

BALKAN WARS AND THE RISE OF TURKISH NATIONALISM

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Abstract

The formulation of Turkish nationhood centred around the motherland, Islam and blood formula was tried by Young Ottoman firstly and later by Young Turks. The throughout the 19th century, Ottoman ruling class was engaged in countering supremacy of European countries and northern neighbour, Russia. Nevertheless they aimed to restore Ottoman army and consolidate the “state power” with imposing institutional and political reforms. A group known as the Young Ottoman, was formed consisting of intellectuals concerned about the disintegration of Empire. The famous writer, Namık Kemal who was to be an inspiration for later generation of Turkish nationalist, popularized the notion of motherland with using nationalistic terms. In the reign of Abdulhamit II, Young Turks who organized against the Sultan, continued to promote Ottomanism. At the end of the 19th century there were four main ideological attempts focused on maintaining integrity of Ottoman state and its indefinite future. Unlike Islamism, Ottomanism and Westernism; Turkish nationalism became the most popular and applicable one among the others because of the distinctive marks of Balkan Wars (1913-14) and wartime atmosphere. In this paper I aim to analyse the process that indicates the rise of Turkish nationalism among the others regarding with the texts from the nationalist periodicals both for adults and children, especially from Turk Yurdu Dergisi [Homeland Magazine] and prominent issues on the agenda of nationalists.

The Roots of Turkish Nationalism

There had been actually some studies defined cultural heritage of Turks, especially in literature, history and ethnography before the Balkan Wars. Predecessors of Turkish nationalism, who expressed some basis about Turkish language and history, were the members of Ottoman ruling class. For example Ahmet Vefik Pasha attempted to standardize Turkish language regarding its folk version; another name Ahmet Cevdet Pasha claimed Turks and Arabs, two ancient nation, ruled Muslim world unprecedentedly. Suleyman Pasha, the commander of military schools, focused on pre-Islamic era of Turks and emphasized the “continuity” from Central Asia to Ottomans. Mustafa Celaleddin Pasha tried to prove that Turkish tribes descended from the same roots with Europeans. Thus all these studies paved the way for constructing national consciousness in the beginning of the 20th century.

The nationalist intellectuals, such as Ismail Gaspirali, Huseyinzade Ali, Agaoglu Ahmet etc., came from Russia and its periphery at the end of 19th century and in the beginning of 20thies and the studies on Turcology in Europe especially in Hungary, Finland and Denmark also promoted Turkish nationalism and contributed to form nationalist discourse among the intellectuals and Ottoman middle class (Göçek, 2002). Yusuf Akcuraoglu, the prominent thinker and famous nationalist writer, in his well-known article named *Uc Tarz-ı Siyaset* [Three Ways of Politics] compared Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkism to find the political remedy what the most applicable was. Akçura argued that the Ottomans could choose from three options: an Ottomanism that assimilated all the empire's inhabitants into one nation; the embrace of Panislam and the unity of all Muslims or the pursuit of the unity of the Turkic peoples, who extend from Central Asia to Montenegro.

According to Akcura Islamism, a system in which only Muslims would constitute the citizens of the Ottoman Empire was out of date. Then he tried to prove the impossibility of the success of Ottomanism which gained support after the 1908 Young Turk revolution and could be defined the all the inhabitants of Empire as essential Ottoman citizens, regarding with actual positions of European states referring to national principles. Turkism was only way out for Muslim Turks to survive and restore the state. According to Akcura, inevitability of nationalism was clear: “this century is the century of nationality, the most influential force on the consciences of this century is the ideal of nationality” (Akçura, 1976). After the Balkan Wars *Uc Tarz-ı Siyaset* would be the reference point of not only Turkist intellectuals but also the Committee of Union and Progress and its political cadres.

The Young Turk revolution in 1908 resumed the constitutional momentum which was postponed during the Hamidian era. Lots of the members of Young Turks were ideologically foremost nationalist and criticized the imperialist policies of European countries although they were bound up with the idea of Western civilization. In this period, several intellectuals promoted the idea of a Turkish nation as a final resolution to the problems facing the Empire. After the 1908 Revolution, *Türk Dernegi* was established to deepen studies about Turkish culture and ethnography. *Cemiyet-i Tibbiye-i Osmani* as a Medical Science Association and another association named *Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i Osmaniye* began to translate the western terms and notions to Turkish. Four years later, nationalist intellectuals and activists gathered in some organizations such as *Türk Yurdu Cemiyeti* [Homeland Association] (1911) and *Türk Ocagi* [Turkish Hearth] (1911-12). Besides *Genc Kalemler* [New Pens] with its writers such as Omer Seyfettin, Ziya Gokalp and Ali Canip; *Türk Yurdu Dergisi* was one of the most popular journal that became the official one both Committee of Union and Progress and the government in 1913. Well-known authors of *Türk Yurdu Dergisi* -Akcuraoglu Yusuf, Aka Gunduz, Kopruluzade Fuat, Mehmed Emin, Kazim Nami and Halide Edip attempted to formulate Turkish nationalism (N. Önen, 2005: 102-107). Authors of *Türk Yurdu* and the other nationalist agents such as Omer Seyfettin, Mehmet Ali Tevfik began to influence the literate Muslim-Turks with their so-called “scientific” articles by utilizing enthusiastic discourses. Seyfettin as a publicist and essayist militated for a

essentialised nationalism, claiming that “if you are a Turk, you will think, feel and act like a Turk”. He addressed to his intellectual peers not only essays but also his popular fiction.

Besides Seyfettin, Ziya Gokalp’s writings and speeches impressed the nationalist leaders and he was elected a member of the Committee of Union and Progress’ executive council. Gokalp, called the “father of Turkish nationalism”, systematized an ideology that synthesizes modernism, Islam and Turkism (Gökalp, 1976). He claimed the tribes “developed” into religious communities and then into nations and also believed that nationalism was the new political religion of twentieth century. According to him, culture was national but the advances of “civilization” were international. Gokalp’s works contributed to the nationalist literature with his didactic poetries and political thoughts formulated both in the latter days of Empire and Turkish Republic that followed (Parla, 2005).

Balkan Wars and Their Reflections on Turkish Nationalism

Italy seized Libya after a brief war with Ottomans and Ottoman Empire had to withdraw its military forces from Libya according to article 2 of Treaty of Ouchi (1912). Realizing how easily Italy had defeated Ottoman army; before the Italian war ended, members of Balkan alliance attacked the Ottoman Empire. In October 1912, a war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and the alliance set up between Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro. Ottoman reformers who had accepted the centralization of administration tried to reconcile non-Muslims in Balkans by advocating Ottomanism. But their efforts at Ottomanization had been rejected by Balkan nationalists that demanded full independence.

In the first war, The strong march of the Bulgarian forces in Thrace [Trakya] pushed the Ottoman armies to the gates of capital city, Istanbul. Ottoman Empire lost substantial amounts of land in Europe including parts of its former capital named Edirne that caused traumatic consequences because of its historical and symbolic importance in the process of empire’s becoming a power. In this context nationalist writers and some soldiers tried to remind the “glorious days” of Edirne to agitate and encourage masses. For example Kopruluzade Fuat wrote that in *Turk Yurdu*:

“While Selim, the son of Magnificent Suleyman, in Edirne where the heart of the great and ancient civilization in Europe, did the Turkish master build the everlasting temple, our flag had been wawing in plains of Hungary. In those times Edirne was not a border-city where the enemies of Turks attacked.” (*Turk Yurdu* May 1913)

As well as, reminding the “glorious” past was not limited only foundation and the rise of Ottoman Empire, the distant past in Central Asia became an “historical reference” to mobilize Turks for taking vengeance from the enemies in the future. Nationalist scholars imparted a “national memory” that how Turks should remember themselves especially their past and enemies. Both adults and the

children should have been aware of Turkish “glorious” history and taking vengeance was essential part of it. The statement of Ilyas Sukru that published in *Mektepli*, the juvenile magazine, gives an example of these thoughts:

“I am a Turk and I have the glorious history. Bulgarian, bloody ones... My noble heart is full of hatred and anger for you. Bulgarian! You should learn that the nobility of Turkishness is revenge and revenge!” (*Mektepli*, June 1913)

Another text from Kopruluzade Fuat;

“Turkish Youngs! If you want to save your dignified nation that to be devastated by the enemies; at the moment of tiredness and desperation; listen the voices comes from the steps of Asia: for the sake of Turkish nation I did not fall asleep at nights; not rest in daytimes and did struggle constantly till I would die (*Turk Yurdu*, February 1913)”

With the fall of Edirne, so many people in Anatolia were worried about the fate of Istanbul. They had shared same feelings during the Russian War in 1877-1878. Istanbul was the last ground that signified sovereignty of state and imperial days. The huge afraid of losing the capital intertwined with anger targeted Bulgarian and the other members of Balkan alliance. Famous woman writer and activist Halide Edip [Adivar] addressed to Sultan with those words after the outbreak of first Balkan War:

My Sultan, the enemy threatened Istanbul where was conquered with sword of great ancestry and holy blood. Our old gardeners with their muddy feet grabbed field guns of our soldiers in order to trample down our honour and dignity (*Turk Yurdu*, November 1912).

The citation above and the similar ones show us the nationalist evaluated the Turks as “supreme nation” and the other non-Muslims as the slaves. Turkish nationalists could not understand the effects of nationalism on the non-Muslim subjects of Empire. During the Balkan Wars, thousands of Muslim migrated from the Balkans to Ottoman’s Anatolia desperately with traumatic memories and composition of population of motherland suddenly and radically changed. In this circumstance, the definition of “motherland” also had been modified in accordance with new situation. With rising of Turkish nationalism, Ottoman land became to be mentioned as Turkish motherland and instead of the loyalty that expected to be shown to Ottoman identity, declaring loyalty to Turkishness became much more imperative.

At the wartime in January 1913, after a brief constitutional rule, the Committee of Union and Progress led by Enver Pasha staged a successful coup and took control of the government. Hence Committee of Union had reinforced its single-party regime and the leadership emerged as a military dictatorship in the hands of triumvirate consisting of Mehmet Talat Pasha, Ahmet Cemal Pasha and Enver Paha. According to the leaders and the intellectuals of the Committee of Union and Progress, the

sovereignty of the nation was being overlooked by the European countries and the former government could not be successful to protect the motherland. Perpetuity and integrity of the Ottoman land could not be sacrificed under any circumstances and even more wars could be fought. With these assumptions Committee of Union and Progress carried out nationalist transformation projects from education to law. In this process, Turkish nationalism step by step became a “state politics” and much more popular among the intellectual cadres and Muslim societies. For example contents of textbooks, such as history and reading books, were changed in accordance with nationalist aim and its discourse. Committee of Union and Progress aimed to cultivate soldier-citizens in order to “secure” well being of Turks. Some para-military organizations such as *Türk Gucu Dernekleri* [Turkish Force Committee] were established by Tevfik Rustu, Ahmed Cemal, Edhem Nejat and Faliş Rifki (Akin, 2004: 95). “National economy project”, based on exclusion non Muslim merchants in Empire from economic activities, was intensified with the boycott of 1913-1914 anyway.

In 16 June 1913, after the first Balkan War, a second war broke out after disagreements between the victorious states. Bulgaria, dissatisfied with its share, attacked Serbia and Greece. Serbia and Greece had signed a defensive alliance; Bulgarians without any official declaration of war attacked Greeks and Serbs. These two countries counter-attacked Bulgaria and by the wartime Romania that had territorial disputes with Bulgaria, engaged in too. As the result of second war, Bulgaria lost territory to all her enemies by the treaty of Bucharest. Ottoman took advantage of the conflict and Ottoman army reclaimed the former capital Edirne at the end of the second war. But it was insufficient to appease the nationalists and the some people who came from Balkans with hatred and anger. Turkish nationalism and fear of losing national integrity would surround the political agencies. At the end of the Balkan Wars, there was growing more homogeneously Muslim as Empire lost its heavily Christian territories and accepted a steady influx of Muslim immigrants and refugee

Turkish Nationalism After the Balkan Wars

The Balkan Wars prepared the way for World War I by satisfying some of the aspirations of Serbia and thereby giving a great impetus to the Serbian desire to annex parts of Austria-Hungary. After the Balkan War defeat, the need to modernize Ottoman army was recognized immediately and a military mission from Germany came to help the government. Liman Von Sanders was appointed commander of First Army in November 1913 and large quantities of new equipment were purchased in Europe. In this process nationalist scholars went on writing essays about the linkage between Turkish nationalism and resurgence. Nationalist decided that Asia Minor would be homeland for Turks alone and the others were to be eliminated. With the outbreak of World War I, it was the beginning of the collapse of Ottoman Empire; Germany and Ottoman state allied fully. In this process nationalist leaders perpetrated and carried out deportation and massacres of

Armenians; thus the combination of population in Anatolia was radically changed again. The armistice was signed at Mudros in 1918 giving the Entente the right to occupy any places if it saw reasonable. Committee of Union and Progress was blamed for the Empire's losses during the World War I; and the leaders of party fled. British, Italian and French military forces began to occupy the provinces of southern Anatolia and Greeks landed at Izmir in May 1919. Grand National Assembly was proclaimed in Ankara on 23 April 1920, forming shadow government and Turkish nationalist forces were engaged in War of Independence. Aftermath of Turkish Independence War (1919-1922), the addressee of Turkish nationalism was defined as the Turkish speaking populace of Anatolia with republican references. Mustafa Kemal as a founder and national leader played the key role to build new nation-state. In 1930's, while official ideology was being re-invented by intellectuals and officers, Turkish nationalism with its popular positivist components, dominated to process of institutionalisation and collective identity. The ideology was officially formulated in 1935 as consisting of six principles: nationalism, republicanism, secularism, revolutionism, statism and populism. The stereotypes constructed in Balkan Wars and traumatic heritage of occupy proceeded to designate the "national history" and internal politics in early republican era.

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