, in which it is confronted by cultures of greater wealth and superior technology. From a world-system perspective, this can be rephrased as the integration of a nation-state into the capitalist world system as a periphery or semi-periphery. The last, and probably the most important one, is “incipient secularization or its threat, as the nub of a wider clash of cultures, usually between a technologically superior, more “rationalistic civilization and a more traditional backward one, a clash that divides the community over the value of its

⁹³ Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, p. 108.

⁹⁴ Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, pp. 1394-95.

tradition today”.⁹⁵ Since there is a great amount of theory linking nationalism to religion and since religion has an important place in understanding the Turkish case, we will examine it in more detail.

1. Religion, Secularism and Nationalism

The traces of the clash mentioned above can be seen in the papers of the First Turkish History Congress as the speakers try to give new meaning to a world, which they had spent so much time to disenchant by way of totally severing its ties with religion; and to assure themselves and others of the worth of their authentic traditions. The paper presented by Afet İnan can provide a case in point. She openly embraced the theory of evolution and argued that man was the last chain of an evolutionary progress beginning with fish; thus taking away the creative power ascribed to God and undermining the authority of Islam.⁹⁶ They were in effect trying to legitimize the revolutionary aspects of the new regime, which included, among other things, a devotion to a thorough secularization of both the political and the socio-cultural realm.

As was mentioned above, nationalism came up the historical stage in a period when belief in a divine order was on the decline and it was this lack of trust in the ways of the world that the nationalist sentiments compensated for. It was –and, to a large extent, still is– only through the myths of ethnic descent, that individuals and collectivities alike could begin to make sense of the displacements and relocations affected by the rise of the bureaucratic state and the decline of religion and reorient themselves in what seemed to be foreign territory. Gellner claims that advanced industrial societies are, by definition, devoted “to a theory of knowledge which makes nature intelligible without recourse to Revelation and thus also renders nature effectively manipulable and a source ever-growing affluence”.⁹⁷

Yet, in the Turkish case –like in many other cases of non-Western nationalism–, the nation does not rise in order to fill the void left by the already declining religion. There is a model of nationalism –which has become the norm as a source of political

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 1418-9.

⁹⁶ İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde” in *BTTK*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Gellner, “The Coming of Nationalism and its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class”, p. 105.

legitimation-, which in its original form followed from the demise of religious beliefs and was secular in character. The new states, reflecting on their backwardness in comparison to the modern nation states of the West, find themselves in a crisis of belief in their own traditional values, including religion. Thus, in cases like Turkey, secularism –and the “demise” of religion- follows, or at least parallels, the rise of nationalism and not the other way around. The official –and sometimes oppressive- imposition of secularism on the society as a criteria of modernization, leads to a crisis in identity and a loss of collective capacity to make meaning out of life. In this case, nationalism provides “an identity and a purpose for those compelled (or tempted?) by modernization to abandon tradition”.⁹⁸

The role of the intellectuals in the creation of such an identity crisis should not be underestimated, as Weber links the drive for meaning itself with the rise of intellectualism. Accordingly, “it is the intellectual who transforms the concept of the world into the problem of meaning”; as the intellectuals destroy “the belief in magic, the world’s processes become disenchanting, lose their magical significance and henceforth simply ‘are’ and ‘happen’ but no longer signify anything”.⁹⁹ Again, an example from Afet İnan’s speech can prove meaningful, for she argued that life was simply a result of chemistry and physics.¹⁰⁰ If life is only chemistry and physics then it does not signify anything; hence the need for re-enchantment. Myths of ethnic descent re-enchant this world by way of “placing the present in the context of the past”, thus providing a sense of security through the construction of “new identities that seem to be also very old”.¹⁰¹ According to Deniz Kandiyoti, this is central to nationalism, which “presents itself both as a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favor of new identities and as a reflection of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past”.¹⁰²

These myths of ethnic descent fabricate an illusion of a nation which had always been and will always be there. The sense of continuity thus created, gives meaning to the otherwise meaningless life and death of the individuals through the promise of collective immortality. Here lies the source of nationalism’s true appeal. In this context,

⁹⁸ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 269.

⁹⁹ Quoted by Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1423.

¹⁰⁰ *BTTK*, p.19.

¹⁰¹ Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1398.

¹⁰² Quoted in Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race”, in Eley and Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader*, p. 263.

one might argue that “the formation of nations and the rise of ethnic nationalism appear more like the institutionalization of a ‘surrogate religion’ than a political ideology”.¹⁰³ In principle, religion and nationalism work in similar ways. Both start from the individual and go on to constitute a specific form of community with its distinctive system of social morality.¹⁰⁴ Nationalism succeeds in replacing –and in some cases supplementing- religion, because it works with the same principle: it creates men. It resolves the identity crisis brought along by modernity, by way of supplying each man with an identity of his own which is at the same time part of a collective identity and which links him with a meaningful unity beyond his individual existence. The crisis that leads men to seek meaning in life is individual in character, but it can be resolved only within a collectivity -the community of believers or the nation; for although all identity is individual, there is no identity which is not at the same time historical and social.¹⁰⁵

These explain the affinity between the language of religion and of nationalism and the narrative strategies that aim to sanctify the nation by way of treating it as if it was in fact a religion. Here, the “theological discourse works as a model for the idealization of the nation and the sacralization of the state”.¹⁰⁶ The examples of how the narration of the nation could take on a religious quality can also be seen in the papers of the First Turkish History Congress; for instance, the frequent use of the imagery of light vs. dark. One should keep in mind that most of the participants of the Congress were brought up in a cultural environment in which religion was still the primary instrument in making life legible.

Moreover, the secularization in Turkey was far swifter than many other cases and to a large extent engineered and imposed from above; all the more reason why, people needed to construct a religious faith out of the new nation. This constitutes another aspect of the affinity between religion and nationalism. Since people who were brought up with a certain religious understanding of life and of world, could not switch at once to a world-view which did not depend on Revelation for its legitimacy; they tried to fit the new ‘faith’ –the civic religion- into their old framework of religious faith. Their way of relating to the new faith was naturally modeled on their relation to the old one. Their belief in the nation was a reflection of their belief in God –as the ultimate

¹⁰³ Smith, “The Origin of the Nations”, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology”, p. 139.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

provider of all meaning and the omnipotent legitimator of all truth and all action. Hence, it was only natural for the first generation Republicans to be “fundamentalist, rigid, uncompromising, scholastic” in their nationalism.¹⁰⁷ The Turkish nationalists were in effect trying to construct a new system of faith based on the triad of nation, state and leader. This is somewhat similar to what Gellner means when he claims that the commitment of Turkish nation to modernization initially had “an Ottoman and a Koranic quality”.¹⁰⁸ In the Turkish case, like in many other reform nationalisms, modernization was almost synonymous with nationalism. This new faith –in modernity and progress and in the capacity of nationalism to achieve these ends-, in a similar fashion to the old religion, was “linked to the state” providing its legitimation and, in turn, being itself justified in proportion to “the strength which it bestow[ed] on the state”.¹⁰⁹

As was mentioned before, the nationalist imagination resembles religious imaginings. This is a marked characteristic of the Turkish nationalism. Religion was the one of the main loci of power and legitimation against which the new regime had to position itself. Naturally, the sovereign nation imagined by and for that regime would have to be outside and above religion –if not directly opposed to it. One of the primary aims of the official Turkish history thesis (and of the larger project of nation-formation) that the Congress was trying to affirm and approve of, was to shift the focus of faith from a system centered on God to one that was secular and national. The early Republican nationalism was striving hard to keep religion and religious thought, which were regarded as guilty of the failures of the old regime, out of the newly imagined national life.

2. Functions of Myths

The three conjunctures discussed above, leading to the emergence of new myths, are times of crisis in terms of legitimacy. The primary function of all myths –if we regard them from a functionalist, Durkheimian view- is to legitimate the social and

¹⁰⁷ Gellner, *Nationalism*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

moral structure of a society and to reaffirm the identity of the people.¹¹⁰ When there is a transformation in any one of these fields, new myths will be required. Myth-making is necessarily a continuous project; the “national story... must be continually recreated, modified and defended”.¹¹¹ Myths provide the essence of the identity of the nation. They do not need to be true –even believed to be true-, what matters is their symbolic power in producing, reproducing and defining the nation.¹¹² This power is predicated upon their success in producing the effect and/or the illusion of a natural –even “commonsensical”- sense of historical attachment to a geographical territory marked and shaped by collective memory¹¹³; that is, in naturalizing and normalizing membership to a nation, hence prioritizing the loyalty to and identification with the nation over all else. Moreover, myths seek to create an intellectual monopoly by way of presenting themselves as the only ways of ordering the world.¹¹⁴ It is through the sharing of such a mindset, that the members of a community identify with each other and produce monolithic responses in times of crises.

Smith breaks down his ‘meta-myth- of the ethnic descent into its component myths –while underlining the fact that all national myths will include some unique elements in addition to this general framework. Before going on any further, it is necessary to draw attention to the importance of history –and its complementary disciplines, archaeology, anthropology and philology- in the making of these myths.

3. Myth-making and Historical Sciences

It is as if the main task of the nationalist historian is to contribute first to the formation and then to the reproduction of such myths. Their scientific –or in some cases, pseudo-scientific- findings are integrated into myths, which become the carriers of the national history on the popular level. Both history and myths feed into each other

¹¹⁰ Geoffrey Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and A Taxonomy of Myths” in Hosking and Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 7-8.

¹¹¹ Staurt Allan and Andrew Thompson, “The time-Space of National Memory”, in Kevin J. Brehony and Naz Rassool (eds.), *Nationalisms: Old and New*, London: Macmillan Press, 1999, p. 38.

¹¹² Mary Fulbrook, “Myth-Making and Identity: The Case of the G.D.R.”, in Hosking and Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, p. 73.

¹¹³ Staurt Allan and Andrew Thompson, “The time-Space of National Memory”, p. 36.

¹¹⁴ Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and A Taxonomy of Myths”, p. 19.

ad infinitum. The formation of a nation always requires history to be turned into ethnic myths.¹¹⁵ This brings us to the crucial role of the nationalist historians in the construction of national identity: they supply myth-making with the material it requires. In this regard, the First Turkish History Congress and the official history thesis cannot be evaluated as purely academic undertakings; they were aimed at nothing less than the creation of the new myths necessitated by the new national identity, which was itself being simultaneously constructed. Any form of collective identity, including national identity, is predicated on the presence of a collective past; it is through this past that human communities come to know themselves. The national history provides the mirror-image -which is so crucial in the development of individual identity- for the nation. In this line of argument, national history is indispensable for national identity; and what the official history does is to basically provide the members of the nation with an image that they would like to identify with.¹¹⁶

The discipline of archaeology also has close ties with the process of myth-making. According to Smith, the underlying purpose of this discipline is “to reconstruct a past era or civilization and relate it to later periods, including the present”.¹¹⁷ This relation between historical periods is established primarily by way of dating –and of arranging in a chronology. Chronology is the reflection of a world-view that binds the past, the present and the future in a linear succession. The periodization thus achieved, contributes to the sense of continuity that is so vital to the national sentiment. This sense of continuity renders the flux of history manageable through an intellectual framework which gives the people’s history coherence and design”.¹¹⁸ Thus, in dating relics, the archaeologist determines the location of “the community in its historic time and in that sense provides a symbolic and cognitive basis or foundation for that community”; that is, he “reconstructs the modern community by altering its temporal perspective and self-view”.¹¹⁹ The archaeologist fixes the location of the community not only in terms of time but also of space. Moreover, he helps preserve the glories of these past epochs –

¹¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith, “The Resurgence of Nationalism?: Myth and Memory in the Renewal of Nations”, in Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p. 265.

¹¹⁶ Nuri Bilgin, “Kimlik Arayışı Olarak Resmi Tarih” in Özbaran(ed.), *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları: 1994 Buca Sempozyumu*, pp. 109-112.

¹¹⁷ Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of the Nations”, p. 176.

¹¹⁸ Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, p. 50.

¹¹⁹ Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of the Nations”, p. 176.

which also translate into potentialities for the future. These are all very important tasks not only for the making but also for the reproduction and possible verification of myths as will be clearer as we talk about various types of myths below. One further point needs emphasis: archaeology does all these “in the name of, and through the use of, modern science”, which is the ultimate legitimator of the modern age.¹²⁰ This scientific quality of archaeology is often utilized to provide an aura of truth to the myths of the nation. This is one of the most emphasized aspects of archaeology throughout the papers of the Congress.

The discipline of philology is crucial in establishing authenticity –its common aim with myths of ethnic descent. It traces “linguistic descent and origins to reveal what was intrinsic to the pure, authentic language group”.¹²¹ Hence, it provides a parallel narrative to the myths of ethnic origin, legitimating and reinforcing their claims. Yet, one should remember that “national languages are almost always semi-artificial constructs”; “they are the opposite of what national mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind”.¹²²

4. Types of Myths and Time-Space of the Nation

There are six main types of national myths according to Smith. The first is a myth of temporal origins. If myths are a form of popular knowledge telling the nation about itself -and in doing so reproducing it-, one of the primary things that the nation needs to know about is its origins. One of the main tasks of the nationalist historian is to satisfy this need by dating the community’s origins so as to “locate it in time and in relation to other relevant communities”.¹²³ The antiquity of the nation had to be established in order for the nation to take pride in its history –and consequently, itself- and to claim external recognition. The participants of the History Congress were trying to achieve both these ends. Yet, it seems that external recognition was somewhat more

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

¹²¹ Smith, “National Identity and the Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1406.

¹²² E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 54.

¹²³ Smith, “National Identity and the Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1399.

important in the Turkish case –made more evident by the international character the history congress acquired in its second convention. It was as if the whole official history thesis was devised as a response to those who regarded the Turks as culturally inferior and if the self-esteem of the nation would follow from their recognition. To give an example on the same line of thought from the Congress, the closing comments of Yusuf Akçura can be utilized:

Tarih milli harsın temelidir, aynı zamanda tarih milletlerin cihandaki mevki ve şereflerini tayin eder: tarih sayesinde bir kavim yer yüzündeki hayat ve saadet hakkının hiccetlerini aleme gösterir.¹²⁴

Etienne Copeaux is in effect pointing to the same issue by claiming that the Turkish history textbooks were addressed not only to their original recipients –the students-, but through them to a larger public –comprised of anyone who thought less of the Turks, especially the Europeans.¹²⁵

The second one is a myth of location and migration. This myth is complementary to the first one in that it locates the nation in space. The stuff of this myth is the homeland(s) and migration routes. This myth is associated with what Smith calls the “ethnoscapes”. What we are dealing with in here is the merging of a nation with a piece of land. The impact of the homeland in the life of the nation is threefold: at its simplest, it provides the stage on which the history of the nation unfolds; it has a more active role in that it influences not only events but also the character of the people; and most important of all it stands witness to the survival of the community, for it holds the graves of the forefathers of the nation. Through the presence of these graves, the homeland ensures a sense of continuity in the life of the nation -binding the dead, the living and the yet-unborn under a potent symbolism of the land. The creation of such a “homeland” is a part of the general process of “territorialization of memory”; in time the landscape comes to embody the memories of the nation –it is as if the history of the nation becomes symbolically inscribed on the land. That is how a commitment to the “homeland” great enough to risk death for its defense becomes possible; the individual identifies with the nation, which is in turn identified with the territory, thus any threat to the boundaries of the territory are felt by the individual members of the nation as direct

¹²⁴ “History is the foundation of the national culture; history also determines the status and distinction of nations in the world: it is by means of history that a people prove the world of its right to life and to happiness.” *BTTK*, p. 618.

¹²⁵ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 16.

threats to their own person. Since it is this commitment that the new states need the most, it is only natural that they will “pay so much attention to inculcating love and veneration for particular ethnoscapes and lavish so much praise on the natural features of the territory they control”.¹²⁶ Such a merging of the nature with the history of the nation results in the historicization of the nature and the naturalization of the history: by becoming an agent in history, the land becomes glorified; and by becoming associated with the nature, the history acquires a sense of being part of the natural order –in a sense approaches destiny. Frequently, the un-spoilt land signifies “a pure and virtuous people” in the nationalist imagination.

Like all new nations, the early Turkish Republic paid close attention to harvesting love for the homeland. To install a sense of self-sacrifice in the nation, the state had to make sure to present the nation with a “homeland” with which to identify and in which to take pride. The route to this went first and foremost through what Smith calls “the national re-education of the young”, that is “a mass standardization of outlook, values, knowledge and skills in a nationalist framework around the trinity of literature, history and geography”.¹²⁷ Instituting such a national education system with the required standardized history textbooks was one of the main goals of the First Turkish History Congress.

As pressing was the need to secure the attachment of the nation to the homeland, it was also complicated -given the drastic changes in the boundaries of the state that took place over the first quarter of the century; the necessity of endowing the new capital (Ankara) with just enough symbolism in order for it to divest loyalty from the former capital (Istanbul); and the amount of myth-making which was necessarily involved in the transformation of a former, not-so-important territory of the empire (Anatolia) into a glorious and beautiful “homeland”. Esat Bey was trying to establish that in his closing speech:

Eski Anadolu hayali sıvaları dökük evleri, yıkık taşlı mezarları, yolsuz ve bakımsız şehirleri üstünde Sakaryalar, Kızıl ve Yeşil ırmaklar akan çoşan sular memleketiydi. Her şehrinde, her köyünde havasını bir bataklık ovası zehirleyen bu yüksek yaylalar ve hırçın ırmaklar memleketi senelerce düşünilememiş, görülememiş, Türklüğün öz sevgisinden uzak ve mahrum kalmıştı.

Asırlarca bizi yalnız İstanbul muhabbetine bağlayan makus bir sevginin tesiri ile bu aziz yurdu değirmende, tarlada, cephede güneşin ve karın

¹²⁶ Smith, “Nation and Ethnoscape”, p. 151.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.154.

altında çalışan saf ve güzel Anadolu köylüsüne bağışlayan bir hissin esiri idik.

Güneşinde, toprağında, rüzgarında yabancı bir nefes bulunmayan güzel anadolunun biricik yıldızı Ankara Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin ve Türk varlığının en büyük abidesidir. Eskiden Anadoluyu sevgisiz gören gözlerin yanlış duyan kalplerin imanını düzelten bir varlığın, büyük Gazinin eseri.¹²⁸

Moreover, the myths of location and migration were doubly important in the Turkish case, for the new state had not one but two homelands: an ancient homeland in Central Asia and the present –and hypothetically not so recent- homeland in Anatolia. According to Smith a geographic area can become associated with a given ethnic community either as the land of its origin, or as the land of its liberation and settlement.¹²⁹ The Turkish nation has one of each. While glorifying the Central Asian steppes as the cradle of Turkish and the world civilization; the Turkish nationalist historians had to simultaneously establish the Turkish nation as the autochthon inhabitants of the Anatolia –thus downplaying competing claims brought forward by Greeks and Armenians.

Kadim Etilerimiz, atalarımız, bugünkü yurdumuzun ilk ve otokton sakini ve sahibi olmuşlardır. Burasını binlerce yıl evel anayurdun yerine özyurt yapmışlardır. Türklüğün merkezini Altaylardan Anadolu-Trakya'ya getirmişlerdir. Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin sarsılmaz temelleri bu özyurdun çökmez kayalarındır.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ “The old image of Anatolia was that of a country of overflowing waters with Sakarya, Kızıl and Yeşil rivers running through tattered cities without roads, houses with plasters falling off and cemeteries with ruined gravestones. This land of high plateaus and angry rivers, every city, every village of which was poisoned by a swamp, has been unthought-of and unseen for years and has remained far and deprived from the true love of Turkishness.

For centuries, under the influence of a perverse love which bound us to only the affection of Istanbul, we were prisoners of a sense that granted this dear land to the pure and beautiful Anatolian villagers who worked in mills, fields and battle-fronts under the sun and the snow.

The one and only star of Anatolia, which does not have a breath of foreignness in its sun, its soil and its wind, Ankara, is the biggest monument of the Turkish Republic and the Turkish existence. It is the work of a being, who corrected the faith of the eyes that used to see Anatolia without love and of the hearts that used to sense it wrong; it is the work of the great Ghazi (Atatürk).” *BTTK*, p. 624.

¹²⁹ Anthony D. Smith, “The Resurgence of Nationalism?: Myth and Memory in the Renewal of Nations”, p. 269.

¹³⁰ “Our ancient Hittites, our ancestors, were the first and autochthon dwellers and owners of our present homeland. They made here their own-land in place of the motherland thousands of years ago. They brought the center of Turkishness from Altays

Since the Turkish nation has two homelands, the migration routes grow in importance. Etienne Copeaux talks about a map of the migrations -which supposedly took place in the Neolithic Age- that was the first map in all the Turkish history textbooks until the end of the 40s. According to him this map both summarizes and signifies the official history thesis of 1931: a map of Eurasia, with Europe in the periphery and arrows signifying migration routes originating from the “homeland” and covering the whole globe.¹³¹

Parallel to this type of myth are what Schöpflin terms the myths of territory. He reminds that often the land sacralized as the “homeland” was a land of plenty and harmony in which the purity of the nation was safeguarded against outside contacts – usually through natural, geographical barriers.¹³² To give but one example of each:

Ortaasiya yaylası insanlara ve insanlığa beşik olmaya başladığı eski zamanlarda bütün dünyanın en yüksek, en feyizli ve en gür hayat verici şartlarını kazanmış eşsiz bir alemdi.¹³³

Dünyanın her tarafına yayılan bu dolikosefal insanlar yalnız topografya hususiyeti cihetile Ortaasiya yaylasına girememişlerdir.¹³⁴

The third kind of myth is that of ancestry –which we discussed above in some detail. To recapitulate: it constitutes solidarity and fraternity among the members of the nation by way of reference to a common ancestor –who can be either a historical or a fictive figure, or retain elements of both truth and fiction. This myth constructs the nation on the analogy of an extended family. If it is a kind of familial bond that holds the nation together, then greater sacrifices can be demanded of the individual for the good of the nation/family.

The fourth one is a myth of golden age. The Golden Age of Periclean Athens had, by the turn of the 19th century, been established as “the standard and model for

to Anatolia-Thrace. The un-collapsible rocks of this land are the unshakable foundations of the Turkish Republic.” Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *BTTK*, p. 41.

¹³¹ Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 40.

¹³² Geoffrey Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and A Taxonomy of Myths”, p. 29.

¹³³ “Central Asian plateau was a unique world, which possessed the highest, most fertile and most abundant life giving conditions of the whole world at the ancient times when it began to cradle human beings and humanity.” Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *BTTK*, p. 22.

¹³⁴ “These dolichocephalous men, who spread throughout the world, could not enter only the Central Asian plateau due to its topographical characteristics.” Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *BTTK*, p. 24.

subsequent ideals of the Golden Age”.¹³⁵ Yet, with Romanticism, a more inclusive concept of antiquity, which included the whole ancient world, emerged. This move was paralleled by ever-growing interest in archaeology and by the archaeological discoveries in Assyria, Sumeria, Achaemenid Iran and Hittite Anatolia throughout the 19th century. The myths of golden age undertake important functions in the construction and/or reproduction of the national identity. They establish the authenticity of the nation by unearthing the “true self” of the nation at its best. That is crucial from a historicist, evolutionary worldview, which sees the every nation as going through a life cycle of birth, efflorescence, decline and rebirth.¹³⁶ In this schema, the existence of the golden age makes the rebirth at the hands of the nationalists possible. They boost the self-esteem of the members of the nation by reminding them of the past glories of their nation. They also provide “a standard of comparison” with the other nations.¹³⁷ We can see examples of all these functions in the First Turkish History Congress. The level of civilization achieved by the Turks in their golden age in Central Asia around 7000-8000 B.C. is compared to the situation of the Europeans of the same period in order to claim cultural superiority.

The current political situation of the nation often translates into the choice of the elements that make a golden age, thus the past is seen through the lens of the present and more often than not with the aim of legitimating that present. For instance, as popular sovereignty becomes a fact in the political arena and the electorate expands to include the majority of the population, the choice of golden age and/or its interpretation will often shift from a dynastic to a more communal golden age.¹³⁸ So it is only natural that the new Turkish state, trying to distance itself from both its imperial and religious heritage, should try to locate its golden age in a far away land and far away time, when the virtues of loyalty to the community and strict observance of the law supposedly reigned superior.

The last two kinds of myths are interrelated: that of decline and that of regeneration. The narrative of the nation is not unilinear, but rather underlines the possibility of retrogression¹³⁹; otherwise there would be no need for a nationalist revival and regeneration. The nationalists feel the need to advance the nation to save it from an

¹³⁵ Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, p.39.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

¹³⁹ Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1403.

inferior cultural position not only in comparison to the technologically and educationally superior West, but also to “the underlying genius of the community”.¹⁴⁰ The members of such a nation are unaware of their true historical identity, without which they can find no meaning in life –they are strangers to themselves; thus, the primary task of the nationalists is to help people get in touch with that identity. This is also one of the factors motivating the participants of the First Turkish History Congress: to remind the nation of its true worth.

There is a further kind of myth, a myth of election; but in Smith’s taxonomy, it has a primarily religious content. Schöpflin mentions the same myth but rephrases it in more secular terms. He grants that a religious motif underlies this myth, but argues that in the modern world, this has transformed into something more secular –for instance, capacity for modernity or democracy; or stronger European credentials.¹⁴¹ The papers of the Congress contribute to the development of this myth in various ways: for instance, by way of establishing the primacy of the Turkish race in developing all human civilization –which is the main proposition of the Turkish history thesis; or by reference to the supposedly natural inclination of the Turks to rational thinking.¹⁴² This myth becomes the basis of claims to moral and cultural superiority.

One final myth that Schöpflin mentions is that of foundation. This does not refer to an original moment but to a later foundation, something like a second coming. It usually revolves around the myth of the new state itself and comprises a claim that “afterwards everything will be different (better) and the newly founded system has dispensed with whatever made the old reprehensible”.¹⁴³ The counterpart of this myth in the Turkish case is the myth of the new Republic –voiced by Esat Bey in the example below:

Her devirde bir suretle harikalar yaratan Türk milleti, işbu yakın zamanlar devrinde de Cumhuriyet idaresini kurarak idari, siyasi, içtimai ve medeni sahalarda dünyanın en büyük inkılaplarını yapmıştır.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1404.

¹⁴¹ Geoffrey Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and A Taxonomy of Myths”, p. 31.

¹⁴² *BTTK*, p. 294.

¹⁴³ Geoffrey Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and A Taxonomy of Myths”, p. 33.

¹⁴⁴ “The Turkish nation, which has created wonders in one way or another in every era, has made the biggest administrative, political, societal and civil revolutions of the world by way of establishing the Republican regime in the near past.” *BTTK*, p. 10.

Smith examines the role of the myths of ethnic descent in Turkey and claims that they were particularly important in constructing the Turkish national identity “since until the end of the 19th century the very word Turk had pejorative connotations”.¹⁴⁵ This was the case even in the Ottoman Empire. According to Georgeon, “Türk” meant uncultivated, peasant in İstanbul idiom.¹⁴⁶ The following comment from the Congress is also of interest:

Hatırlarsınız ki pek uzak olmayan zamanlara kadar pek muktedir addettiğimiz tarihçilerimiz bile, mesela Naima, Türk hakkında...tahkiramiz cümleler kullanmaktan çekinmezlerdi...öyle muharrirler gördük ki Türklerden bahsedilirken irkinmek ve iğrenmek alametleri göstermeyi marifet addederlerdi.¹⁴⁷

During the 19th century, “Western scholars and Orientalists began to take an interest in Ottoman studies”.¹⁴⁸ There was a quick proliferation of works on the origins and the history of the Ottomans. All these works praised the Turkic-speaking peoples and located their origins in the Central Asia. Many grouped the Turkish language along with the Finno-Ugric languages –Hungarian, Finnish, Mongol and Estonian. The Ottoman writers themselves had been tracing their lineage back “to the tribe of Kayi Khan, a branch of the Oguz Turks, who had been forced by the Mongols to migrate westwards to the domains of the Seljuk Turks, at the time of the Ertugrul”.¹⁴⁹ By the turn of the century, these new developments in the European knowledge about the Turks have merged with the traditional narrative of the Turkish history, producing a new awareness in the Ottoman intellectuals that the Turkish history was their own national history. Here, it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that both these traditions –that of the Ottoman historians and that of the Orientalist- have proved effective on the formation of the official history thesis of the early Republic by setting its limits. In Turkey, like in all other historical settings, the energies of the nationalist

¹⁴⁵ Lewis quoted by Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1411.

¹⁴⁶ Georgeon, “Osmanlı Devletinde Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Yükselişi”, *Osmanlı-Türk Modernleşmesi*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ “You might remember that in the not-so-distant past, even the historians whom we considered quite able, for instance Naima, did not refrain from using insulting phrases about the Turks... We even saw writers who considered it a clever thing to show signs of irritation and repulsion at the mention of the Turks.” Ahmet Ağaoğlu, “İptidaî Türk Aile Hukuku ile İptidaî Hindo-Avrupaî Aile Hukuku Arasında Mukayese”, *BTTK*, p. 261.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1412.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1412.

historians were devoted to saving the people from self-contempt and restoring their dignity and self-esteem through history education.¹⁵⁰

4. The Intellectuals and the Nationalist Culture

One of the definitions Smith provides for nationalism is as follows: “At the broadest level nationalism must be seen as a form of historicist culture and civic education, one that overlays or replaces the older modes of religious culture and familial education”.¹⁵¹ In this equation, historicism replaces religion; and familial education is to a large extent complemented –if not totally replaced- by civic education: at this juncture lie the seeds of the new nation. The participants of the First Turkish History Congress were aware of the necessity of such transformations for the establishment of a well-grounded national identity. The papers were on the whole nonreligious –if not outright anti-religious- and there was a constant effort to endow the history of the nation with religious qualities; and the very reason for the convening of the Congress was to devise such a system of civic education. Smith argues that for the Romantics, “the sacred had been transferred from humanity’s primordial relationship with God to its rediscovered bond with Nature, with history and with the nation”.¹⁵² The historical nation is divine; this is an important component of the heritage that the nationalists inherit from the Romantics.

If nationalism is basically a historicist culture, then those who benefit most from nationalism are those who can claim authority in view of historicism, i.e. the intellectuals. The intellectual as the authoritative interpreter of the nation’s history, constructs the much-needed image of a distinguished past and in so doing enhances not only the position of his nation among all other nations but also his own standing within that nation. Being no longer a marginal character disconnected from his society, he

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 1413.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 91.

¹⁵² Anthony D. Smith, “Romanticism and Nationalism”, in Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, p. 254.

becomes a “national pedagogue” and takes active part in the formation of the nation.¹⁵³ The active role of the nationalist intellectuals is threefold: rediscovery, reinterpretation and regeneration. The first is the most basic one: it includes all sorts of research aimed at the formation of the history of the nation –“the role *par excellence* of the nationalist historian, philologist, anthropologist and archaeologist”.¹⁵⁴ The second one is a bit more complicated and involves selecting from myths, memories and sources, in order to locate the nation in a historically significant context and to “make the national inspirations of the present appear authentic, natural and comprehensible”.¹⁵⁵ In the third stage, the nationalist intellectual translates the cultural work of the first two stages into political conclusions, thus becoming one of the leaders of the movement. This was what the participants of the Congress were trying to accomplish. If it is the responsibility of the intellectuals to create the necessary historicist culture; it is the responsibility of the intelligentsia to diffuse that culture throughout the educated public -the consumer of that culture.¹⁵⁶ To put it differently: the intellectuals create, the intelligentsia transmits and the educated public consumes nationalism.

Nationalism can also be seen on the behalf of the intellectuals as way of resolving their identity crises, brought along by “the challenges posed to traditional religion and society by the ‘scientific state’ and Western ‘revolutions’ that it promotes wherever its influence is felt”.¹⁵⁷ This crisis is related to what Smith terms the crisis of “dual legitimation”; that is the dichotomy between legitimation in terms of tradition and religion and in terms of reason and observation, in the context of a modern state which makes increasing use of scientific thought. This crisis is naturally felt, first and foremost, by the intellectuals by virtue of their early exposure to such a system of thought. Eager to resolve this crisis, they turn elsewhere, trying to create new myths.¹⁵⁸ Historicism is probably the most important one of them. It is appealing in that it can provide a comprehensive world-view without resorting to metaphysics –hence the transformation from religion to historicism.

¹⁵³ Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent”, p. 1419. See also Smith, *National Identity*, pp.120-1.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of the Nations”, p. 177.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

This crisis of dual legitimation was evident in the papers and discussions of the Congress. The emphasis on the concept of Truth (Hakikat) was of enormous importance in this framework. It seems that the new system of faith was based on the replacement of God (Hakk) by Truth (Hakikat). The resemblance between the Turkish words is striking. *Hakikat* means both truth and knowledge of God; and one of the primary qualities of God was being simultaneously the subject and the source of all truth. With a small tactical move, Turkish nationalism seems to have turned an existing belief system inside out, making it usable for its own legitimation. Thus, it makes sense that *Hakikat* was one of the most frequently used concepts throughout the Congress, probably second only to “nation”.

On this plane, membership to the nation becomes a prerequisite of reaching the truth. Simultaneously, the knowledge and acceptance of (a particular) truth becomes the prerequisite of the membership to the nation:

Hakikat sizce ve bizce sabittir. Her asil manada cevheri tükenmez
Türklük kanı taşıyanlar bundan şüphe edemezler. Davamız bizim
hakikatimizi bütün beşeriyetin itikatları arasına koymaktır.¹⁵⁹

There are frequent references to the scientific method throughout the Congress papers and discussions.¹⁶⁰ Yet it signifies more than a method. It seems that the scientific thought was regarded as not only an instrument in advancing the nation but also as an end in itself, crucial for the construction of the new national identity. Scientific thought was regarded as the emblem of modernity and a quality fitting the Turkish nation which supposedly founded the civilization as such.

The Congress tries hard to create a deep belief in the immutability of the scientific thought. It is as if it is enough to say that the scientific method has been used to legitimate the propositions of the papers; if an idea is to be criticized the scientific method provides the basis. To establish science and reason as the primary instruments of “truth-telling” was an integral part of the transformation of the nation envisioned by the nationalist intelligentsia and the ruling elite. In this way, alternative criteria of “truth-making” –such as religion and religious ethics- would lose their ground.

¹⁵⁹ “The truth is constant in your view and in ours. Those who carry the blood of Turkishness, in any noble meaning the quality of which never runs out, can have no doubt about this. Our struggle is to place our truth among the convictions of the entire humanity.” Reşit Galip Bey, “Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış”, *BTTK*, p. 161.

¹⁶⁰ *BTTK*, pp. 50, 82, 329.

Moreover, the political man necessitated by the new nation-state and the economic man necessitated by the capitalist system, into which the nation state had been integrating had a common quality; they were both imagined as “men of reason”.

If nationalism is primarily a cultural doctrine, then this cultural doctrine necessitates “the introduction of new concepts, languages and symbols”.¹⁶¹ These concepts include autonomy, identity, national genius, authenticity and unity and they “form an interrelated language or discourse”¹⁶² of nationalism. All these concepts are derived from the Romantic tradition.¹⁶³ The most important of those concepts is probably that of identity. It emanated from the concept of “national genius” and found its full-fledged expression in the writings of Rousseau who argued that: “the first rule which we have to follow is that of national character: every people has, or must have, a character; if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one”.¹⁶⁴ This concept was also central to Herder’s theory, according to which every nation had a “peculiar genius”. The nationalists had to rediscover the “authentic identity” of the nation –which embodied the “national genius”- through philology, history, archaeology and anthropology. The mythical quality of the concept of “national genius” is quite self-evident: it refers to an ideal state, a pure national essence, which once existed –most probably, during the golden age of the nation- and was now lost. The uncovering of the Turkish “national genius” was one of the main tasks of the Congress.

Another important concept is that of autonomy. In the Kantian universe of “self determination”, autonomy had become “an ethical imperative for the individual, a principle of his being”.¹⁶⁵ One could only be true to oneself if one was autonomous. At the hands of Schlegel, Fichte and other German Romantics, this principle was turned into “a philosophy of national self-determination”:¹⁶⁶ only through achieving autonomy could the community return to its pure, uncontaminated state –recover its authentic identity. Again the mythical implications are clear: through autonomy, a community can re-attain the glory of its Golden Age. In a similar fashion, yet another important concept, that of unity, can be connected to myth-making in the following way: fraternity which is the social expression of unity, can be established by way of constructing the

¹⁶¹ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 74.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁶³ Smith, “Romanticism and Nationalism”, pp. 246-9.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Smith, *National Identity*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7.

nation on the analogy of an extended family, which is held together by the belief in a common ancestor, a myth of ethnic origins. The concept of unity further implies a homogenizing of the people to form a unitary nation –which can be accomplished only through a standardized and centralized education system, which can be undertaken only by the state: thus it is the state that produces the illusion -and upholds the myth- of the unity of the nation.

If nationalism is “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation”¹⁶⁷; the First Turkish History Congress was a near perfect tool of nationalism for through the version of history and/or myths that it promoted, it aimed at the construction and the reproduction (through the use of the textbooks perfected in that congress) of those exact three qualities of the nation.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

LIMITS OF MYTH-MAKING AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Smith claims that “nationalism takes its color from its context”.¹⁶⁸ What he provides in his theory is a general framework which more or less fits any particular nationalism. Yet each nationalist movement reworks the general blueprint of nationalism in its own way by adding it “more contextual and particularistic notions” – even if, on the long run, they turn out to be only rhetorical (like the Sun Language Theory).¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, this should not lead us into thinking that these specific concepts are secondary to the success of specific nationalisms; rather they “play a vital role in each instance and not just a supporting role”.¹⁷⁰

The specific and contextual concepts utilized by the nationalist movements are often the results of certain limitations. As Smith repeatedly underlines neither the formation of the nationalist identity nor the associated processes of myth-making are limitless endeavors. The real and/or imagined limits of the nation are what really endow it with its uniqueness. Here, it is also useful to remember Gellner’s claim that the differentiating marks that are required in the invention of a nation might sometimes be “purely negative”.¹⁷¹ A nation is, more often than not, defined by what it is not, rather than what it is. This aspect of nationalism is naturally more pronounced in the case of the Turkish nationalism as a result of its reactionary character; the Turkish nationalism was formed in reaction to the Western imperial nations, to Russia and pan-Slavism, to the nationalisms of its minority populations –including the Arabs-, to its semi-peripheral position within world-economy, to Islam, etc.

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 79.

¹⁶⁹ Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities”, p. 189.

¹⁷⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 83.

¹⁷¹ Quoted by Smith, *ibid.*, 71.

1. Former Power Structures

The first limitation on the construction of national identity was provided “by the nature and activities of the preceding political system and institutions”.¹⁷² Each new regime defines itself in opposition to the *ancien régime* that it has replaced; thus the formation of the new national identity depends on the repudiation of all the former identities. For that reason, the nationalists engage in one of their main battles within the nation “against the older self-definitions”.¹⁷³

It is important to add that in the case of Turkey the repudiation of the former regime included a reaction to Islam as well; since Islam has formed one of the main bases of the political system. In this regard, it was the nationalist historians’ job to locate the essence, the true identity of the nation in a golden age which had no connection whatsoever either to the Ottoman Empire or to the Islamic civilization; thus symbolically connecting that golden age with the reawakening of the nation under the guidance of the new nationalist ruling elite, in order to legitimate the new regime and to establish its credentials at a level much deeper than those of the Ottoman Empire or the Islam, the two major loci of power and legitimation that the new regime had to compete with. A golden age located in the depths of history and under the sand hills of Central Asia was more than convenient.

The Ottoman period was imagined not as a time of a great and successful empire, but as a time of the demise of the nationalist sentiments and loss of identity on the behalf of the members of the nation. The comments of Halil Nimetullah Bey on the issue provide a summary of this position:

İnsanların mevcudiyeti iki türlü varlıktan tevekkün eder: ferdi varlık ve içtimai varlık. Ferdi varlığın uzvi, ruhi kısmından başka bütün unsurlarının içtimai olduğu bugün ilmin vardığı en son hakikatlerden biridir...Milli şuuru sönmüş fertler kendi varlıklarından bihaber şursuz idraksız bir halde yaşarlar. İşte bizim bundan evel içinde bulunduğumuz Osmanlılık böyle bir yokluk alemi idi...Türk inkılabı bu Osmanlılık

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁷³ Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, p. 124.

karanlığını yırtarak yepyeni bir nur alemi olan Türklük dünyasını yaratmıştır.¹⁷⁴

In this context, one of the participants of the Congress quoted Atatürk's words from a speech he delivered in 1923, in İzmir Economy Congress:

Milli bir devir yaşamıyorduk. Milli tarihe malik bulunmuyorduk. Osmanlı tarihi padişahların, hakanların, zümrelerin destanı mahiyetindeydi.¹⁷⁵

When viewed from the framework of the national history thesis, The Ottoman history was nothing more than the history of a family; and thus, it was deemed historically insignificant. What was required was not to search for the roots of the Turkish nation in the successes and failures of a family; but rather to seek an original and authentic Turkishness in the depths of history.

Kafasını ve vicdanını en son terakki şuleleriyle güneşlendirmeye karar vermiş olan bugünün Türk çocukları biliyor ve bildireceklerdir ki onlar 400 çadırlı bir aşiretin değil, onbinlerce yıllık ari medeni yüksek bir ırktan gelen yüksek kabiliyetli bir millettir.¹⁷⁶

With this assertion Afet İnan has successfully completed the task assigned to the Turkish historians by Atatürk in 1928.

Moreover, the character of the new nation had to be imagined in opposition to the Ottoman past in order to legitimate the claim that the Ottoman period was a time unbecoming the nature of the Turks; thus providing greater legitimation for the new regime. Mediha Muzaffer Hanım, in her closing speech, delineated the differences between the Ottoman period and the new regime in the following words:

¹⁷⁴ "Men's being is built upon two kinds of existence: individual existence and social existence. Aside from its organic and spiritual parts, all other components of the individual existence are social; this is one of the latest truths attained by science today...Individuals whose national consciousness has died down, live in an unconscious and uncomprehending state, unaware of their own existence. The Ottomanness in which we found ourselves before was such a world of un-existence... The Turkish revolution has ripped out the darkness of this Ottomanness and has created the world of Turkishness which is a brand new world of light." *BTTK*, pp. 327-8.

¹⁷⁵ "We were not living a national age. We were not in possession of a national history. The Ottoman history had the character of a legend of the sultans and certain classes." Yusuf Hikmet Bey, "Şarkta İnhitat Sebepleri", *BTTK*, p. 521.

¹⁷⁶ "The Turkish children of today, who have decided to enlighten their minds and consciences with the flames of latest progress, know and will make people know that they are a highly talented nation descending not from a 400-tent tribe, but an Aryan, civilized and elevated race which is tens of thousands years old." *BTTK*, p. 41.

Türk milleti, Türk Cümhuriyeti artık yabancıların zevkinden, sanatından, ilinden, seciyesinden renk ve kalıp almayan, her şeyde milli harsını, milli kültürünü, milli seciyesini gösteren bir teşekkül, medeniyet dünyasının varlığını tamamlayan yepyeni bir alemdir. Bu alemden taassuptan daima kaçan ve hakikatten nur alan bir kuvvet var...

Hakikati hakiki hayattan alan, en samimi en vitaraf bir ilim mantığı ile tahlil eden, düşündüğü ve olduğu gibi söyleyen, dinde taassuba, ahlakta riyakarlığa, lisanda yabancılığa, sanatta taklide rağbet etmeyen mert bir Türk seciyesi var.¹⁷⁷

The official history thesis –in a way supporting and legitimating the secularism of the new regime- argued that the main reason for the decline of the Empire was that the *ulema* class had been standing in the way of scientific developments; unfortunately, the Sultan who had combined both a secular and a spiritual duty in his person was not in a position to defend science against religion.¹⁷⁸ Only through the absolute separation of religious and state affairs and the expulsion of religion from all the facets of the public realm -and its strict limitation to the public domain- could a modern nation state be formed and modernization undertaken.¹⁷⁹

The national history thesis did not regard the Koran to be the word of God. Within the framework of general history, the development of Christianity was recounted as a social, cultural and philosophical formation. It was then argued that Islam was a rationalized version of Christianity.¹⁸⁰ This argument was a further blow to the legitimacy of Islam.

One of the main propositions of the Turkish history thesis was that it was the Turks who “founded and developed the Islamic civilization which had been the highest civilization of the world from the 8th to the 13th centuries and has provided the foundation of the present Western civilization”.¹⁸¹ According to this line of argument,

¹⁷⁷ “The Turkish nation, the Turkish Republic no longer borrows colors and forms from the taste, art, science and character of the foreigners; it is rather a formation that demonstrates its national culture and its national character in everything, a brand new world that has completed the existence of the world of civilization. In this world, there is a strength that always refrains from fanaticism and takes light from the truth...

There is a manly Turkish character that acquires the truth from true life; that examines it with the most sincere and most impartial scientific logic; that speaks as he thinks and as he is; that has no inclination to fanaticism in religion, hypocrisy in morals, foreignness in language and imitation in art.” *BTTK*, p. 622-3.

¹⁷⁸ Yusuf Hikmet Bey, “Şarkta İnhitat Sebepleri”, *BTTK*, p. 503-4.

¹⁷⁹ Afet İnan, “Orta Kurun Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış”, *BTTK*, p. 444.

¹⁸⁰ Yusuf Hikmet Bey, “Şarkta İnhitat Sebepleri”, *BTTK*, p. 507.

¹⁸¹ Şemsettin Bey, “İslâm Medeniyetinde Türklerin Mevkii”, *BTTK*, p. 289.

an Islamic society needed to receive “fresh blood” from outside in order to overcome its inherent conservatism and accomplish advancement in civilizational terms; this “fresh blood” has been supplied by the Turks for centuries.¹⁸²

Within this framework, one of the participants questions the reasons motivating Turks to convert to Islam. The answer is focused on pragmatic, rather than spiritual reasons. The Turks had converted to Islam because there was a higher level of well-being in the Islamic world; because they were geographically closer to the Islamic world; and because Islam provided a greater amount of sovereignty to the rulers in comparison to the other religions.¹⁸³ Claiming that the Turks had converted to Islam for pragmatic reasons implied that religious beliefs could be easily changed if and when they did not conform to the needs of the state and the requirements of the time.

2. Scholarly Criteria and the Problem of Resonance

The second limitation was effected by the criteria of verifiability: the national history and the accompanying myths on which the national identity depends should be verifiable: the better documented they are, the better they can stand the pressure of the emotions attached to them and counter efforts at demythologization.¹⁸⁴ Fabricated histories may prove successful for some time in boosting the self-esteem of the nation, but sooner or later, when they are exposed, they will cause much damage to the sense of continuity vital for the maintenance of the national identity and “induce cynicism and apathy for the national cause”.¹⁸⁵ A similar argument may be developed about the official Turkish history thesis and the Sun Language Theory of the early Republic. They did help replenish the self-confidence of the nation for some time but when the revolutionary fervor settled down, apathy slowly took over its place. Then again, it would be wrong to claim outright that such nationalist fabrications do not have long term effects; no matter how discredited they may become in the end, they nonetheless leave some traces on the collective identity of the nation –especially if they have been

¹⁸² Yusuf Hikmet Bey, “Şarkta İnhitat Sebepleri”, *BTTK*, p. 504.

¹⁸³ *BTTK*, p. 506.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, p. 56.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59; and also p. 55.

transmitted through the education system and consumed by people while they were still quite young –like the official history thesis. Moreover, even if there have been modifications in this thesis and it has to a large extent been academically renounced; not only it did continue to capture the imagination of the nationalists, but also managed to retain its place in the history textbooks. For instance, the proposition that all brachycephalous people originating from Central Asia were Turks and that they civilized the entire human race, remains a part of the official history textbooks in Turkey even today.¹⁸⁶ This shows that, however discredited it may have become, some of the main tenets of the official thesis have been thoroughly internalized and have become part of the common fund of knowledge, as well as that of common sense.

Another limit is set by the popular side of the myth-making process. In order to produce the results they are aimed at, myths and national histories should find resonance among the larger public; they should, so as to say, hit some chord. If the nation at large is not receptive to a certain version of national history or myth, even documentation and verification cannot go a long way. In this respect, Smith talks about what he terms “the patterning of a particular ethno-history” by which he basically refers to “the relationship over time between certain key components that recur in that community’s history”.¹⁸⁷ What we have here is the actual or imagined repetition of certain key concepts throughout the history of the nation; to find resonance, official national history and myths should fit into this overall pattern.

3. Geo-Politics

Another set of limits was imposed by the material geo-political conditions within which the new nation found itself. Since international borders could not be made to fit into the national identity, the national identity had to conform with those borders instead. Even when there was an attempt at redrawing borders, the claims to land were mainly the result of politics rather than of myths; the later were modified in order to support the former. For instance, it was crucial for the Turkish nationalists to “prove”

¹⁸⁶ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, “Gastronomy of Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations”, p. 178.

that they were the original inhabitants of Anatolia to legitimize their claim over that land and to discredit the counter claims of Greeks and Armenians. To this end, it was necessary to argue that Turks were there before all the others; it was even better to claim that Anatolia had been completely Turkified and was inhabited by a monolithic population of Turks, i.e. that there were, and had been, no “others” who could produce such counter claims. To claim that the Hittites were Turks was such a strategy: not only did it establish the antiquity of the Turkish population in Anatolia, but it also provided an alternative to the European idea of the “Greek miracle”¹⁸⁸: thus competing with the Greeks in two levels simultaneously. The antiquity of the Turks in Anatolia was established by way of turning the Turkish nation into the Turkish race, a process which will be dealt with in more detail above. The following quotation provides an example of how the counter-claims to the idea of the “Greek miracle” were formulated:

Yunan ananelerinin bize Fenikeliler adıla tanıttığı kavim ne cenubî Avrupaya yazıyı getirdikleri ne de Yunanistanın Attik kıtasında, adalarda ve İtalya yarımadasında şehirler tesis ettikleri zaman tek bir unsur halinde bulunuyorlardı. Başlarında bilhassa Türkler mevcuttu.¹⁸⁹

Turkish nationalists developed a problematic relationship to one other ex-minority of the empire, the Arabs. The Arab territories of the former empire had been lost and there was no considerable amount of Arab minority in the new Republic. Yet the Arabs kept providing one of the counter-images of the new Republic. On one level, the Turkish nationalists kept obsessing about the “Arab betrayal”, that is about how the fellow Muslims could rebel and fight against the Ottoman Empire/the Caliphate. On another, they were taking part in an Orientalising discourse: regarding the Arabs as exotic others, helped to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Islamic civilization and symbolically located them at a position in proximity to the West in proportion to its distance from the East. It was also a strategy which helped them define the Turkish nation as distinct from its Islamic heritage; there was an authentic Turkish identity unaffected and untainted by its coexistence with Islam, and Islam was only one of the many traditions which influenced the Turks in their long history. The difference of the

¹⁸⁸ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, p. 80.

¹⁸⁹ “The people that the Greek tradition presented us as the Phoenicians did not consist of a single element -either when they brought writing to southern Europe or when they founded cities in Attica of Greece, in the islands and in the Italian peninsula. They were led especially by the Turks.” Samih Rifat Bey, “Türkçe ve Diğer Lisanlar Arasında İrtibatlar”, *BTTK*, p. 76.

Turkish nation from Arabs was proof that an overriding Islamic identity did not exist, or that if it did, it did not affect the Turks. The sharper the contrast between the Turks and the Arabs, stronger was that proof.

4. Western Influence

The final –and probably the most decisive- set of limits was produced by the influence of the West on the new national states. This influence was, in most cases, complicated and multi-layered and worked mainly in two ways. First, it was the Western nations that set the standards for the formation of nations by virtue of precedence: they were the first nations to be formed and being successful -in terms of politics, economics and culture alike- they had become models to be emulated. As we mentioned earlier, once formed, the nation became a reproducible model and by the end of the Great War the nation-state had become the norm in international politics. The new states found themselves under great pressure to rapidly form their nations on the line of their Western predecessors. Moreover, the nation was the only “tested framework for economic and social development”¹⁹⁰ which meant that the new states had no other chance than to adopt it, for they could not risk failure in those realms –a modern state could not ever legitimate itself without material success in socio-economic terms.¹⁹¹ Historically, the first nations of the West were based on ethnic elements; for the latecomers this meant that they had to produce out of whatever cultural materials they might have, a coherent mythology and symbolism of an ethnic community of history.¹⁹² Their recognition by the international community as legitimate states depended on the success of that project of nation formation.

As Anderson claims the new nations had the advantage of being able to copy and combine different styles of nationalism; they did not have to invent their tactics and strategies from scratch. Yet this had a down-side; there were somewhat strict limits to

¹⁹⁰ Smith, “Gastronomy or Geology?: The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations”, p. 169.

¹⁹¹ Gellner, “The Coming of Nationalism and its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class”, p. 105.

¹⁹² Smith, *National Identity*, pp.41-2 and 70; also Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, p. 116.

what constituted a nation and how it was supposed to be formed. As Chatterjee complains, it was as if the imagination of the new nations –especially the post-colonial ones- had to “remain forever colonized”.¹⁹³ The rules of being a nationalist had Western origins, which was bound to create a dilemma for the non-Western nationalists who were aiming at the recovery/recreation of an authentic identity for their nations. This dilemma translated into a kind of love-hate relationship between the non-Western nationalists and their Western ideological predecessors. Kedourie argues that in the non-Western nationalisms, imitation was combined with psychological resentment.¹⁹⁴ On the one hand, the nationalists admired their more successful Western counterparts; on the other they despised their pretensions to cultural superiority.

There was always the tension of trying to create a nation which would qualify the standards of the Western nations, while still being clearly distinct from them; a constant tension between the simultaneous attempts of identification and differentiation. Thus the non-Western nationalists constantly emphasized their difference from –and even ultimate superiority to- the Western nations; while at the same time looking to those same Western nations for approval and recognition. This tension can clearly be seen in Chatterjee’s comments on the Indian nationalism: “language...became a zone over which the nation first had to declare sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world”; or “the desire to construct an aesthetic form that was modern and national and yet recognizably different from the Western”¹⁹⁵.

The same tension was recognizable in the First Turkish History Congress and the official history thesis it purported. One of the main aims of the Turkish nationalist historians was to shatter the Western prejudices about the Turks. They were intent on replacing the Western image of the Turks as the nomadic warriors of the yellow race with the image of the Turks as the source of all human civilization. It was crucial for the self-esteem of the new nation to prove the equality –and if possible, the superiority- of the Turks in comparison to the Europeans and to accomplish this with their methods and with reference to their authorities and sources. The self-image of the nation was invariably bound with its image held to be true by the Europeans.

¹⁹³ Partha Chatterjee, “Whose Imagined Community?”, in Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, p. 216.

¹⁹⁴ Paraphrased by Smith in “Nationalism and the Historians”, p. 186.

¹⁹⁵ Partha Chatterjee, “Whose Imagined Community?”, pp. 218-9.

The Turkish national identity was constituted, so to speak, from the outside in; the nation imagined itself as being imagined –or seen itself as being seen- by the West. It was always the West that had the gaze/power in this configuration; and Turkish identity was invariably bound to be reactive and defensive. It was this, more than anything else, which contributed to the making of the Turkish national identity. The Turkish nation was always more concerned with how it looked from outside than how it really was.

The intellectual sphere was one of the main battlegrounds in this respect, with Turkish theorists persistently trying to outdo the theoretically more solid theories of their European counterparts. The above mentioned differentiation-identification dichotomy was also in operation here; in trying so hard to differentiate themselves from the Orientalists, the Turkish nationalist intelligentsia, more often than not, found itself in the position of an auto-Orientalist. Likewise, in formulating Turkish national historiography as the diametrical opposite of the Eurocentric historiography which they were devoted to undermine, they produced a national history that was “both the anti-thesis and the mirror-image of Eurocentricism”.¹⁹⁶ The “national history” tried to understand and classify everything in reference to itself -just like Eurocentric history has done; and has become Turcocentric, so to speak.

By the turn of the 20th century, the overriding beliefs among the Orientalists about the Ottoman Empire consisted of mainly two elements. First, Turks were strictly nomadic until they came under the influence of the Islamic civilization in eleventh century. Following from this point, all the Turkic-Islamic states in history owed their civilizational accomplishments solely to the influence of the Islamic and Persian traditions.¹⁹⁷ If that was true, the Ottoman history or the history of any other Turkish state –including the new Republic- was only a chapter in Islamic history. Accordingly, any system of law the Ottomans had –if they had one at all- was congruent with the Islamic law; at least until they conquered Constantinople and began a new phase of Byzantine influence.¹⁹⁸ This brings us to the second proposition of the Orientalists, the idea of *Byzance après Byzance*, developed originally by Iorga.¹⁹⁹ This line of thought

¹⁹⁶Berktaş, “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Tarihçiliğin Durumu ve ‘Dilin Evrenselleşmesi’ Üzerine Düşünceler”, p. 82.

¹⁹⁷Berktaş, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁹⁹Halil Berktaş, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography”, p. 138.

suggested that the Turks in Anatolia -being so primitive, so completely tribal and so lacking in any tradition of state and law of any kind- could not have developed an empire; all they were good for was fighting. Thus the existence and the success of the Ottoman Empire were predicated on the Christians that they enlisted and the imitation – even replication- of the Byzantine institutions. Accordingly, the institutional framework of the empire was fully developed only after the conquest of Constantinople.²⁰⁰

These were not strictly academic arguments but had real effects on politics. The political corollary of the *Byzance après Byzance* idea was that the Ottoman Empire was a historical accident, rather than the rightful owner and the legitimate ruler of the territory it encompassed. Hence, “the Turks had no right to continue to rule the lands that they had usurped from Byzantium, from the medieval Bulgarian state, or from that of the Serbian prince Stefan Dushan”.²⁰¹

The Allied memorandum addressed to the Turkish delegation at the Sévres Peace Talks on 23 June 1919, probably provides the best example of how the prejudiced Orientalist ideas created in academic and intellectual circles could be translated into political terms:

Whether in Europe, Asia or Africa, there was no single case in which the institution of the Turkish administration was not followed by a decline in material wealth and level of culture of the country; likewise, an increase in material wealth and level of culture always followed the termination of Turkish rule. Among European Christians as well as the Moslem peoples of Syria, the Arab land and Africa, the Turk has done nothing but to ravage and destroy what he has conquered; it is not in the Turkish nature to develop in peace what he has acquired through war.²⁰²

This general framework of the Orientalist ideas about the Ottoman Empire dictated to a large extent the limits of Turkish historiography –and in turn, the Turkish national identity. On the most basic level, there was the problem of being seen as the heir of the Ottoman Empire by the Europeans. While the Turkish nationalist historians were working hard to prove that the Ottoman period was just a chapter –and not so important one- in the history of the Turkish nation; Europe still treated the new

²⁰⁰Halil Bertay, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography”, p. 138; and Bertay, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, pp. 19-20.

²⁰¹Halil Bertay, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography”, p. 138.

²⁰²Quoted in Bertay, *Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, p. 23; and “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography”, pp. 138-9.

Republic as an inheritor of the Ottoman Empire and thus argued the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule to decide whether the Republic had title to the land that it ruled. Moreover, Europeans were persistently regarding the Turks as under the influence of Islamic civilization. Hence, the nationalist historians of the new Republic found themselves in the awkward position of being regarded as the epitome of the very traditions from which they were trying to differentiate themselves. The secular identity –and its supporting history- they were trying to construct in opposition to their Islamic heritage; as well as the modern, republican identity –and its supporting history- they were trying to construct in opposition to the traditional, imperialist and dynastic heritage of the Ottoman Empire were magnified and brought into sharper focus due to these Western ideas. In a way, the reaction against the Orientalist perception of the Turkish nation coupled with and intensified the reaction against the *ancien régime* and Islam. For instance, the repudiation of the conquests and the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and their labeling as costly adventures which were not supported by the Turkish nation developed as a reaction to the image of the warrior/barbarian Turks held by the Europeans, rather than as a direct reaction to the former regime.²⁰³ In this equation, the Ottoman Empire –the state and not the people- were turned into scapegoats; if the Europeans envisioned the Turks as militaristic, the Ottoman administration was to blame, not the Turkish nation.

As opposed to the idea that the Turks were completely nomadic and incapable of developing civilization before they converted to Islam, the nationalist historians developed the idea of the original Turkic civilization flourishing in Central Asia around 7000 BC and then civilizing the rest of the human race. In opposition to the idea that the Turkic-Islamic states owed their civilization to the influence of the Islamic tradition, they emphasized the role of the Turks in not only defending and spreading Islam but also revitalizing it.

Against the idea of *Byzance après Byzance*, they claimed that the initial wave of migration to Anatolia had successfully Turkified the entire population and that the Turks held title to Anatolia not as inheritors of the Ottoman Empire, but as the autochthon population of the territory. That is, all the basic assumptions of the official history thesis were in one way or another related to the Western perception of the Turkish nation.

²⁰³ Halil Berktaş, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography”, p. 140.

One might further argue that the West has played the role of the “constituting other” in the cases of non-Western nationalist movements, yet there were two ways that such a role could be played. For instance in Central Europe, as Neumann has showed, the national identity was to a large extent predicated on the “negative and distorting images of Russia” as the constituting other.²⁰⁴ A similar role has been played by the Greeks, the Armenians and the Arabs for the Turkish national identity. Yet this was a two way process and not all the constituting others were negative in character. For almost all of the non-Western nationalisms and definitely for Turkish nationalism, an even more important part of their national identities were predicated on the distorted, but this time positive, images of the West -and modernity and progress which were thought to be almost synonymous with it.

Western ideas about the Turks, limited the national history thesis in one further way: There was widespread belief that the Turks were members of the yellow race and within the discourse of racism, the yellow race was deemed secondary. As was mentioned above the necessity of proving that the Turks were not secondary to European nations was the spark that fueled the project of the writing of the nationalist history. Accordingly, the official history thesis had no chance but to acquire racist overtones. Throughout the Congress, it was repeatedly asserted that the Turks had no relations whatsoever with the yellow race. The comments of Şevket Aziz on the issue provide only one of numerous examples:

Asiya brakisefallerin ocağıdır. Bunlar Alp adamı tipidir ve Türk de bu tiptir. Bizim son telâkkiye göre esasen bir ırk olmaktan uzak bulunan Sarılarla bir alâkamız yoktur.²⁰⁵

Resorting to the notion of “race” also provided a fertile strategy for the nationalist historians who were trying bypass many of the problems elaborated above. The antiquity of the Turks in Anatolia; as well as the existence of an authentic Turkish identity pre-dating Islam could be established by reference to pre-history. Yet, doing so would produce a further limitation, for pre-historic times eluded the historian due to

²⁰⁴ Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, “Blood and Sacrifice: Politics versus Culture in the Construction of Nationalism” in Brehony and Rassool (eds.), *Nationalisms: Old and New*, p. 109.

²⁰⁵ “Asia is the cradle of the brachycephalous men. These are the Alpine men and Turks are also of that type. We have no relation to the Yellows which were found to be fundamentally far from constituting a race by the most recent interpretations.” *BTTK*, p. 49.

lack of documentation. Archaeology could prove helpful but its fund of knowledge was limited; not to mention the impossibility of discovering a past which in most cases did not exist. Under such conditions, the idea of race came in handy. Almost all the problems that the Turkish nationalist historians were trying to tackle could be handled with the help of anthropology and its related sciences and by reference to theories of race. Below, we will examine the importance of “race” in the official national history thesis in more detail.

5. Race and Nationalist Imagination

If ethnic communities were often confused with races, that was because the racist discourse with its supposedly “scientific” notions had dominated any attempt at the examination of “the purely cultural and historical differences of *ethnies*”-especially between 1850 and 1945.²⁰⁶

The ideal of popular sovereignty had originally developed in the West; as it moved east, to the non-European nations, “it took on an increasingly populist form” - especially within the framework of ethnic nationalism- and led to the exaltation of “the people as the repository of truth and virtue and the embodiment of true national values”.²⁰⁷ From there, it was but a small step to racism; yet that did not mean that this step had to be taken.

If and when nationalism joined forces with racism, it was because racism could satisfy the need for rootedness crucial for all nationalisms in a definitive manner with the help of “science”. In its claim to absolute truth, racism resembled a civic religion²⁰⁸ –quite in line with nationalism itself. Yet one should not be led to believe that racism was a simple discriminatory policy tool that could be put to use by the nationalists whenever they needed. It was rather a well developed and focused world view on its own right.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶Smith, *National Identity*, pp. 21-22.

²⁰⁷Smith, “Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities”, p. 196.

²⁰⁸George Mosse, “Racism and Nationalism”, in Hutchinson and Smith (eds.), *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, vol. 4, p. 1383.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1382.

Yet, as was hinted above, the Turkish case was a bit more complicated; nationalist history writing in a way necessitated a conscious manipulation of the idea of race and required the assumed interchangeability of the concepts of ethnicity and race.

1. Turkish History Thesis and the Idea of Race

The national history thesis propounded by the Congress was predicated on the formation of a close tie between the ideas of nationality and of race. Even though most of the participants found it necessary to affiliate the theories of race with imperialism and Eurocentricism –in a way devaluing their scientific credentials and emphasizing their political uses-²¹⁰, the notion of race and theories of racism had considerable influence on the formation of the Turkish national history. In most of the papers Turk was used as the name of a race rather than a nation.

Among the theories of race, Gobineau’s work –entitled *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853) was probably the most influential one. Many of the participants of the Congress gave Gobineau reference in matters of race and explained his ideas in detail; yet, they then emphasized that such a theory based on the superiority of the Arian race was no longer scientifically tenable. Although the nationalist historians found it necessary to distance themselves from a notion that they associated with European imperialism, this distance was only rhetorical.

It seems that the project of the official history thesis was not only limited to the writing of the national history, but rather aimed at the re-writing of the world history in a Turcocentric way. This could only be achieved by fusing the notions of nationality/ethnicity and race together. It is possible to see in Afet İnan’s paper that the word “Turk” was explicitly being used to define a race: “ortaasiyadan bahsederken tek bir ırk düşünüyorum ve onun adına Türk diyorum.”²¹¹

The original idea that was the hallmark of the national history thesis and the biggest contribution of the Turkish intelligentsia to the cumulative fund of knowledge

²¹⁰ *BTTK*, pp. 45, 136, 606.

²¹¹ “When talking about Central Asia, I am envisioning a single race and I am calling it Turk.” *BTTK*, p. 31.

was expressed by İhsan Şerif Bey as follows: “Dünyaya şamil olan medeniyetin mebdesi ve menşei Ortaasiya yaylasıdır ve o medeniyetin naşir ve nakilleri de Türklerdir.”²¹²

Various participants, who tried to prove this point, freely and extensively quoted from European theorists. Of course, the works cited did not have any direct reference to Turks as such; but in their view that was only natural when one took into consideration the hostility and fear with which the European world viewed the Turks. The hostility and prejudice of the European scientists against the Turks was a recurrent theme throughout the Congress; the participants were convinced that their European counterparts were trying to down-grade the Turks out of spite and that this was understandable when one took into consideration the fear that the constant Turkish raids must have created in the collective European psyche throughout history.

Some of the participants started out by proving that Central Asia was the cradle of civilization. There was already a literature on that issue in Europe.²¹³ After all, the notion “Aryan” so popular among the Europeans was claimed to be Turkish in origin, deriving from the Turkish word “er” –which means man. The presumption was that those who founded the Western civilization –like all other civilizations worthy of praise- were the Turks. They had forgot about their origins once they had settled in Europe; but retained a memory of the land of the Arians, from where they came, at the depths of their collective memory. It was supposedly this memory that translated into the proliferation of theories about the Arians.²¹⁴ Thus, the Turkish history thesis was not against the existence of the Arian race or its superiority *per se*; their only opposition –or correction- was that this race was actually Turkic in origin.

Some of the participants who tried to use a more ‘scientific’ discourse, talked about the brachycephalous men rather than the Arians. Brachycephalous men had originated in Central Asia and then spread throughout the world, melting down the dolichocephalous races of the less-developed regions of the world in time and bringing civilization to the entire world.

Certain other papers referred to the notion of the Alpine man. After the credentials of the Alpine men -as the brachycephalous men that spread civilization throughout Europe- were firmly established by reference to foreign scientists, it was

²¹² “The origin of the civilisation that encompasses the world is the Central Asian plateau and the diffusers and transporters of that civilisation are the Turks.” *BTTK*, p. 15.

²¹³ *BTTK*, p. 39.

²¹⁴ *BTTK*, p. 40.

claimed that the Alpine men were Turks although their name was not explicitly cited by these scientists. To give but one example of this position: “muassır alimlerin Alp adamı dediği ve bizim daha doğru olarak Ata Türkler diye andığımız insanlar, yani kudret ve kabiliyet kaynağı harikalı soy”.²¹⁵ To recapitulate, human beings might have originated at different places simultaneously, but the human civilization was developed by one race exclusively, the Turkish race.

Taking these arguments in consideration, it is not possible to understand why there was a constant refusal of the ideas of Gobineau. Reşit Galip summarises the ideas of Gobineau in the following manner: the existence of completely different and distinct races in the world; the inequality of races in terms of their natural talents; the lack of ability of the black and the yellow races to develop civilization; the suitability of the Arian race to the development civilization; the fact that the whole human civilization was a work of this race; the unfortunate fact that in many places, this beautiful race had intermixed with lower races and lost its purity (with the purest ones being the Germans); the assumption that races would develop in proportion to the amount of white blood circulating in the veins of its members.

Actually, these assumptions also formed the basic tenets of the Turkish national history thesis. If we follow the order above: the autochthon population of the ancient Central Asia were Turks (brachycephalous, Alpine men or Arians); they were superior to other races inhabiting the rest of the world –as suggested by Reşit Galip in the following manner: “brakisefallerin bilhassa alplileri dolikosefallere nazaran biyolojik bir faikiyeti olduğu kabul edilmelidir”²¹⁶-; the Turks were the source of all human civilization which was the main proposition of the official history thesis. Other races cannot develop their own civilizations; they can achieve civilizational capacity only under the rule of Turks or in time, through thorough intermixing with the Turks, which eventually leads to an improvement of their racial qualities. Certain hybrid races had developed as a result of Turks’ intermingling with inferior races.

An important corollary of this line of argument was that the purest Turkish race could be found in Anatolia. Since Anatolia has been a constant route of passage for the

²¹⁵ “What the contemporary scientists term Alpine men and what we more correctly term the Ancestor-Turks, that is, the wonderful race which is the source of power and talent.” Reşit Galip Bey, “Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış”, *BTTK*, p. 110.

²¹⁶ “It should be accepted that the brachycephalous men, especially its Alpine type, have a biological superiority in relation to their dolichocephalous counterparts.” *BTTK*, p. 113.

Turkic peoples moving westwards since the Ancient times, it is no more possible to trace any remnants of a race predating brachycephalous. Here, one can clearly see how equating race with nation helped the scientists of the early Republican period to circumvent the question of the antiquity of the Turks in Anatolia –and the associated question of the Republic’s title to land. Reşit Galip explains this point in a manner that makes its political implications clear:

Yapılan antropolojik tetkiklerde ancak %5.5 nispetinde dolikosefal unsure bulunmuştur. Bu Anadolu’da yaşayan ırkın hiçbir saha ile kıyas edilemeyecek derecede Atalar vasfını muhafaza etmekte olduğunu apaçık gösterir...elde mevcut antropolojik tetkikler Anadolu’da dini ve siyasi sariikler ve dil ayrılığı dolayısıyla ayrı unsurlar halinde görülmüş olan Ermeniler, vs. gibi zümrelerin ve hatta mübadele edilen Rum ahalinin dahi aynı ırk tipi menşinden geldiklerini göstermektedir.²¹⁷

Since we know from prior arguments that this race was the Turkish race, the scientific proposition provided here translated into and legitimated the political assertion that the Anatolian population was a homogenous Turkish community and included no minorities whatsoever.

2. Object of National Beauty: The National Body

Racism was built upon “anthropology, history and –last but not least- a reawakened aesthetic consciousness” which it collectively melded into “a standard of human looks, beauty and behavior”.²¹⁸ It was no coincidence that anthropology –as well as certain other sciences concerned with the human body, such as physiognomy- originated at the same time as the formation of a new aesthetic ideal –that is, “the rediscovery of Greek sculpture popularized by J.J. Winckelmann”.²¹⁹ This new

²¹⁷ “In the anthropological investigations performed, the dolichocephalous element was found to be only 5.5%. This clearly shows that the race inhabiting Anatolia has preserved the quality of Ancestors to an extent that is beyond comparison to any other place...Present anthropological investigations show that groups of people, who have been considered as separate elements due to religious and political factors and linguistic differences, such as the Armenians, and even the Greek population which has been exchanged with Greece, are descended from the origin of the same race type.” *BTTK*, p. 134.

²¹⁸ George Mosse, “Racism and Nationalism”, pp. 1382-3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1385.

aesthetics served the need of the emergent industrial societies for both dynamism and order: it was based on harmony and proportion and “upon ‘quiet greatness’, projecting moderation as a cardinal principle of beauty”.²²⁰ Yet, this moderation was always accompanied with –and balanced by- a touch of activism and virility.

Parallel to these developments was the establishment of the link between body and mind during the second half of the 18th century, which led to a heightened interest in scientific works devoted to the deciphering human appearance –whether in anthropology, phrenology or physiognomy.²²¹

As the human body became both the basis and the ultimate symbol of the idea of race, there has been a proliferation of works concerned with the methods to “recognize on sight one’s own as against those of a different race”. Within racist literature, “the very construction of the human body, with its size, sinews, muscles and bones, were made to bear witness to the superiority or the inferiority of a race and its culture”.²²² The body structure not only expressed, but also naturalized and legitimized cultural difference.

The influence of such a line of thought was discernible in the First Turkish History Congress. There seems to be an obsession with the “beauty of the Turks” to such an extent that it becomes self-evident that beauty should be signifying something bigger than itself; this points to a racially organized world view. The Turks are beautiful because they are racially superior, because they are virtuous, because they are civilized, so on and so forth. Şevket Aziz links the beauty of the Turkish race to its capacity for civilization in the following manner:

Bendeniz Anadolu da gezdiğim zaman ne kadar saf, güzel velût Türk ırkına tesadüf ettim...Maddî mânevî inkişafı müsait, biyolojikman söylüyorum, mütakamil bir iskelete, ete ve kafaya, hamura malik bir beşer tipidir.²²³

Yet it is hard to be sure whether the participants of the Congress were really racists or they were reacting against the racist prejudices of the Europeans which deemed Turks ugly –and hence, racially and culturally inferior. It seems more plausible

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 1385.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 1387.

²²² Ibid., p. 1384.

²²³ “While traveling in Anatolia, I have encountered such pure, beautiful and prolific Turkish race... Biologically speaking, it is a human type befitting material and spiritual developments, possessing perfectly evolved bone structure, flesh, head and nature.” *BTTK*, p. 51.

that such a transformation in aesthetics influenced the Turks only by relation –by way of the image of beauty reflected back at them in the mirror of the West.

The participants repeatedly claimed that the view which regarded Turks as ugly was totally ungrounded.²²⁴ Another issue repeatedly emphasized was that the Turks definitely did not belong to the yellow race and had white skins.

Uzun boylu, uzun beyaz simalı, düz ve ya kemerli ince burnunlu, çok kere mavi gözlü ve göz kapakları çekik olarak değil ufki açılan Türk beyaz ırkın en güzel örneklerinden biridir.”²²⁵

Dr. Şevket Aziz summarizes the results of his research on the issue as follows: “vasatinin üstünde bir boy (167.59), brakisefal bir kafa, leptosop (ince uzun) bir burun, kulaklar vasati dediğimiz bir ebatta bulunuyor; mongol gözü yok...”²²⁶ Yet he does not stop there; he goes on to a demonstration of his findings and presents the Congress a Turkish family he picked up at random from a village near Ankara:

Ankaranın biraz şimalinde Bağlum köyünden Apdullahı, kadını ve küçük yavrusunu takdim ediyorum. İşte ince uzun burunlu, brakisefal ve antropoloji kitaplarında bu karakterlerle tavsif edilen halis dağlı adamı, alp adamı, Türk adamı. (alkışlar) Apdullah koyu olmayan gözlere, buğdaydan daha açık renkli kumral bıyıklara ve beyaz bir tene sahiptir. Fakat işte yavruları, saçları altın renkli olan bu yavru Türk ırkına mensuptur. (alkışlar) İşte Alp adamı...

İstikbale sessiz fakat çok ümit veren adımlarla ilerleyen Türk ırkını ve Türk neslini idame ettiren Türk yavrusuna bakınız. Asırlık ihmellere rağmen hala bereketli olarak ve bereket taşıyarak fıskıran uyanıklığı, kanilietleri kat’iyen mahvolmayan... Anadolu Türk köylüsüne bakınız.²²⁷

²²⁴ *BTTK*, p. 47.

²²⁵ “The Turks, who are tall and of long and white complexion, who have straight or aquiline but narrow noses and often blue eyes, and whose eye lids are not slanted but open up horizontally, are among the most beautiful examples of the white race.” Reşit Balip Bey, “Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış”, *BTTK*, p. 159.

²²⁶ “An above-average height (167.59 cm), a brachycephalous head, a leptosop (narrow and long) nose, ears of a size we term average; no Mongol eyes.” Şevket Aziz Bey, “Türklerin Antropolojisi”, *BTTK*, pp. 277.

²²⁷ “I present Apdullah, his wife and his little child from Bağlum, a village to a little north of Ankara. Here is the narrow and long nosed, brachycephalous man, the genuine mountain man described in the anthropology books with these characteristics, the Alpine man, the Turkish man. (Applause) Apdullah has eyes that are not dark, an auburn beard that is lighter than the color of wheat and a white skin. Yet here is their child; this child with golden hair is a member of the Turkish race. (Applause) Here is the Alpine man...

Look at the Turkish child who perpetuates the Turkish race and the Turkish generation which advance to the future with silent but quite promising steps. Look at the Anatolian

The participants, who argued that the norms of beauty which were thought to be the characteristics of the Europeans –like white skin, colored eyes and fair hair- were actually the characteristics of the Turks, were trying to establish once again the thesis that every good thing had to be of Turkish origins. As opposed to common belief, the Turks were not Europeanized; rather the Europeans were Turkified. In Reşit Galip’s words:

Bizim tipimizin Avrupalılaştığı değil fakat asılları protonegroit ve protoostraloit olan Avrupalıların Türklerin daimi akınları ve çok sıkı temasları neticesinde Türkleşerek bugünkü tipi aldıkları ve onları bu neticeye ulaştırabilmenin Türkler için pek zahmetli bir iş teşkil etmiş olduğu söylenebilir. (Alkışlar)²²⁸

To recapitulate, the racist views on the human body affected the intellectuals of the early Republican era in two ways: through the scientific literature on races and through a new understanding of human beauty fostered by the Europeans. In reaction, they imagined an ideal national body -combining all the physical traits affiliated with the Europeans and the qualities of control and virility; and they situated that body in the ideal un-spoilt Anatolian village. The beautiful homeland populated by the beautiful Turkish people; yet another myth of nationalism.

villager whose vigilance and talents that burst out abundantly and carrying abundance, are ultimately un-spoilt in spite of centuries of negligence.” *BTTK*, pp. 278.

²²⁸ “It can be said that our physical appearance did not Europeanize; but that the Europeans who had originally been proto-Negroid and proto-ostraloit, have been Turkified to acquire their present appearance as a result of the constant raids of and the close contact with the Turks; and that it has been quite a burdensome work for the Turks to be able to make them attain such a result.” *BTTK*, p. 158.

NATION IMAGINED AND THE FIRST TURKISH HISTORY CONGRESS

History of the Nations, beginning with our own, is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject. The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfillment of a “project” stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness.²²⁹

The primary aim motivating the project of producing an official history thesis and its accompanying history textbooks befitting the needs of the new Republic -which culminated in the convening of the First Turkish History Congress-, was providing the Turkish nation with such a historical narrative of its own. All nations require a glorified past, not only for self-esteem and international recognition but also for legitimating the revolutionary measures being undertaken in the name of the regeneration of the nation. Hence, the importance of an historical narrative tailored for the current purposes of the state. The new Republic was no exception to this case. There were traumatic transformations going on in the daily life of the people, which needed to be legitimated and naturalized; the new nation had to be homogenized through standardized education, leading to a higher level of unity; the loyalty of the nation to the homeland was to be strengthened for only then could people be expected to die for the defense of its borders; the self-esteem of the new nation needed to be repaired and the prejudices of the Western nations claiming cultural and racial superiority were to be countered; the new nation had to be supplied with a new identity which posed as ancient and authentic, as the true identity of the nation; the ensuing crisis of identity and security, resulting from the rapid dislocations that the new regime created, had to be overcome by locating the nation definitively in space and in time.

²²⁹ Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology”, p. 132.

We have previously underlined the importance of myth-making and of national history, which combine to produce a historicist national culture, in the formation of the national identity. The First Turkish History Congress, along with the new set of history textbooks which were its reason and result, contributed to the formation of a historicist discourse in Turkey. This discourse provided the context for the development of the Turkish national identity.

This new national identity was being formed along three axes: space, time and body. The nation had to be securely located in space and in time; the homeland had to be first defined and then glorified and the antiquity of the nation established. Meanwhile aesthetics of the ideal national body had to be formed. Providing myths in every one of these three axes, the participants of the Congress were actively attempting to construct the nation and its identity and culture. Aside from questions of the verifiability of the papers presented or the popular resonance and success of the project undertaken, this attempt alone makes the Congress crucial for the formation of the Turkish nation; and thus meaningful as an object of study.

The primary assumption of this thesis is that the nations are cultural constructs. Starting from this point, the next step was to figure out the nature of the act of construction that was involved in the making of the nations and nationalisms. Following Anderson, it is claimed that the overriding characteristic of act of the making of the nation is its imaginary quality; nations, nationalisms and nationalities are all imagined.

To be able to understand nations, nationalisms and nationalities, one needs to examine the methods of their construction. In this thesis, priority was given to the theories of Anthony D. Smith and especially his views on myths. Myth-making is one of the primary methods for the imagining/construction/invention of a nation. National myths become all the more potent for their intermingling with the national history, which is the main topic of this thesis: the national history thesis -and the First Turkish History Congress in which it was stated for the first time in its fully developed form- are treated not so much as instances in the development of the discipline of history, but rather as instances in the development of a new nation in need of new myths.

In the early Republican period, the new regime was trying to locate its designated nation in space and in time. The new state had new frontiers which needed to be naturalized and historicized in order to become suitable to be worshiped and which required protection against counter-claims to title. It was trying to establish an image of

Anatolia as a glorious and beautiful homeland; as the land of the Turks from almost time immemorial.

The task of establishing the antiquity of the nation was a parallel and interrelated undertaking. In order for nationalism to be able act as the new 'civic religion', it was necessary to endow the nation with an ever-existing quality. Only a nation which has always been there, could gather enough attraction for the members of the new/modern nation who were in search of identity and meaning in life; and only then it would be possible to imagine that the nation would always be there, thus providing the security sought by men who had lost faith in the magic of life.

In order to accomplish these effects, the new regime utilized history –when history was not enough by itself, it was backed up by anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and geography. The use of all these scientific disciplines provided the nation with an aura of truth. Yet geared to the formation of a national –and a nationalist history- they provided more material for myth-making than for scientific knowledge. This was an intended outcome: national history required the legitimacy conferred to it by the academic discourses; yet if it remained purely academic, it would have no policy value for the regime. The First Turkish History Congress clearly demonstrated all these points; in contrast to all the scientific jargon utilized, its main aim was to develop a simple thesis of history that could be disseminated through the education system and that could capture the imagination of the members of the new nation. The Congress and the history text-books it propagated contributed to the development of all kinds of new myths, from those of ethnic descent to those of golden age. Ultimately, all these efforts combined and went into the creation of a nationalist historicist culture and its accompanying Romantic discourse.

The final element which was required by the national narrative was the ideal national body of the ideal national man; he was to be situated in the temporal and spatial location secured for the nation. This process was to a large extent affected by the race theorist and the aesthetic notions of human beauty. Proving the beauty of the national body was as crucial for the nationalist intelligentsia as was providing the nation a solid standing in temporal-spatial terms.

To recapitulate, the national history thesis and the project of the development of nationalist history textbooks – and the convention of the First Turkish History Congress which was their result and their symbol- were all parts of a conscious effort on the behalf of the new regime -and the intelligentsia which aimed to gain power by relating

to that regime- to create or direct the creation of the national myths required by the new nation, contributing to the formation of a new national identity. Only the state power could undertake such an ambitious project of social engineering. The formation of a modern nation was first and foremost dependent upon the extensive use of the state apparatus, making possible the diffusion of the nationalist sentiments on a wide scale: for instance, one can hardly think of the creation of a homogeneous nation without standardized mass education. When thinking about the Turkish nationalism, one should keep in mind that the early Republic was the first time that mass literacy and standardized education system came into being in Turkey; this gave the new regime a tremendous amount of power over its population.

To return to where we began, all these characteristics provide only a general framework for the Turkish nationalism and locate its position among other nationalisms with reference to certain typologies and general theories of nationalism. Anderson claims that what differentiates a nation from all the others is not its imagined quality, but the style in which it is imagined. If this is true, then we should concern ourselves not with the main axes of the nation-formation, but –so to speak- with the coordinates that the nation occupies along those axes: all national narratives try to locate the nation along temporal, spatial and bodily axes; what differentiates one nation from the other is the exact location it occupies in the conjuncture of these three axes.

In the hope of acquiring a sense of the specific location occupied by the Turkish nationalism –of finding traces of its distinctive qualities-, this thesis undertook a close examination of the papers presented in the First Turkish History Congress. The peculiarities of the Turkish nationalist discourse coincided with the limits of the national imagination: there were so many things that the nation could not be, to the extent that it was defined by them. It developed in reaction to its Ottoman past, to Islam, to its position within the world-system, to its European counterparts and to its minority populations -to name but a few of them. The strategies adopted by the intelligentsia to circumvent all those things that the nation should and could not have been, more often than not, gave the Turkish nationalism its distinctive coloring.

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