

“Guided Modernization” in Turkey: From Young Turks to Kemalists

Zan Tao Dong Zhenghua*

Abstract: The Young Turks (Unionists), being commonly regarded as the first generation of Turkish enthno-nationalists of the late Ottoman Empire, aimed at saving the Ottoman state in the late 19th and early 20th century through both Turkifying and modernizing projects.

The Young Turks, however, failed their mission to save the Ottoman Empire in effect, yet their course continued in the name of Kemalists/Kemalism in the Turkish Republic after 1923.

There is a clear historical continuity between the Unionists and Kemalists.

The Young Turks and Kemalists and their reforms represent the Turkish elites’ top-down efforts to install European-style modernity in their society.

The Turkish journey to modernity is a transformation under the tutelage of the state and cultural elites. We call this type of transformation “guided modernization”.

Keywords: Guided Modernization, Young Turks, Nationalism, Secularism

*: Zan Tao (zantao@pku.edu.cn), Peking University, Beijing, P R. China; Dong Zhenghua (EE4, dongzh@pku.edu.cn), Peking University, Beijing, P. R. China

More than a century has gone by since the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Today, when we try to look back at that revolution and commemorate it, it is not easy to assert that it has got the final evaluation in the modern history of Turkey.

History serves as a bridge linking the past and the present.

To understand today’s Turkey, a country where the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) has established a long-term rule under the tutelage of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the traditional Kemalist secularists headed by the People’s Party (CHP) and the Turkish Armed Forces are, to a large extent, being marginalized and challenged.

This paper mainly explores two aspects—the nationalism and secularism, which constituted the basis of Kemalism and the most important dimensions to understand modern Turkey.

Young Turks were the first group of nationalists who wanted to save the Ottoman state/empire through both Turkifying and modernizing it (a process of nationalization and modernization).

The Young Turks failed their mission to save the Ottoman Empire in effect, yet their course continued in the name of Kemalism in the Turkish Republic, although for a long time the Kemalists have denied that they are the successors of the Young Turk Revolution.

It is going to argue, in this paper, that the Young Turks and Kemalists and their reforms represented the Turkish elites' continuous top-down experiment to install European-style modernity in their society.

The Turkish journey to modernity is a transformation under the tutelage of the state and cultural elites.
[1]

We call this type of transformation “guided modernization”, which is coined by the authors inspired by the so-called “guided democracy”.

“Guided democracy” is also called “managed democracy”.

Such governments are legitimized by elections that are free and fair, but do not change the state's policies, motives, and goals.

“Managed democracy” is centered on containing electoral politics; it is cool, even hostile toward social democracy beyond promoting literacy, job training, and other essentials for a society struggling to survive in the global economy.

“Managed democracy” is democracy systematized.”[2] define the modernization in Turkey during the Young Turks [3] and Kemalist period a guided modernization.

As will be argued in later parts of this paper, by using “guided Following the definition of “guided democracy”, in this paper we modernization”, we mainly refer to the state elites dominated, top-down features of Turkish modernization during the discussed period.

[1]: Here, we accept Metin Heper's division of state elites (including technocrats and officers) and political elites (politicians on behalf of different interest groups). See Metin Heper, “The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics”, *Journal of International Affairs*, fall 2000,

[2]: Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 47; see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guided_democracy. Accessed Dec. 18, 2021; as for further discussions of guided democracy, please refer to Jose Arsenio Torres, “The Political Ideology of Guided Democracy”, *The Review of Politics*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 34-63

[3] The modernization efforts of Ottoman Empire from Selim IN to the Zanzimat reforms of 19th century could all be regarded as top-down experiments, but only the Young Turks are real nationalist elites who controlled the state power during the last days of the Ottoman Empire. So, in this paper, we only focus on the history of Turkey since Young Turks

I. Changing Images of Young Turks in Historiography

Every nation writes her national history from the remotest time to the present.

Official history writings, however, have always proved themselves the products of nationalist/partizan ideology in the long run.

Especially in countries founded on/ after a revolution, whether a significant one or not, there exist different types of so called “revolutionary histories” As John K. Fairbank would put it, “great revolutions naturally try to revolutionize the history of the era which preceded them.” [4]

In the same sense, we would like to argue that the Young Turks have been revolutionized by the historical narratives of Kemalist Turkey.

After the establishment of Turkish Republic in the year 1923, Kemalists of Turkey began to rewrite their national history under the scrutiny of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

A generation of Kemalist historians, with Afet Inan and Enver Ziya Karal as their outstanding models, were seen to be growing up in the Kemalist era.

Afet Inan, Atatürk’s adopted daughter, is the most important figure in the making of Turkish History Thesis (Türk Tarih Tezi) [5].

And both the two persons were active in the writing of Ottoman history and the history of Turkey’s National Independence.

When we read their works, which are similar to the official history textbooks in Turkey, we realize and understand the basic logic and the thoughts concerning the Kemalists’ attitudes towards their nation and the revolution they have won.

In short, they argue that the modern Turkish Republic is a completely new state, and a creation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Savior (Haldskar) of the Turkish people.

Professor Erik J. Ziircher may be one of the most noted scholars who launched a systematic criticism on the Turkish official historiography.

Ziircher criticized the historians before him in his way — “there is an overwhelming tendency among historians of the period — both in Turkey and abroad — to see events, and especially political conflicts, through the eyes of the victor, i.e. Mustafa Kemal.

As we shall see, his is a very partizan view.”[6]

He pointed out that this outlook of the official historiography of the Republic had a political mission. It emphasized the break with the Ottoman past and, in particular, with the immediate preceding Young Turk period because “the Kemalist leadership had captured a nationalist resistance movement initiated by the former Young Turk leadership and supported by its rank and file, and transformed it into a new party and a new state.

The former Young Turk leaders and Atatürk’s comrades-in-arms from the days of the national resistance movement were purged politically in 1925-1926 [7], but the legitimacy of the new regime demanded that their memory should be erased as well” [8]

[4] Albert Feuerwerker and S. Cheng, Chinese Communist Studies of Modern Chinese History, Harvard East Asia Monographs, 1961, "Foreword"

[5] Türk Tarih Tezi is a historical theory full of novelty and myths. Its main contents will be referred later in this paper. For the role of Afet Inan in the process of formation of Türk Tarih Tezi, see Ari Inan, Prof. Dr: Afet Inan, Tstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2005

[6] Eric Jan Zürcher, Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic: The Progressive Republican Party, 1024-1025, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. YII.

[7] A conspiracy to assassinate Atatürk was uncovered in İzmir in June 1926. Some of the former Unionists were accused of having supported the plot. In the same year two trials were opened with the purpose of sweeping the Unionist, with whose presence Atatürk felt insecure for his politics. Erik Jan Zürcher, Turkey: 4 Modern History, London: LB.Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1993, p. 182.

[8] Erik Jan Zürcher, From Empire to Republic Problems of Transition, Continuity and Change, website of Leiden University: <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/teimo/tulp/Research/Fromtorep.htm>. Accessed Dec. 10, 2018.

The fact is that the official discourse of the Turkish history of National Independence was articulated by Atatürk himself, who made a six-day speech (which was later simply referred to as Nutuk [9] in Turkey) in 1927.

In Nutuk, with plenty of deliberately selected documents, Atatürk showed, related and interpreted the Turkish history of National Independence which was said to begin from May 19, 1919, the day when Atatürk himself landed at Samsun.[10]"

Nutuk set up the official standard version for the future history writing in Turkey concerning the role of Atatürk in the national struggle and his interpretation about the whole process of the Turkish revolution itself.

As observed by Hülya Adak,

"Nutuk described the heroic accounts of the Independence Struggle of Turkey against the Allies (1919-1922), particularly the military leadership of Mustafa Kemal during the Struggle, with much hyperbole.

The speech foregrounded the role of its narrator in Turkish history at the expense of defaming or ignoring the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph, the roles of the leading figures in the nationalist struggle and the establishment of the republic." [11]

Concerning the reason for the delivery of Nutuk, Professor Ziircher also argued that "... the speech is not really a survey of modern Turkish history at all.

It is a vindication of the purges of 1925-1926 and criticism of the former leaders of the PRP is its main theme...

In what is obviously a distortion of the historical truth, it presents the independence struggle not as one to preserve parts of the Ottoman Empire, but as a movement for the establishment of a new Turkish state.[12]

What is clear for us is that, with their long-term and experienced underground organizations and activities, the Unionists or the Young Turks played an important role in the Turkish National Movement [13], but their role and contributions to the transition of the history from Empire to Republic, to a large extent, had been consciously overlooked or marginalized in the Kemalist official history writings for both political and ideological reasons.

[9] Nutuk is a 36-hour speech given by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at Ankara before the deputies and representatives of the Republican People's Party in 1927. The speech lasted for six days. The original text of the speech is Ottoman Turkish, while we can easily find the modern Turkish version (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Nutuk, Cilt 1, T, 11, İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1973.) and the English version (4 Speech Delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İstanbul: Ministry of Education Printing Plant, 1963).

[10] Nutuk begins with "1919 senesi Mayısının 19uncu günü Samsuna giktun (I landed at Samsun on the 19th May, 1919)". In this way, Atatürk wanted to tell the Turkish nation that his first step on the land of Anatolia marked the beginning of Turkish revolution and the work to construct a new state. And since then, only the "I" was staying at the center of the whole following process, and it is also the same "I" that created the victory of Turkish revolution.

[11] Hülya Adak, "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal", South Atlantic Quarterly, 102: 2/3, Duke University Press, 2003, p. 509.

[12] Erik Jan Zürcher, Turkey: A Modern History, p. 183.

[13] See Erik Jan Zürcher, Unionist Factors, The Unionist Factor. The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926, Leiden: Brill, 1984.

The contribution by Professor Zürcher to our understanding of the Young Turks mainly lies in the fact that, by exploiting plenty of detailed historical documentations, he presented us a different version of the Turkish modern political history.

However, Zürcher did not stop hereafter.

He continues to draw our attention by distinguishing "Young Turks" [14] from "young Turks" (both Unionists and Kemalists).

In his book *Turkey: A Modern History*, the second part titled “The Young Turk Era in Turkish History” encompasses the years of 1908-1950.

Zürcher explains that it “reflects the belief that, in spite of the break-up of the empire in 1918 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, politically, ideologically and economically, there is a great deal of continuity”[15].

He also added, “under the ‘young Turks’, Turkey went through the same political cycle twice, first under the regime of the Committee of Union and Progress (1908-1918) and again when ruled by the ‘Kemalists’, the Association for the Defence of the National Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia and its successor, the People’s Party.

In each case, the cycle consisted of a liberal and pluralist phase (1908-1913 and 1919-1925 respectively), followed by an authoritarian repressive phase, which combined an effective one-party system, political, economic and cultural nationalism and modernizing and secularizing reforms (1913-1918 and 1925-1950 respectively).[16]

[14] Zürcher defines it as “a group of modern-educated bureaucrats and officers, who became active in the 1890s and organized the constitutional revolution of 1908, to modernize and so strengthen state and society on the basis of a positivist and increasingly nationalist set of ideas”. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, p. 4.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

As the above arguments can tell, at least in the period of 1908-1950, there is an obvious historical continuity between the Unionists and Kemalists, both of whom could be identified as “young Turks”. There would be little doubt if we would convince people that, to a large extent, the modern Turkey is a creation of the young Turks and their reforms (as a pursuit for European modernity).

So, following Zürcher’s approach, the question — “how to understand the contemporary Turkey” — as we have raised at the beginning of this paper, could be equated, by and large, with the question that “how to understand the legacies of the young Turks”.

II. From Ottomanism to Turkish Nationalism

Young Turks is a group of people who grew up during the transition period from Ottoman Empire to a Turkish nation state.

The time when Young Turks showed up (came onto) at the historical stage was not a golden era of Turkish people any more.

The glory and honor of the Ottoman-Turkish conquerors had become something that hid in a remote past.

Outside, the Ottoman state suffered greatly from the successive defeats of wars with Russia and other European nations.

Domestically, since the early 19th century, influenced and encouraged by the European trend of nationalism, non-Muslim peoples began to seek a more nationalistic policies and independent status. Till the late 19th century, the Ottoman state had lost the control over its economic power, while much of its European territories had acquired their independence or autonomy.

The Empire was wandering at the edge of collapse.

Under these circumstances, it could be said that Young Turks were also in the right time to take up the task to save/preserve the Ottoman country.

The Turkish nationalism has always been so fascinating a topic to be discussed by both scholars and journalists.” [17]

The debates over Turkish nationalism are basically centered on the Kemalist version of Turkish identity and its possible change.

Kemalist nationalism took its root, culturally and politically, in the ideology of Turkism (Türkçülük) [18] which began to gain popularity in the Ottoman Empire under the Young Turks in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Turkism in Turkey is a nationalist ideology that emerged during the process of decline of the Ottoman Empire, which was finally transformed from a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state into a relatively homogeneous nation state with Turkish people as the majority.

As Lieven pointed out, “in 1850-1918 the key dilemma of empire was how, on the one hand, to hold together polities of great territory, population and therefore power, and on the other, to square this priority with satisfying the demands of nationalism, democracy and economic dynamism.” [19]

[17] For example, we can refer to the Turkish Daily News, in which some columnists had discussed the nature of Turkish nationalism. See November 30, 2005, September 11, 2005 and September 12, 2005

[18] In this paper, Turkism is defined as an ethnic nationalism emerged among the Turkish speaking Muslim elites in the Ottoman Empire.

[19] Dominic Lieven, “Dilemmas of Empire 1850-1918, Power, Territory, Identity”, Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 34, no. 2 (Apr., 1999), p. 165

This description could also be applied to discuss the conditions of Ottoman Empire in the same period.

In general, the 19th century can be characterized as a century of national unification and the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire were the first to explore the meaning of nationalist ideology. The Serbs were the first collective group to launch a national uprising against the ruling Ottomans in February 1804.

“In 1815, a second Serbs rising was more successful and won them recognition as an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty.

The Greek uprising a few years later evoked widespread European support and achieved a sovereign independent Greek kingdom.” [20]

In the end, Sultan Mahmud [I] had to accept the independence of Greece, and autonomous Serbia and Egypt.

From the historical works, we learned that the Turkish speaking people were the last ethnic group in the Empire to realize the new trend of nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

To this, Ziya Gökalp explained, “the ideal of nationalism appeared [in the Ottoman Empire] first among the non-Muslims, then among the Albanians and Arabs, and finally among the Turks.

The fact that it appeared last among the Turks was not accidental: The Ottoman state was formed by the Turks themselves.

The state is a nation already established (*nation de fait*), whereas the ideal of nationalism meant the nucleus of a nationality based on will (*nation de volonte*).

With intuitive cautiousness, the Turks were reluctant, in the beginning, to endanger a reality for the sake of an ideal.

Thus, Turkish thinkers believed not in Turkism but in Ottomanism”. [21]

So, it will not be surprising to note that, in 1901, the CUP strongly rejected the notion that the organization was “Turkish” in reply to a letter sent to the CUP from Albania, which considered the CUP to be a “Turkish” organization:

“Let us state first of all that the writer of the letter has no right to call us Turkish.

Our organization consists of more than ten thousands members.

Among them, there are people of Arabic, Turkish, Albanian, Kurdish, Armenian, Laz, Greek, Jewish, Druze origins...

Therefore, unlike the Europeans, we do not recognize a Turkish government.

We recognize only the Ottoman government, which has been subject to the abominable acts of a tyrant.

Our opinion about this has already been demonstrated in the choice of a name for our organization...

Thus, our aspiration to live in unity means not adhering to the sect or language of any ethnicity. ” [22]

[20] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002, p. 34.

[21] Ziya Gokalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gokalp*, translated and edited with an introduction by Niyazi Berkes, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, pp. 71-72.

[22] Cf Zana Gitak, *Nationalism and Religion: A Comparative Study of the Development of Secularism in France and Turkey*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Boston University, 2004, p. 148

Before the mid-1900s, the CUP consisted of people who believed in Ottomanism.

Even Ottomanism, however, is a new and modern phenomenon in the history of the Empire.

It could be said that the Ottomanism is an reaction to the non-Muslim nationalist movements within the Empire.

The Tanzimat era (1839-1876), starting from the proclamation of the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu* (Imperial Rescript), witnessed a large-scale reforms of various aspects of the Ottoman society.

The *Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu* was in fact a declaration of certain rights and political reforms, which introduced a new meaning to Ottoman citizenship. [23]

It was a statement of intent on the part of the Ottoman government, promising in effect four basic reforms: (1) the establishment of guarantees for the life, honor and property of the sultan's subjects; (2) an orderly system of taxation to replace the system of tax-farming; (3) a system of conscription for the army; (4) equality before the law of all subjects, whatever their religion. [24]

The core argument of these doctrines was that it places its legitimacy on the basis of preventing the likely disintegration of the Ottoman Empire along ethnic and religious lines.

It is hard to say that the reformers of Tanzimat wanted to build a homogeneous Ottoman nation "based on will out of an existing 'nation' composed of several nationalities and religions" [25] rather, it is just an effort with the purpose of uniting all the different elements, ethnical or religious, within the Empire.

There was no assimilation tone in its earlier version of Ottomanism.

In our understanding, Ottomanism for the reformers of the Tanzimat era is, to some extent, similar with federalism.

Unfortunately, nationalism, for the minorities, can be described as a kind of drug which is difficult to cast off for those who have become addicted to it.

As observed by Gokalp, "painful experiences proved that this new meaning of 'Ottoman' had been welcomed by no one save the originators of the term.

Inventing this new conception was not only useless but also detrimental, for it gave rise to harmful consequences for the state and the nationalities, and especially for the Turks themselves.” [26]

[23] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire*, New York: Basic Books, 2005, pp. 447-451

[24] Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, p. 53

[25] Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, p. 72.

[26] *Ibid.*

As time passed by, Ottomanism would gain a new and different meaning for the Turkish elites.

In general, the non-Muslim people in the Empire showed no adherence to the principles of Ottomanism.

Instead, they tried their best to utilize the rights that the new constitution of 1876 granted to them to defend and legitimize their own attempts of pursuing national interests.

The Young Ottomans, a group of bureaucratic intellectuals who were active during the period from 1867 to 1878, blamed the Tanzimat reforms for their superficial Westernization.

They sought for more radical reforms including a representative political system.

They believed in the reconcilability between Western sciences and Islamic values.

The Young Ottomans supported the value/concept of Ottomanism in the sense of patriotism as a means to survive the Ottoman state.

For the first time in the Ottoman history, Namik Kemal, the most prominent figure of the Young Ottomans, came up with the concept of vatan (fatherland) much popular as a framework of allegiance for all Ottomans, [27] despite the diversity in race, ethnic origin, religion and sect. However, it is also Namik Kemal who wrote on 30 August 1878 as follows:

“While we must try to annihilate all languages in our country except Turkish, shall we give Albanians, Lazs and Kurds a spiritual weapon by adopting their own characters?

... Language...may be the firmest barrier-perhaps firmer than religion-against national unity.” [28]

And on September 13 the same year, Namik Kemal added in his writing:

“Certainly it is impossible to encourage the spread of our language among Greeks or Bulgarians, but it is surely possible among Albanians and Lazs, namely, Muslims.

If we set up regular schools in their countries and carry out the programs which are now not fulfilled, Laz and Albanian languages will be utterly forgotten in twenty year.” [29]

From Namık Kemal's thoughts showed in his late years, we can conclude that, to some extent, Ottomanism in the Empire would inevitably lead to a sort of Turkification. [30]

And it did happen in the coming days especially after the Young Turks took the power.

Turkism in Ottoman Empire aimed to inspire a kind of Turkish national consciousness among the Ottoman Turkish speaking people.

When the press began to discuss the concept of being a “Turk” and having Anatolia as the central part of a homeland, the fundamental features for the construction of a modern nation were invoked: language, education, press, public opinion, and homeland.

For a long time, the notion of being a Turk was seen as compatible with the concepts of Ottomanism and Islamism. [31]

[27] Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, pp. 330-331

[28] Cf Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, p. 3

[29] Ibid.

[30] Talat Bey, a prominent figure of CUP, said that by the terms of the Constitution equality of Mussulman and Ghiaur was affirmed, but “this is an unrealizable ideal. The Sheriat, our whole past history and the sentiments of hundreds of thousands of Mussulmans and even the sentiments of the Ghiaurs themselves, who stubbornly resist every attempt to Ottomanize them, present an impenetrable barrier to the establishment of real equality.” The British ambassador then, Sir Gerald Lowther remarked that “the policy of ‘Ottomanizaiton’ is one of pounding the non-Turkish elements in a Turkish mortar.” Bemard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 218-219.

[31] Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic*, London: Hurst & Company, 1997, pp. 61-63

With rapid loss of its European territories, the Ottoman Empire began to become more homogeneous in population, which facilitated the adoption of Turkism as a state policy. [32]

In 1910s, when Ziya Gokalp, the most important ideologue of Turkism, came to Salonika, his lectures about Turkism received positive responses from the CUP memebers, among whom Musatafa Kemal was one of the audiences. [33]

Clearly, it could be observed that the environment for the emergence of Turkish nationalism was changing.

In the history of Young Turks, Turkism evolved into a dominant nationalist ideology only after the 1912-1913 Balkan War, during which the Balkan nations rebelled against the original Ottomanism, and the Ottoman Empire lost almost all of its European territories for good.

To hold the loyalty of the rest of the people, Islamism in the first place won its unprecedented dominance in the policy making of the Empire.

But soon after the Albanians and Arabians were also found in an enthusiastic mood of nationalism, the Turkish speaking people had to admit that only the Turkish element was reliable in the Empire. What is clear here is that the Turkish speaking people in power were compelled to adopt Turkism. In this period, the CUP leaders refused to accept any Arabian member.

Turkism and Turkification were their preferred choices.

Earlier in October 1911, the CUP reached an agreement saying the other nations in the Empire could only keep practicing their religions and they had to learn to use Turkish.

There were some more radical people who proposed to colonize and then Turkify the Arabian areas, making the Arabians forget their history and language, and then find opportunity to make Turkish the language of Islam.

In 1916, the Young Turk government promulgated a law of language, according to which the files and letters in economic activities had to be in Turkish.

Later, the train tickets in the Arabian areas began to be printed in Turkish and German instead of Arabic.

The CUP intentionally raised the status of the Turkic speaking immigrants from Central Asia, for they were deemed to belong to the same race as Turkish speaking people in the Ottoman Empire. [34]

[32] Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger: How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey*, London: Granta Books, 2006, p. 6; Veli Yadirgi, *The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 79.

[33] Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey*, Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 1999, p. 96

[34] About these cases, see Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *Turkey: 4 Past and a Future*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917

In the history of Turkish nationalism, it is the Young Turks who for the first time tried to Turkify the state by adopting various nationalist policies in the area of economy, education and politics.

In the last days of the Empire, Ottomanism had the same meaning with Turkism for the Young Turks. After the Empire died, the cause of Turkism continued and culminated in Kemalist Turkey.

We should recognize that the continuity of nationalism from Unionists to Kemalists lies in the evolutionary process from Turkism to Turkish History Thesis.

After the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923, nationalism became one of the most important pillars of Kemalism.

Turkish History Thesis, [35] which symbolized the climax of Turkish nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey, was formulated by Kemalist historians in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Turkism and Turkish History Thesis employed similar logic of reasoning.

The Thesis inherited the cultural legacy of Turkism.

Both ideologies reinterpreted the Turkish history and tradition by returning to the pre-Islamic past. Islamic Past should be erased. 'What is more important for us to notice is that the Turkification policies adopted by the CUP were mainly towards the Arabs and Armenians in the Empire, while in the Republic, the similar assimilation was extended to and implemented in the Kurdish areas.

According to the Thesis, the Anatolian Kurds were also essentially and originally "Turks" who lived in the mountains and forgot their Turkish identity. [36]

In Kemalist Turkey, all the students were asked to recite loudly "Türküm, Doğrum, Çalışkanım... (I am a Turk, honest and diligent)" at the beginning of class.

There was no room for separate ethnic groups.

After 1925 Kurdish insurrection led by Sheikh Said, the assimilation policies by the Turkish state were intensified.

The most famous of the measures was a campaign named "Vatandaş, Türkçe konuş!" (Citizen, speak Turkish!).

The Turkish language, in this way, was used as a main tool to Turkify the Anatolian Kurds, Arabs, Circassians, Laz, Albanians and other Muslim ethnic groups.[37]

[35] Tarih I, İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2001 (1932). For a general description of the Thesis, see Afet İnan, "Atatürk ve Tarih Tezi", Belleten, vol. 3, Ankara, 1939.

[36] İmail Besikçi, Türk Tarih Tezi, Güneş-Dil Teorisi ve Kürt Sorusu, İstanbul: Komal Yayınları, 1977.

[37] A. Yıldız, Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene, İstanbul: Tletisim, 2001, pp. 286-290.

The failure of Ottomanism to unite the different elements of the Empire despite of different ethnic or religious origins led the Turkish elites (both Young Turks and Kemalists) to adopt a parochial version of Nationalism.

The reasons for the failure of Ottomanism to a great extent lies in: (1) The Europeans did not want to see a united Ottoman state, rather, their long lasting dream was to keep it weak and controlled or

dissolve it; (2) Non-Muslim and non-Turkish elements were supported by the Europeans publicly or secretly to weaken the Ottoman Empire and solve the so-called “East question” once for all.

So, it is understandable that the Young Turks in the last days of the Empire were in effect forced to adopt a policy of Turkism.

The Kemalist regime was established on the relics of the Ottoman Empire.

Fearful with the similar fate of the Empire, the new nation-state committed itself to the construction of a homogeneous state from the onset.

Even today, when we try to understand the so-called minority issues in Turkey, we have to be aware that it is a consequence of part of that history.

3. Secularism in Turkey

Since the beginning of modern history, the relationship between Islam and modern state/society (or modernity) has occupied the minds of many generations of Muslims.

The debates over this issue continue till today.

In the Turkish case, the question around the role of Islam was raised with the so-called decline of the Ottoman Empire. [38]

For a very long time, the decline thesis had dominated the writing of history of the late Ottoman Empire.

At least since the 1980s, Ottomanists have rejected the decline thesis. [39]

Before the Young Turks, there is no serious questioning that Islam itself should be responsible for the so-called decline of Ottoman Empire.

Even the 19th century Tanzimat reform movement (1839-1878) was carried out in the name of promoting Islam.[40]

With more and more military defeats in battles with their European rivalries, the Ottoman Empire had to retreat from their frontiers in Europe.

But this does not mean the beginning of decline of the Empire, rather adjustments of their policies. After their major defeat at Carlowitz in 1699, the Ottomans had to learn new concepts and new ways in dealing with European states.

The superiority of European military technology had to be recognized.

This led to the acceptance of a shocking idea to Muslims that they had to learn from previously despised “inferior infidel.”

The Ottoman sultans Selim I (1789-1807) and Mahmud II, the Reformer (1808-39) were the first to acknowledge this reality.

The need for “modernization” of the Empire was initially intended to be limited to military technologies only.

But with the coming of ‘Western teachers and the technologies and ideas they brought in, the Ottomans began to realize that to modernize and save their Empire, they might be forced to undergo a wholesale process of transformation (Westernization) — technically, institutionally, culturally, and even psychologically.

[38] Ahmet T. Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, chapter 7.

[39] Donald Quataert, “Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes towards the Notion of ‘Decline’, *History Compass*, 1 (2003) ME 038, pp. 1-9.

[40] Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gulhane Rescript”, *Die Welt des Islams, New Series*, vol. 34, issue 2 (Nov., 1994), pp. 173-203

The Tanzimat leaders aimed to reform important institutions of Ottoman society at different levels according to the European styles.

In fact, Ottomanism signified the beginning of secularization in the Empire, for the idea that all the peoples despite their religious or ethnic origins were equal before law was so revolutionary to the traditional Islamic millet idea and system.[41]

In addition to this, certain trials of secularization in other fields such as education, law and administration emerged.

Modern schools of Western styled education were founded: secular courts were established and Western legal codes (particularly French model) were adopted; a new administrative system was designed according to the French model.

However, the Tanzimat reformers left traditional Islamic institutions such as religious schools and courts out of their reforming efforts.

And Islam continued to provide the framework of legitimacy for reforms.

The result that the Zanzimat reforms brought in was the formation of a dual structure where the secular institutions were set up alongside the traditional ones, with the latter untouched.

The task to reconcile Islam with the Western modern science and technology was taken up by the Young Ottomans.

The Young Oftomans emerged as being specifically opposed to the era of the Tanzimat.

According to Elie Kedourie, this opposition was an outcome of the political reformation itself. [42]
“They were the first organised opposition group from the Ottoman intelligentsia to use the ideas of the Enlightenment and attempt to [try] modernization with Islam.” [43]

The Young Ottomans believed that the Tanzimat movement did not have a solid ideological or ethical basis; instead the means to reform the state could be found in Islam.

For Namik Kemal, the principle of meşveret (representative government) was in strong conformity with the Sharia.[44]

In this way, he made Islam the framework for the justification of a Westernizing practice, and the Islamic law, in Kemal’s opinion, “already provided a set of fundamental political principles to guide statesmen”. [45]

So, we can find that for the Young Ottomans, Islam was not the root of the backwardness of the Empire.

On the contrary, it was the lack of compliance with Islam that led to the depressing presence.

[41] The millet system was characterized by religious and cultural autonomy of different groups. Thus, the separation was between Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Lazs, Alevis), Christians (Armenians, Greeks), and Jews in the Empire. The number of millers changed throughout the Ottoman history. New millets were created as a consequence of pressure from the great Western powers. For instance, while there were nine recognized millets, of which six were fairly large in 1875, there were seventeen in 1914. Kemal K. Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundation of Nationalism in the Ottoman States: From Social Estates to Classes, from Millets to Nation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 88-89; for a general discussion about the millet system, see Tiber Ortayli, “The Ottoman millet system and its social dimensions”, in Rikard Larsson, ed., *Boundaries of Europe?*

Holland: Cordon Art B. V, 1998, p. 123

[42] Elie Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 50.

[43] Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent*, p. 55

[44] Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pp. 81, 308.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

When history came to the era of Young Turks, a group of people who were educated in medical and military schools, the situation began to change.

These people received European currents of thoughts like biological materialism, which increasingly alienated them from their Islamic society and their value system.[46]

In general, the Young Turks were alienated from Islam, although CUP politicians still used the religion as a political tool, but just a tool for themselves.

What matters in their belief was to change the structure of the Ottoman society in accordance with scientific principles as well as replacing religion with science as the foundation of society.

Once acquiring the political power, they would implement their modernizing projects without hesitation.

In January 1913, the CUP began to monopoly the Ottoman state power.

Using the master position in its own house, the CUP could force through a programme of political and social reforms.

Besides the administrative reforms in Army, central government and the provincial administration, the more influential aspect of reforms was the further secularization of the judicial and educational systems and the further undermining of the position of the ulema.

In 1916, the Seyhüislam, the highest religious dinitary, was removed from the cabinet and during the next year his jurisdiction was limited on all sides.

In 1917, the Seri (religious law) courts were brought under the control of the (secular) Ministry of Justice, the religious colleges (medress) were brought under the Ministry of Education and a new Ministry of Religious Foundations was set up to administer the evkaf.

At the same time, the curriculum of the higher medreses was modernized and even the study of European languages was made compulsory.

Under the rule of CUP, women's status in family and society also began to change, and especially for those of middle and upper classes, the changes were dramatic. [47]

[46] Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State*, London: L. B. Tauris, 2010, pp. 5-6

[47] Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: 4 Modern History*, p. 125

Like those of 1913-1918, the Kemalist reforms aimed at secularizing and modernizing the Turkish society more radically.

The reforms related to creating a secular society, led by Atatürk, can be listed as follows: in social life, compared with its Unionist predecessors, the Kemalist regime went further by prohibiting the polygamy in 1925 and making the civil marriage compulsory in 1926.

Women were given equal rights as men to hold office in 1934.

In the first half of 1926, the European calendar was adopted, as were the Swiss civil code and the penal code from Mussolini's Italy.

A number of laws restructuring the banking sector were passed and, except in the army, all courtesy titles (like Bey, Efendi or Pasa) were abolished.

In September 1925, the religious shrines (furbe) and the dervish convents (tekke) were closed down and in November the fez, the red felt cap which had been the Ottoman gentlemen's traditional headgear since the days of Sultan Mahmut I, was prohibited and replaced by the Western-style hat or cap. [48]

As Prof. Ziircher stated, "together with the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate and the proclamation of the republic, these measures form the first wave of the Kemalist reforms.

It is clear that they constituted an extension of the Tanzimat and the Unionist reforms, which had secularized most of the legal and educational systems.

With the relegation of the sultan-caliph to the role of ornament and the removal of the seyhitislam from the cabinet, the state itself had been secularized to a large extent.[49]

The secularizing reforms adopted by Unionists and Kemalists reflected their understanding of Islam in nationalist and secular modernity.

For Turkism, as a nationalist current, things which are national are more important than those of the religious.

So it is easy for us to see that in both Turkism and Turkish History Thesis, the pre-Islamic past of Turkish people is classicalized, idealized and praised as a golden age.

In Ziya Gokalp's understanding of Turkish history, Turkic peoples' converting to Islam marked the beginning of its medieval period, and then a new era started from Turkic peoples' contact with and adoption of the Western civilization. [50]

For almost all the Turkists in the Young Turks era, the pre-Islamic past of the Turkic peoples was the most important element in their ideology of nationalism because, by describing the Turkic peoples before Islam as a nation of being secular, brave, honest, feminist, democratic, progressive and patriotic, it could help the Turkish people easily alienate from the Islam and adopt the Western civilization (positivism science, industrial technology and social organization).

Here the rhetoric is that for Turkish people to be modern is just to go back to their own glorious past. [51]

In this way, the Turkish nationalists believed that the Islamic experience in the history of Turkic peoples was just a temporary transition period.

Thus, the secularization of Turkish society was legitimized.

For the Kemalists, the same logic was used in their understanding of the medieval history of Turkic speaking peoples.

On the First Turkish History Congress (Birinci Türk Tarihi Kongresi, July 2-11, 1932), Semsttin Günaltay, Yusuf Hikmet Bayur and Afet Inan discussed the relationship between Turkish nation and Islamic civilization.

All of them argued that the Turkic speaking peoples had made great contributions to the development of Islam, and it is also the same religion that blocked the progress of Turkish nation. Besides, Inan argued that the Islamic identity for Turkish people was less important than their Turkish identity. [52]

[48] Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, p. 180.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 181

[50] Ziya Gökalp, *Türk Uygarlığı Tarihi*, İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1991, p. 4.

[51] Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, London: The Harville Press, 1950, p. 112.

[52] *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar Müzakere*, İstanbul: Matbaacılık ve Neşriyat Türk Anonim Şirketi, 1932, pp. 428-444

Islam was ideologically defamed by the Kemalists, and also so institutionally.

It was put under the control of the state.

In Kemalist Turkey, the religious clergy had become similar to the religious state institution, there is a religious state institution named Religious Affairs Directorate * Since the establishment of the Diyanet did not mean the absolute separation of religion and state officers as was the case during the CUP period.

Moreover, (Diyanet) in Turkey established during the early republican period in 1924 [53].

Since the establishment of the Diyanet did not mean the absolute separation of religion and state affairs, it signifies a model of state intervention in religious affairs.[54].

For the Kemalists, just like the Unionists, the social life had to be constructed on the basis of positivism and science instead of Islam.

They were “positivist elites” who were armed by “scientific principles” against the masses who needed to be “saved” from the earlier and hence by definition “backward” stages of development. The civilizing elites detached themselves from the rest of the people with particularistic and traditional affiliations, with their distinct language, profound background dress-style, taste of art and music, education, way of thinking, notion of honor, and so on. [55]

[53] Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 30.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 175; For further normative discussions on secularism in Turkey, see Andrew Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

[55] M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011

In the Kemalist formulation, the standards of the “civilized” world, by which the knowing elite judged all existing aspects of life, were set for the society.

These included prescriptions on how to dress, how to eat, how to look at others, how to walk, how to speak, and so forth.

Kemalist secularism was unique in the sense that it signified the official effort to control and domesticate Islam by institutionalizing it under state control.

All autonomous associations on a religious basis outside the state control were banned.

However, in the period of Kemal Atatürk, the new secular Turkish identity did not take deep root in the whole of Anatolia.

It was limited around the bureaucratic elite of the new republic in Ankara.

If we consider that the majority of the Turkish population lived in rural and agricultural towns, secularization did not directly affect daily lives of the Turkish peasants.

Because of the limited affect of Kemalist secularization on the Muslim Turkish public, this modernizing project created a void in the spiritual and everyday life of the masses.

As a result, the rigid Kemalist secularism of the early republic period would have to be challenged later with the decline of Kemalism.

Conclusion: “Guided Modernization” and the Challenges

Now in an era of democratization, more participation of the people in the public sphere, politically, economically and socially, could be observed.

During the past century, the “young Turks” aimed to install Western modernity into the Turkish society, but they did this through the monopoly of the political and military powers, which guaranteed their control and dominance over the public and more importantly the potential challengers.

For the Unionists, although CUP was proclaimed a party, they relied mainly on the support of officer corps as their guards from time to time to suppress the challengers to their authority. [56]

After 1923, the Kemalists established a new authoritarian regime and an one-party dominated system in Turkey, which maintained their superiority and manipulation over the “enemies” of the Republic.[57]

As rulers of their respective regime, Unionists and Kemalists initiated a modernist project to civilize society on the basis of a sort of state-led, or top-down, nationalism.

The reforms were made by the state.

For the sake of saving the state or keeping the uniform of the country, assimilation was implemented among the various groups with different identities.

To catch up with the Western/European civilization, an extreme form of secularization process was adopted by the Turkish state.

In other words, the limits of secularization were also set by the state itself.

In this sense, we could define the Unionist or Kemalist version of modernization a sort of “guided modernization”.

The “guided modernization” in Turkish history is related to the state’s nature of statism.

It is known that Kemalism has six arrows (altı ok), one of which is “statism” (devletçilik). Devletçilik is not only functioning as the means of economic administration [58], but also consisting of a set of basic political/philosophical beliefs/ values, including that the state, represented by its cadres, should take charge of the direction of political, economic and social developments and even the shaping of individuals.

Bernard Lewis considered that the doctrine that “‘the state must take charge’ was, in a country like Turkey, an easy and familiar one, well in accord with the inherited traditions and habits of both the rulers and ruled.

To the Kemalist regime...bureaucratic and paternalistic, the idea of state direction and control in economic life came as a natural and obvious extension of the powers, prerogative, and functions of the governing elite.” [59]

[56] Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse*, London and New York: I. B Tauris Publishers, 2000, pp. 143-162

[57] As Zürcher dedicated to us, the secularizing measures of Kemalists met with stubborn resistance from the population. But the Independence Tribunals played their part in suppressing this resistance. Under the Law on the Maintenance of Order, nearly 7500 people were arrested and 660 executed. Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, p. 181

[58] In 1923, Gokalp pointed out, “the new Turkey, which has to introduce the latest and most developed techniques of Europe, cannot afford to wait for the spontaneous rise of the spirit of enterprise among individuals in order to industrialize. As we have done in the field of military techniques, we have to reach European levels in industry through a national effort. .. Therefore, only the state can achieve the task of introducing large-scale industry in every field”. Ziya Gokalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, p. 310.

[59] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p 471

Statism had a deep and long tradition in the Ottoman-Turkish society.

The Tanzimat reform accelerated the process of centralization of the Ottoman state, which more and more regarded itself as the propellant for social engineering.

Most of the Tanzimat reformers, Young Ottomans and the Young Turks were a group of elites with background of bureaucrats, intellectuals, and officers, who admired the superiority of the Western civilization and intended to modernize their own society according to the Western model.

The Turkish modernization was never a development that grew naturally from within their own society itself; rather it was a development as a reaction to the growing influence and challenge of Europe.

For this catch-up-style model of modernization, it is understandable that the elites and almost only the elites had the power to choose a road which they deemed right for their society, the people, the nation and themselves.

Ziya Gokalp's personal experience could explain this well.

In 1900/1, in jail, Gokalp met an old man called Naim Bey, who was treated as "spiritual guide" by Gokalp himself.

Naim Bey had an testament to Gokalp. He said,

"...our people are in a deep slumber.

Can a sleeping people understand the value of freedom?

...The youth must spend these years reading, thinking, and searching day and night.

You must discover where the salvation of this nation lies.

Which ideals and beliefs should be inculcated in our people? Which ideals will waken them, will move and lead them in the new direction? Which principles can elevate them towards civilization?

You must discover all these fundamentals in order to have a clear scheme by which to lead the nation, or you may be lost when the day of freedom comes." [60]

Ziya Gokalp concluded as early as in 1923 that "Turks are temperamentally etatists.

They expect the state to take the initiative in everything new and progress.

Even social changes are introduced through the state in Turkey, and it has been the state which has safeguarded social changes against the forces of reaction".[61]

According to Atatürk (1931), "Etatism, as applied by us, while giving priority to individual work and effort, consists in the intervention of the state in all spheres, whenever the general interests of the nation are involved, and this with the aim of leading the country with the least delay to prosperity and welfare".[62]

[60] Ziya Gokalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, pp. 40-41.

[61] Ibid., pp. 310-311.

[62] J Landau, ed., Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey, Leiden: Westview Press, 1984, p. 39.

With the coming of the era of democratization, the “guided modernization” in Turkey is doomed to be challenged.

By the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, Turkey’s cultural diversity gradually became politically significant.

Islamic symbols found larger political space during Democratic Party's rule in the 1950s. [63]

The Kurdish issue, once a taboo, began to come out of the water surface especially in the late 1980s and 1990s under the leadership of Turgut Ozal (1927-1993)[64] and Süleyman Gündoğdu Demirel (1924-2015).

In April 1991, under the leadership of Turgut Ozal, the ban on Kurdish language was lifted.”[65] Some people in the Ozal era even proposed to give up Turk (an ethnical term) as the national identity for the Turkish citizens.

Instead, they preferred to use a more ethnicity-free term Türkiyeli (literally means nationals of Turkey).[66]

Ozal supported a group of intellectuals known as neo-Ottomanists (Yeni Osmanheılar) who “advocate incorporating the Muslims and Turkish inhabited areas and making Turkey one of the great states of the world.”

Moreover, “they attempted to introduce the modern version of the ‘millet system’ of the Ottoman Empire in which religious and ethnic minorities enjoy cultural and political rights in Turkish politics.” [67]

Under Ozal’s leadership, Turkey’s economy, politics and ideologies were to a larger extent liberalized. Ten years before his passing away, Demirel admitted in Turkish media that it is under his leadership Turkish state began to admit the existence of the Kurdish people.[68]

It is a bold move that implies the loosening of rigid Kemalist ethnical nationalism and the possibility of further open discussions on Kurdish identity in Turkey in the coming days.

The most radical changes both in field of nationalism and secularism took place in the 21st century under the rule of AKP and Erdogan.

The Erdogan regime since 2002 had begun to discuss the Kurdish issue publicly and they wanted to make an official division between the upper (national) and sub (ethnical) identities. [69]

So we were able to see a sign that the Kemalist nationalism is undergoing dramatic change in contemporary Turkey and a policy of liberal version of “neo-Ottomanism” is reviving.[70]

[63] Further modernization in Turkey during this period may even have helped the spreading of Islamic customs to the rural areas of this country. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, pp. 316-317.

[64] Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State*, pp. 62-63; Mühittin Ataman, "Ozal Leadership and Restructuring of Turkish Ethnic Policy in the 1980s", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4 (October 2002), p. 129.

[65] Kemal Kilişci, "Minority/Majority Discourse: The Case of the Kurds in Turkey", in Dru Gladney (ed.), *Making Majorities*, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 243

[66] Mubittin Ataman, "Ozal Leadership and Restructuring of Turkish Ethnic Policy in the 1980s", p. 129.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 133

[68] "Kürt realitesini tanıyoruz", *Milliyet*, 17 Ağustos, 2005, p. 16.

[69] Selcan Hacaoğlu, "Erdoğan's remarks on Kurdish identity stir debate over Turkey's national identity", *Turkish Daily News*, November 30, 2005.

[70] Joannis N. Grigoriadis, "Türk or Türkiyeli? The Reform of Turkey's Minority Legislation and the Rediscovery of Ottomanism", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3 (May 2007), pp. 423-438.

In 2009, the Turkish government proclaimed the Kurdish Opening (Kürt açılımı) which promised to protect Kurds' rights in the aspects of their language-culture, citizenship and local government. [71]

On November 23, 2011, in Dersim, on behalf of the Turkish government, Erdogan, in a public speech, apologized for the killing of thousands of Kurds in the 1930s.

This was called "Dersim Apology" in Turkey.[72]

It seems that the attempts of Erdogan regime to solve Kurdish problem through "more democracy" in the first decade of the 21st century was sincere.

With political democratization, stronger appeal for civil equality and the outside pressure of the European Union, the possibility for the forging a new type of liberal Turkish nationalism, other than the Kemalist one, seems to be likely achieved by 2011.

The development of political Islamism consequently has led to the official acceptance of Islam, and even some traditional forms of it, by both the state elites and the politicians as part of Turkish national identity.[73]

Most people in Turkey have recognized that Islam cannot be alienated from the social life.

The common people need Islam, and now they are the voteholders.

Under these conditions, Islamist parties, together with other social forces which were once marginalized before, began to gain powers during the democratic transformation.

This is a great challenge to the old secularist/etatist state elites who had made themselves a separate and enclosed “civil society” in which the common people were excluded.

Since 1950, several military interventions have taken place in Turkey.

It is widely believed that the interventions took place for the reason that the state elites felt challenged by the newly rising political forces with multiple social values.

The so-called “postmodern” coup in 1997 was said to take place because the Army wanted to suppress the rising challenge of the political Islamism.

However, with the continuous overwhelming victories in elections since 2002, the AKP has proved the effectiveness and flexibility of its one-party-dominant system with strong conservative background/orientation in Turkey.

Turkish traditional secularists have been aware of this situation and have launched several large-scale protests against AKP since 2007.[74]

The turning point might be 2007's presidential election in Turkey.

On 27 April, 2007, to reassert its stubborn stand on the rule of secularism, the Turkish army even hung a memorandum (as an implicit warning to AKP) on the Internet at mid-night just before the presidential election of Abdullah Gül in the parliament.” [75]

[71] “The Kurdish Opening in Turkey: Origins and Future?”, <https://camegieendowment.org/2009/12/01/kurdish-opening-in-turkey-origins-and-future-event-1494>. Accessed Oct 22, 2021

[72] “Turkey PM Erdogan apologises for 1930s Kurdish killings”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15857429>. Accessed Oct. 22, 2021

[73] Etienne Copeaux, *Türk tarih tezinden Türk-Islam Sentezine*, translated by Ali Berktaş, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998,

[74] *Milliyet*, April 15, 30, and May 14, 2007.

[75] *Turkish Daily News*, April 30, 2007

But this did not prevent Gül's being elected as the 11th president of Turkey in a second round.

By advocating a combined Islamic modernization, which claims that Islam is compatible with secularism, democracy and freedom, the 2007's victory of AKP both in parliament and presidency implies that, to a certain extent, the challenges to the “guided modernization” had triumphed.

But this is not the end of the story yet.

Since 2011, successive successes in elections and referendums have consolidated the political power of AKP and the control of Turkey by Erdogan. [76]

In March 2015, Erdogan changed his rhetoric on Kurds by stating that what he said in his 2005 speech was the Kurdish issues (Kürt meselesi) [77] instead of Kurdish problem (Kürt sorunu).” Later in 2015, facing the failure of AKP in general election of that year (mainly due to the rise of pro-Kurdish party)[78], Erdogan dropped his “peace process” with PKK and picked up the military means again. Since 2002, some changes have already taken place in the relationship between Islam and politics in Turkey.

Under the rule of AKP, the Diyanet of Turkey, a state apparatus, has been increasingly Islamized. Without a project of wholesale Islamization or liberalization of Turkey, AKP and Erdogan seek to “redefine” the concept of laiklik (secularism) in Turkey, which continued to stir much unease/fear among the Turkish traditional secularists. [79]

It is safe to argue that AKP and Erdogan could be regarded as the representative of historical continuity of the moderate version of political Islamism in terms of cultural/social values and Kemalism in terms of political style.

So far, Kemalism in Turkey is under siege but not yet overthrown.

A spectre is haunting Turkey—the spectre of “guided modernization”.

Edited by Ning Fan

[76] Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, London: I B. Tauris, 2017.

[77] “Kürt Sorunu Yoktur; Kürt Kardeşlerimin Sorunları Vardır”, <https://www.tecb.gov.tr/haberler/410/29843/kurt-sorum-yoktur-kurt-kardeslerimin-sorunlari-vardir.html>. Accessed Oct. 22, 2021

[78] For the detailed statistics of 2015 general election, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim/7-haziran-2015-genel-secimleri/>. Accessed Oct. 22, 2021

[79] An example of this is the anxiety caused by Ismail Kahraman’s speech in 2016 which mentioned the dropping of laiklik from Turkish constitution. “TBMM Başkanı Kahraman: Sabsi düşüncem”, <https://www.conturk.com/turkiye/tbmm-baskani-kahramandan-laiklikle-ilgili-yeni-aciklama>; “Meclis Baskanı Kahraman'dan yeni 'laiklik' açıklaması”, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/meclis-baskani-kahramandan-yeni-laiklik-aciklamasi-40095021> Accessed Oct. 22, 2021