

2014

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### **Recommended Citation**

Balci, Tamer. "Osmanli Balkan Mirasi Ve Türk Millî Kimliğinin Oluşumu (Ottoman Balkan Heritage and the Construction of Turkish National Identity)." *Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies (JOLS)* 1.1 (2014): 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.17822/omad.201419772>

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*Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi (OMAD)* , Yıl 1, Sayı 1, Kasım 2014, ss. 60-70.  
*Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies (JOLS)*, Volume 1, Issue 1, November 2014, pp. 60-70.  
ISSN 2148-5704

## OTTOMAN BALKAN HERITAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TURKISH NATIONAL IDENTITY\*

### *Osmanlı Balkan Mirası ve Türk Millî Kimliğinin Oluşumu*

Tamer BALCI\*\*

**Abstract:** This study covers the influence of Ottoman Balkan Heritage on the construction of Turkish national identity. In order to shed light on the intricate correlation among the Ottoman heritage, the Balkans and Turkish national identity, this article presents that while the Turkish republican elite took a negative stance on the Ottoman Empire to create a secular nation-state, Balkan migrants' view on Islam as the main component of their identity helped to shape the creation of Turkish national identity.

**Key Words:** Ottoman heritage, Ottoman Empire, Turkish Republic, Turkish national identity, Balkans

**Özet:** Bu çalışma Osmanlı Balkan mirasının Türk millî kimliğinin oluşturulmasındaki etkilerini incelemektedir. Osmanlı mirası, Balkanlar ve Türk millî kimliği arasındaki münasebeti aydınlatılmak amacıyla araştırma şu hipotezi sunmaktadır: Her ne kadar cumhuriyetçi Türk eliti laik bir ulus devlet inşa etmek amacıyla Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı olumsuz bir tavır almışsa da, Balkan göçmenlerinin İslam'ı millî kimliklerinin ana unsuru olarak görmesi Türk millî kimliğinin oluşturulmasında önemli bir etken olmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı mirası, Osmanlı Devleti, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Türk millî kimliği, Balkanlar

### Introduction

As the centennial of Balkan Wars (1912-1913) passed, many symposia, conferences and panels have been held to commemorate the wars and derive further lessons from them. Focusing on the Balkan Wars not only reopened the old wounds of Turkey, which abandoned much of its European lands in these wars, but also opened new opportunities to reevaluate the tumultuous history of the Balkans in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and the Ottoman heritage.<sup>1</sup> Before it became an empire stretching to three continents, the Ottoman Empire was a Balkan state. From the foundation of villages, towns and cities to the erection of architectural structures, mosques, and bridges, the Ottomans left long-lasting marks on the history and culture of the region and played a significant role in the development of Balkan culture.

The Balkan mosaic the Ottomans created through the employment of *millet* system was shattered in the nineteenth century with the emergence of nationalism. Wars and chaos cast over the Balkans in the first quarter of the twentieth century left many marks over the formation of modern culture and identity in the Balkan nations in the post-World War I period. This study

\* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Second International Symposium on Balkan History Studies (UBTAS) (April 30-May 4, 2014) in Podgorica, Montenegro.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Ali Fuat Örenç and İsmail Mangaltepe (Ed.), *Balkanlar ve Göç*, Bursa Kültür Sanat ve Turizm Tic. A.Ş., Bursa 2013; Abidin Temizer (Ed.), *Balkan Tarihi Araştırmalarına Metodolojik Yaklaşımlar*, Libra Kitap, İstanbul 2014; M. Hakan Yavuz and İsa Blumi (Ed.), *War and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 2013.

examines the young Turkish republic's approach toward the Ottoman Balkan heritage in the interwar years. The article argues that despite the overwhelming majority of Balkans-born military officers and politicians, including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the young Turkish republic turned its back on its Balkan heritage for practical reasons: primarily that the legitimization of a young republic in place of a 600-year old empire dictated demonization of the Ottoman Empire and devaluation of its Balkan heritage. Accordingly, Kemalist policies were designed to create a Turkish Anatolia rather than preserving the Ottoman Balkan heritage. Nevertheless, Balkan migrant labor and culture played a significant role in the formation of Turkish national identity.

### The Ottoman Past and Reshaping the Millet System

Up until the nineteenth century, the Ottoman *millet* system facilitated a peaceful coexistence for the multi-religious and multi-ethnic population in the Balkans. Derived from the Arabic term *millah*, the term *millet* in the Ottoman Empire referred to each officially recognized religious group. The Jews, the Orthodox and Catholic Armenians and the Greek Orthodox Christians along with the Gregorian Christians were the first officially recognized millets in the empire. The patriarch of the Orthodox Church was not only the religious leader of the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire, but also its semi-political leader. The problems of the Orthodox Christians were settled in the court of the Orthodox patriarchy. In case of a need, the heads of *millets* could join the highest state council, *Divan-ı Hümayun* (Imperial Council), to present their issues.<sup>2</sup>

The *millet* system functioned well for the Ottoman population before the age of Enlightenment. Since the geographical discoveries changed the direction of international trade and invalidated the historic silk and spice roads, Jewish and Christian merchants with European language skills fared better than the Turkish, Arabic and Iranian merchants. Consequently these non-Muslim communities were the first groups exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment. The ideas of liberty, equality and national self-determination found supporters among the Balkan nations of Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians and Albanians. One after the other Christian Balkan nations sought equality or self-determination and their demands were backed by the European powers.

The Ottoman rulers had two options: they could either suppress these demands by force or reform the state structure to meet the demands of their non-Muslim subjects. The use of force against the Greek independence fighters in the 1820s proved counterproductive as Greeks gained their independence with the help of European powers. *Tanzimat* or reorganization reforms of 1839 opened a new period with an aim to turn subjects into respectful citizens. Indeed, turning *tanzimat* ideals into reality was a painstaking process that dominated Ottoman politics until the empire's collapse. Within two decades *tanzimat* reforms proved insufficient and another imperial edict, *Islahat Fermanı*, was declared to strengthen reforms in 1856.

Beyond the extended rights granted for all Ottoman citizens in education, taxation and property ownership and public employment, one of the main issues *Islahat* introduced was the restructuring of the *millet* system. As the Jewish and Christian citizens of the empire had been exposed to Western ideas including secularism, they expressed their dissatisfaction at being ruled by their clergy. They desired to be involved in the decision-making process in their communities, but under the *millet* system the religious head of each community was in charge of their congregation. The new structure of the *millet* system allowed non-Muslim minorities to establish their own parliaments, while Muslims were not granted this right. According to the new regulations, every *millet* or religious community, except the Muslims, was to create a

<sup>2</sup> Bilal Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, Ağaç Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1992, p. 21. For a more recent study on the millet system see, Kemal Karpat and Yetkin Yıldırım (Ed.), *The Ottoman Mosaic: Exploring Models for Peace by Re-exploring the Past*, Cune Press, Seattle 2010.

parliament to debate their issues. The decisions of these parliaments had to be approved by the sultan. The clergy could no longer collect donations and taxes from their communities. The new regulations removed the powers of non-Muslim religious leaders and transferred the power to their parliaments, which were filled by numerous secular members.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the religious leaders of *millets* were to be elected by their parliaments. This regulation for the first time allowed non-clergy members of minorities to be included in the decision making process of their communities, which had previously been solely under the control of the clergy.<sup>4</sup> The restructuring of the *millet* system paved the way for the secularization of *millet* administrations. To comply with the new structure, the Greek Orthodox, the Gregorian Armenian and the Jewish *millets* founded their parliaments in 1861, 1863 and 1865 respectively.<sup>5</sup> From 1839 to the end of the empire, the Ottoman *ulema*, Islamic religious establishment, regarded reforms as a compromise and did its best to block or slow down the progress while the progressive forces pushed for faster and more deep-reaching reforms. Thus, a power struggle between the reformers and the guardians of traditional Islamic rules, the *ulema*, was unavoidable. This struggle not only dominated the last century of the empire but also turned reformers against the *ulema* and what it represented, Islam.

While the emerging Ottoman opposition to the sultan and *ulema* gradually turned against Islam and desired a secular state, the Christian population of the empire benefited from the economic and political privileges or *capitulations* they gained for being Christian. *Capitulations* or economic privileges had been granted to several European states since the fifteenth century. The policy of granting economic privileges for European countries became unbearable for the Ottomans when these privileges were transformed into political gains for the Europeans in the nineteenth century. European powers sought opportunities to gain protectorate rights over their co-religionists in the Ottoman Empire. Catholic Armenians received *millet* status along with a French protectorate in 1831. Soon after the first Protestant church in the Ottoman territory was opened in Jerusalem in 1842, Protestants in the Ottoman Empire were granted *millet* status in 1850.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, with its pan-Orthodoxism policy, Russia aimed to establish its dominance over the Orthodox Christians of the Balkans paving its road to reach the warm seas. All the groups that received protectorate status from European powers were allowed to become citizens of the state that provided protection. That protection brought with it the economic privileges of *capitulations*. For instance, a Catholic Ottoman citizen could receive French citizenship and thereby become exempt from paying certain taxes or from being judged in an Ottoman court. This situation created opportunities for European powers to regularly interfere in Ottoman domestic affairs.

### From Millet System to Nationalism

At the turn of nineteenth century, the Balkans served as the hotbed of opposition to Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909). The Young Ottoman opposition forcefully turned Ottoman rule into a constitutional monarchy with a parliament in December 1876, but their dreams faded away as the sultan abolished the first Ottoman parliament and constitution in February 1878. The Young Ottoman opposition went underground and transformed into Young Turks with a strong hatred toward Abdulhamid II. The Young Turk clandestine organization, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), was well-organized and spread among the young Ottoman cadets especially in the Balkans. While the Young Turk opposition garnered support from various ideological groups, the dominant views among the Young Turks leadership tilted

<sup>3</sup> Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: a Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Syracuse University Press, Princeton 2000, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Salahi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, Turkish Historical Society, Ankara 1993, p. 189-191.

<sup>5</sup> B. Eryılmaz, *ibid.*, p. 82-84.

<sup>6</sup> B. Eryılmaz, *ibid.*, p. 46-47.

toward secularism. They did not openly express their ideas in order to not divide their support.<sup>7</sup> According to M Şükrü Hanioglu , for the Young Turks, “Islam was nothing other than a device.”<sup>8</sup> The Young Turk elites regarded the majority of Ottoman citizens as ignorant for accepting the absolute rule of the sultan. For the Young Turks, intellectuals were superior to the masses. Thus, a change or a revolution from above was necessary.<sup>9</sup>

Before Turkish nationalism gained supporters in the Ottoman capital, it ripened among the Muslim Turks of the Balkans and the Caucasus, who developed a reactionary nationalism against Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian and Russian nationalisms. While the Ottoman bureaucracy’s Ottomanism and the sultan’s pan-Islamism were still attractive ideologies, Turkish nationalism was a reality among the Balkan Turks as early as 1898. The publications of Balkan Turks made their quiet nationalist declarations before the Young Turks recognized the political power of nationalism. This early sentiment of Turkish nationalism came in a religious form. The Balkan Turks declared in 1898 that “Islam and nationalism had merged into a single construct.”<sup>10</sup> Initially, the CUP leadership did not take the Islamic blended nationalism of the local CUP branches seriously. Both the pressure from the CUP branches in the Balkans and the persuasion of early Turkish nationalists forced the Young Turks to reconsider their approach to Turkish nationalism. In terms of nationalism, the Young Turks had to go through three phases: to recognize, theorize and secularize Turkish nationalism. By the time these three goals were reached, the rule of the Young Turks was already over but their ideas had triumphed. Indeed, the seeds of nationalism and the German nation-state model had already been sown into the Turkish military academy by German instructors. The intellectuals outside the military barracks were aware of both the German and the French nation-state models employed in the nineteenth century.

The Russian policy of Pan-Orthodoxism and Pan-Slavism has helped the Balkan national revival and independence. As early as in 1854, Russian Slavophile Alexei Stepanovich Khomyakov (1804-1860) wrote that “*The Russian people is bound by ties of blood to the Slav peoples and by ties of faith to the Greeks.*”<sup>11</sup> Khomyakov’s statement was an early indication what type of nationalism would emerge in the Balkans. As early as in the 1820s Greek nationalism already proved itself as nationalist movement with a strong influence of Orthodox Christianity. British, French and German nationalisms that were forerunners of nationalist movements set the examples for the nationalist movements that emerged after them. Staunchly secular, the French nation-state model was more inclusive but it was not a fit for the Christian Balkan nations, which regarded their religion as an ally rather than a foe. The religion-friendly but inherently more dangerous and divisive German nation-state model, which prioritized homogeneity, became a role model for Balkan nationalisms.<sup>12</sup>

There were still several obstacles in front of rising Balkan nationalisms. Primarily the Balkans were known as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious region. Creation of a homogenous nation-state would not be possible without destructive wars. Secondly, in some areas such as in Montenegro, the strong existence of tribalism was a hindrance to creation of a national identity.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, one after the other Balkan nations of Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, and Montenegro, Romania and eventually Albania gained their independence in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Creation of national identity is a process that cannot be done

<sup>7</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> M. Ş. Hanioglu, *ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> M. Ş. Hanioglu, *ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>10</sup> M. Ş. Hanioglu, *ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology*, Vintage Books, New York 1960, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> For a deeper analysis of different models of nationalism see, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, MA, Cambridge, 1992; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*, Routledge, London 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Uğur Özcan, *II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Osmanlı-Karadağ Siyasi İlişkileri*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 2012, p. 14.

overnight. Soon after their independence each Balkan nation launched its public education system to create its national identity. Furthermore, each picked up ways to create homogenous states. For instance, as the German nation-state model became the dominant model in Europe after the Congress of Berlin in 1878, newly independent Montenegro adopted discriminatory policies toward its Muslim minority.<sup>14</sup> Minorities, especially the Muslim ones, reminded the Christian Balkan nations of the Ottoman past. The Ottoman and Turkish Muslim “enslaver” were not the only enemy. In the Bulgarian nationalist narrative, Greeks and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch were as guilty as the Ottoman Turk.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly the Bulgarian Orthodox Church separated from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy of Constantinople in 1870. Similarly the Serbian Orthodox Church severed its ties with the Greek Orthodox Church in 1879.<sup>16</sup>

After a short period of independence and identity construction, the Balkan nations engaged in the Balkan Wars (1912-13) to capture what they claimed. Within a year, the Ottoman Empire lost 83 percent of its European lands and 69 percent of its European population.<sup>17</sup> The devastating Ottoman losses in the Balkan Wars caused a massive wave of immigration from the Balkans to Anatolia. This was neither the first nor the last wave of immigration. Before the Muslim refugees were settled in their new homeland, the eruption of World War I created further refugee problems. Thus it is hard to estimate which war caused exactly how many refugees. According to the statistics of Turkish Ministry of Interior, from 1912 to 1922, 413,922 refugees arrived from the Balkans.<sup>18</sup> The sudden mass immigration changed the demography of not only the Balkans but also of Anatolia. The Muslims left behind in the Balkans faced persecution and discrimination and further migrations ensued. Regardless of their self-identification in terms of national identity, one commonality among the migrants was their Muslim religious affiliation. Furthermore, the CUP government made an agreement with Bulgaria to exchange the Muslim population of Bulgaria with Bulgarians of Thrace.<sup>19</sup>

### Culture and Politics of Post-Ottoman Turkey

One of the main causes of unexpected Ottoman defeats in the Balkan Wars was the political divisions among the Ottoman military officers and cadets.<sup>20</sup> Since its foundation, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was well-established in the Ottoman military schools. By 1912-1913, the young generation was in positions of power and they determined the destiny of the Ottoman Empire and its successor young Turkish republic. The CUP and the Young Turks fell apart as did the Ottoman Empire but the Young Turk ideas prevailed in the Turkish republic as the founding fathers of republic, including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, were former members of CUP. Atatürk’s Republican Public Party (RPP) in many ways functioned as a continuation of CUP: from the top-down modernization of approach of the CUP to secularization and embracement of the Latin alphabet, CUP ideals were put into practice by the RPP.

<sup>14</sup> Abidin Temizer, “Karadağ’da Öteki Sorunu: Müslümanlar (1878-1913)”, *History Studies*, Vol. 5/3, May 2013, pp. 223-240.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Alexieva, “Ottoman Dominion Epoch in the Cultural Memory of Bulgarian People”, in *Balkan Tarihi Araştırmalarına Metodolojik Yaklaşımlar*, Ed.: Abidin Temizer, Libra Kitap, İstanbul 2014, p. 159-160.

<sup>16</sup> Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001, p. 50-51. The Bulgarian discrimination against the Jewish and Greek minorities and the Greek discrimination against the Jews and Bulgarians caused another wave of migration into the Ottoman-controlled territories during the Balkan Wars. Ahmet Halaçoğlu, *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli’den Türk Göçleri (1912-1913)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1995, p. 64-65.

<sup>17</sup> R. D. Sonyel, *ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, Darwin Press, Princeton 1995, p. 160-161.

<sup>19</sup> Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?*, Routledge, London 2006.

<sup>20</sup> İsmet Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu 1912-1922: Balkan-Birinci Dünya ve İstiklal Harbi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1993, p. 11.

The Kemalist desire to construct a secular Turkish nation state was hindered by the Muslim identity the Balkan immigrants embraced. RPP ideally desired a secular Turkish national identity without the influence of any religion, but the realities of newly arrived masses from the Balkans manifested differently. For majority of the Balkan immigrants, Islam was the primary identification, especially for the Muslims who were subjected to forced population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1923.<sup>21</sup> A large number of Muslim migrants from Crete did not even speak Turkish.<sup>22</sup>

The forerunners of Turkish nationalism were either from the Russian-controlled Trans-Caucasus and Caucasus or from the Balkans. In both regions Turkish nationalism emerged as a reactionary movement from the bottom-up rather than a well-planned top-down elite project. Moreover, in both regions Islam remained as a key component of national awakening. As stated above, the CUP aimed to secularize the proto-nationalism of the Balkan Turks but this duty fell onto the laps of republic. Atatürk believed in a top-down modernization, but his pragmatism suppressed his idealism. In his quest to create a Turkish nation he still embraced Islam as a component of national identity. For instance, he did not accept the Gagauz Turks of Moldova to Turkey mainly because of their Orthodox Christian faith. One of the main reasons Atatürk chose to preserve Islam as part of national identity was because of the Ottoman experience with foreign interventions. Throughout the last century of the empire, the Western powers intervened in Ottoman domestic affairs under the banner of protecting Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Existence of substantial numbers of non-Muslim populations in Turkey would open the new republic to similar interventions. Furthermore, many other practices of the young republic indicated that being Muslim was *de facto* condition of Turkish nationhood.<sup>23</sup> Islam was too important to be left to the masses even in a secular state. Nevertheless, the Kemalist elitist project to nationalize Islam was harder to implement than planned.<sup>24</sup>

### Early Republican Approach to the Ottoman Balkan Heritage

Being born after a 623-year old empire, the young Turkish republic had to present reasonable explanations to its masses for why the Ottoman Empire had to be abolished rather than reformed. In its quest to become a modern state, the young republic not only turned its back on its imperial past but also demonized it. On the tenth anniversary of the republic, the Turkish Ministry of Education released a book comparing the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish republic.<sup>25</sup> The book not only compared the late Ottoman sultans to Atatürk, but also the citizens of both states. It named the Ottoman Empire as the “slave empire” and called the new state the “free republic.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the mindset of the empire was called “spider webbed” or backward, while the republican mind was named the “enlightened mind.”<sup>27</sup> Ironically the book blamed the Ottoman Empire for being an “admirer of Europe” while it called the republic “nationalist, creative and patriotic.”<sup>28</sup> Another interesting comparison in the book is about the history narrative of the Ottoman Empire and the republic. The book presented that in the

<sup>21</sup> For detailed analysis of forced population exchange see, Renée Hirschon (Ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece and Turkey*, Berghahn Books, UK2003; Müfide Pekin (Ed.), *Yeniden Kurulan Yaşamlar: 1923 Türk-Yunan Zorunlu Nüfus Mübadelesi*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Tuncay Ercan Sepetcioglu, “Sürgün ve İskân Kıskaçında Giritli Müslüman Kadın (1896-1913)”, *History Studies*, Vol. 6/2, February 2014, p.111.

<sup>23</sup> For detailed analysis see S. Cagaptay, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Tamer Balcı, “From Nationalization of Islam to Privatization of Nationalism: Islam and Turkish National Identity”, *History Studies*, Vol. 1/1, December 2009, p. 82-107.

<sup>25</sup> Vedat Nedim and Burhan Asaf (Ed.), *Osmanlı İmparatorluğundan Türkiye Cumhuriyetine: Nasıldı? Nasıl oldu?*, Devlet Matbaası, İstanbul 1933.

<sup>26</sup> V. Nedim and B. Asaf, *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>27</sup> V. Nedim and B. Asaf, *ibid.*, p. 20-21.

<sup>28</sup> V. Nedim and B. Asaf, *ibid.*, p. 30-31.

Ottoman Empire only Islam, Ottoman and general human history courses were taught while during the republic, Turkish history is prioritized and the Ottoman, Islam and Arab history are only indirectly mentioned. It also has a picture four volume history textbooks adopted in 1931.<sup>29</sup> The young republic was willing to become the successor of the Ottoman Empire but not of its heritage. Republican rebranding of the Ottoman Empire as a “slave empire” was not any different from the nationalist Bulgarian depiction of Turks as “The enslavers.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü clearly stated in 1934 that Turkish revolution was a war against foreign invasion and the Ottoman system.<sup>31</sup>

While the Kemalist state rejected the Ottoman legacy, it sought a source of pride in newly crafted historical narratives of a Turkish History Thesis and Sun Language Theory. Embracement of pre-Islamic Turkish, Hittite and Sumerian legacy overshadowed the Ottoman legacy. Atatürk turned against political pan-Turkism to avoid the ire of Russia but turning against the Balkans was unexpected. Furthermore, the Kemalist idea of a Turkish homeland was strictly limited to Anatolia. Rather than negotiating the coexistence of Balkan Turks and Muslims within the countries in which they lived, Atatürk encouraged migration into Anatolia, uprooting centuries of communities from their dwellings. In January 1923 he suggested bringing the Turks of Western Trace to Anatolia.<sup>32</sup> While the Lausanne Treaty (1923) kept the Turks of Western Thrace and the Greeks of Istanbul outside the mandatory population exchange, the issue could not be resolved until 1930.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond the Kemalist foreign policy, the Ottoman Balkan heritage was largely ignored in the academic and cultural products of the early republic. There was not even a single presentation about the Ottoman or the Balkan history in the First Turkish History Congress. Founded in 1912, Türk Ocağı or the Turkish Hearth (TH) is often referred as the nationalist organization that founded the republic. Its periodical, *Türk Yurdu*, voiced the ideas of Turkish nationalism. Under the Kemalist republic the Turkish Hearth and *Türk Yurdu* functioned as a semi-official state apparatus. By 1930, the Turkish Hearth had more than 250 branches across Turkey with over 30,000 members.<sup>34</sup> Between 1924 and 1931, before it was shut down, *Türk Yurdu* published only five pieces on the Ottoman Balkan Heritage and nothing on the social, cultural and political impact of migration from the Balkans.<sup>35</sup> Although *Türk Yurdu* ceased its publications on pan-Turkism after 1928, the history and culture of the Caucasus, Russia and Central Asian Turks still got more coverage than the Muslims in the Balkans.

<sup>29</sup> Reprint of four-volume history texts are available with an introduction by Doğu Perinçek (Ed.), *Tarih I: Kemalist Eğitimin Tarih Dersleri (1931-1941)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2000; Doğu Perinçek (Ed.), *Tarih II: Kemalist Eğitimin Tarih Dersleri (1931-1941)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2000; Doğu Perinçek (Ed.), *Tarih III: Kemalist Eğitimin Tarih Dersleri (1931-1941)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2000; Doğu Perinçek (Ed.), *Tarih IV: Kemalist Eğitimin Tarih Dersleri (1931-1941)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2000. For analysis of these textbooks see, Büşra Behar Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de “Resmi Tarih” Tezinin Oluşumu (1929-1937)*, Afâ Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1992; Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine 1931-1993*, Translated from French by Ali Berktaş, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2000.

<sup>30</sup> A. Alexieva, *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> İsmet İnönü, “İnkılap Kürsüsünde İsmet Paşa’nın Dersi” in *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I*, Ed. Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Zeynep Kerman, Necat Birinci, Abdullah Uçman, Kültür Bakanlığı, Ankara 1992, p. 264-274.

<sup>32</sup> Önder Duman, “Atatürk Döneminde Balkan Göçmenlerinin İskân Çalışmaları (1923-1938)”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, n. 43, Spring 2009, p. 474. <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/45/1142/13387.pdf> (Retrieved on November 19, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol, *Atatürk ve Türkiyenin Dış Politikası*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1990, p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Hüseyin Tuncer, *Türk Yurdu Bibliyografyası (1911-1992)*, Akademi Kitabevi, İzmir 1993, p. III.

<sup>35</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Eski Serhatlarımızda Edebi Hayat: Gazi Aşık Hasan”, *Türk Yurdu*, 4/19, July 1342 [1926], p. 18-23. The article is about the seventeenth century folk singer Gazi Aşık Hasan, who wrote songs about the loss of Budapest-Budin (1686) and Belgrade (1688); Reşit Saffet, “Bulgaristan’ın Milli ve İktisadi Tecrübeleri”, *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 4/24, March-April 1930, p. 49-53; Reşit Saffet, “Eski Vardar Türküleri”, *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 4/24, May 1930, p. 17-21; Ivan Manolov, “Bulgaristan’da Turanizm Fikri”, *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 3/6, 1926, p. 450-456.



After the Turkish Hearth was shut down, the Turkish People's Houses took over the cultural duty TH had carried. With the help of the government and the Republican Public Party from 1932, when it was founded, to 1940, 366 People's Houses branches were opened in Turkey. It should also be noted that by 1939, Turkey had only 403 towns or villages with a population of 500 or more. Practically every town had People's Houses. People's Houses also opened People's Rooms in villages.<sup>36</sup> In terms of its penetration into the cultural lives of the people, People's Houses had a much deeper reach than the Turkish Hearth. The theater games played in People's Houses reflected the same ideological approach. For instance, the play "October 29" authored by Vedat Nedim, who was also co-author of the previously mentioned *From the Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic*, was published and distributed to schools by the Ministry of Education on the tenth anniversary of the republic.<sup>37</sup> The play was another form of demonization of the Ottoman Empire. A comedy "Şeriye Mahkemesinde-On the Sharia Court" by İbnürrefik Ahmet Nuri in the same year picked on the ironies in the Ottoman courts.<sup>38</sup> From 1932 to 1951, when it was closed, the plays in the People's Houses largely ignored the Ottoman and the Balkan Heritage. None of the plays apparently covered the pain and suffering of Balkan immigrants.<sup>39</sup> The Turkish novels of the early republican period carried the same approach of the official state toward the Ottoman Empire. The novels presented the Ottoman sultans as incompetent, brutal and sex-addict.<sup>40</sup> The Ottoman Balkan Heritage and the stories of Balkan immigrants were not in the early republican novels either.

### Conclusion

The Ottoman exodus from the Balkans in the nineteenth and the twentieth century created massive waves of migration into the Turkish heartland of Anatolia. Considering the numbers presented in various sources, from 1912 to 1922, 413,922 immigrants arrived from Balkans to Turkey.<sup>41</sup> During the rule of Atatürk between 1923 and 1938, approximately 756,000 Balkan immigrants moved to Turkey.<sup>42</sup> According to the 1940 census, out of 17 million people Balkan migrants and their families made up at least 10 percent of the Turkish population. The majority of these immigrants escaped from various Balkan countries for religious and ethnic discrimination. In the eyes of Balkan Christians, the Muslims and the Turks were the same. The fact that the migrants were pushed out of the Balkans primarily because of their religious affiliation made Islam an irreplaceable part of their identity. Furthermore, some immigrants did not even speak Turkish and Islam was their sole source of identity. Existence of strong Islamic religious affiliation among the Balkan immigrants hindered the Kemalist elite's goal to craft a secular nation-state.

In order to legitimize the cause of the republic, the Kemalist elite fore fronted Ottoman failures and shortcomings in the previous century, but they failed to attach these failures to the failures of their ideological predecessors, the Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress. Demonization of the Ottoman Empire and the disregard for the Ottoman Balkan heritage was daunting because forefathers of the republic and the Turkish military class largely came from the Balkans. The desire to eliminate the Ottoman legacy turned into a desire to eliminate the Ottoman heritage not only in Turkey but only in the Balkans. This became reflective in Kemalist foreign and domestic policies. Kemalist design to turn Anatolia into a

<sup>36</sup> Nurhan Karadağ, *Halkevleri Tiyatro Çalışmaları, 1932-1951*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 1988, p. 62-63.

<sup>37</sup> N. Karadağ, *ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> N. Karadağ, *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> List of plays are available in B. Karadağ, *ibid.*, p. 235-267.

<sup>40</sup> Murat Kacıroğlu, *Millî Mücadele ve Erken Dönem Cumhuriyet Romanı (Yapı ve Tema 1919-1928)*, Kriter Yayınevi, İstanbul 2008, p. 474. For a full list of Turkish novels published between 1920 and 1946 see, Alemdar Yalçın, *Siyasal ve Sosyal Değişmeler Açısından Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Romanı (1920-1946)*, Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara 2002.

<sup>41</sup> McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, *ibid.*, p. 160-161.

<sup>42</sup> Ö. Duman, *ibid.*, p. 474-475.

homogenous Turkish land had its toll on the Balkan communities. Instead of seeking solutions for the coexistence of Muslim populations in the Balkans, leaders of the young republic preferred uprooting the centuries-old communities from their lands. The Kemalist elite did not refrain from criticizing the Ottoman rulers for treating their peoples as subjects rather than respectful citizens but the early republic, which cut a top-down deal with the Greek government in Lausanne and forced the Turkish and Greek populations out of their centuries-old homes in 1923, started its existence by treating its population as subjects in the name of nationalism. Moving people out of their homes was easier than moving their religious ties out of the people. Eventually, the Islamic identity embraced by the migrants became *ade facto* national identity with Islam in its center as opposed to the idealist formulation of the republic for a secular nationalism.

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