



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Kemalist Myth and Kurdish Nationalism: A Critical Perspective

Suleyman Azad Aslan *

College of Political Science, University of Salahaddin, Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 17(01), 954-971

Publication history: Received on 20 July 2025; revised on 28 August 2025; accepted on 03 September 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.17.1.2517>

Abstract

This article critically examines the intertwined emergence of the Kemalist movement and Kurdish nationalism in Anatolia following World War I, focusing on the period from 1919 to 1922. It challenges the conventional narrative of the Turkish War of Independence as a purely national liberation struggle, arguing instead that the Kemalist movement was a continuation of Ottoman policies aimed at preserving state integrity and suppressing non-Turkish national aspirations, particularly those of the Kurds. The study highlights the conceptual confusion between "Turkey" and the Ottoman Empire, the role of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in shaping post-war policies, and the dual approach of the Kemalists—seeking Kurdish support against external threats while simultaneously undermining Kurdish nationalist organizations. The article contends that mainstream historiography has marginalized Kurdish identity and history, reducing Kurds to a minority status and erasing their territorial claims. By critically analyzing the roots, intentions, and policies of Kemalism, this study provides a nuanced understanding of early Republican Turkey and the failure of Kurdish nationalism, offering insights relevant to contemporary debates on ethnicity, nation-building, and historical justice.

Keywords: Kemalism; Ottoman Empire; Kurdistan; Kurdish Nationalism; World War I; British Empire; Greek;

1. Introduction

This text sets out to explore the rise of the Kemalist movement in Anatolia following WWI in conjunction with the formation of early Kurdish nationalism. This rise coincided with the emergence of Kurdish nationalism. As Kemalists territorially confined themselves within the area of what is called *Misak-i Milli* (the National Pact), it was inevitable that the Kemalists would perceive the Kurdish nationalists as potential and real opponents. The Kurdish nationalists likewise assumed the Kemalists would be a threat to their national interests and therefore took up a position against them. Thus, a critical analysis of Kemalism and its policies against Kurdish nationalism in Kurdistan from 1919 to 1922 is imperative. The rise and success of the Kemalist movement was related to the failure of Kurdish nationalism. As will be analyzed, the Kurdish nationalists found themselves competing against the Kemalist movement in Kurdistan to secure the support of Kurdish tribal and other local forces.

An analysis of Kemalism in the period following WWI up to the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 requires further conceptual clarification on the loosely defined terms such as Turks, Turkish nation and Turkey. Turkey, as a political term, was incorrectly used by Westerners to refer to the Ottoman polity. (B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford University Press, London) [1] In the early 20th century Turkey was not referred to either as a geographical territory nor as a political term by the Ottoman establishment, or even by the heterogeneous Ottoman subject peoples. In the very early 1920s the Kemalists adopted the name of 'Turkiya' from Italian term 'Turchia' as the land where the Turks lived. (A. Yıldız, *Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları, 1919-1938*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2nd ed. 2004) [2] Thus it is essential to differentiate the two different uses of 'Turkey' by westerners who referred to the Empire prior to the establishment of the Republic, and Kemalists who adopted it as a new name for the

* Corresponding author: S Azad Aslan

Misak-i Milli in the law of 1921 and in the republican constitution of 1924. While the former referred to the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, the latter referred to a secular and mono-ethnic entity. This study suggests that failure to distinguish the two usages of 'Turkey' would cast a shadow on any analysis of Turkish history and Kurdish nationalism at this crucial period.

Prior to the establishment of the Republic, Turks were merely one of the many subject peoples of the empire. Within the Ottoman establishment 'the ethnic term Turk was little used, and then chiefly in a rather derogatory sense, to designate the nomads or, later ignorant and uncouth Turkish-speaking peasants of the Anatolian villages. To apply it to an Ottoman gentleman of Constantinople would have been an insult.' (B. Lewis, op. cit., pp.1-2) Indeed, during the resistance period, the sense of Turkishness among the peasant population of Anatolia was very weak. A Kemalist novelist depicted this situation in his novel, *Yaban*:

- You are one of them, sir, I know
- Who are 'them'?
- Those who side with kemal pasha
- How come that anybody who is a turk cannot side with kemal pasha?
- But we are not turks, sir
- Who are you then?
- We are muslims, thanks be to god, those whom you mentioned live in haymana. (quoted in d. Avcioglu, *Türkiyenin Düzeni: Dün-Bugün-Yarın*, Tekin Yayınevi, İstanbul,1998, p.283) [3]

Turks, like most of the other Muslim communities within the Empire, had not been identifying themselves as a distinct nationalist category despite the fact that a version of early Turkish nationalism, pan-Turanism, had been in elite discourse since the 1860s. In the very early phase of the Kemalist movement, 1919-1924, any specific reference to the Turkish nation was restricted; instead, the Kemalists used the term '*millet*' which was inclusive of Kurds and other Muslim groups within the unoccupied Ottoman territory. '*Millet*', as an Arabic term, referred to religious communities, not ethnic or linguistic communities. Within the Ottoman Empire each non-Muslim community was identified as a *millet*. The Muslim subjects of the Empire, despite their ethnic and linguistic differences, constituted a *millet* on their own. Only after the second half of the 19th century did the term *millet*, apart from the religious meaning, acquire ethnic and linguistic meanings, and then only within the limits of journalistic literature. In popular culture *millet* continued to signify religious communities. (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.329; A. Yıldız, op. cit., pp.50-2; B. Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, Ağaç yayınları, İstanbul, 1992, p.11) [4] According to the most important Ottoman dictionary, *Kamus-i Türki*, *millet* referred to Muslim communities regardless of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. (Ş. Sami, *Kamus-i Türki*, vol.III, Tercüman, İstanbul, 1986, pp.881-882; see also, A. Yıldız, op. cit., pp. 50-2) [5] As Lewis argued 'in the Ottoman Empire *millet* came to be applied to the organized and legally recognized religious communities, such as the Greek Christians, the Armenian Christians, and the Jews, and by extension also to the different "nations" of the Franks... In the Empire, there was a Muslim *millet*, but no Turkish or Arab or Kurdish *millets*.' (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.329)

In its early period (1919-1923) Kemalist discourse on the term '*millet*' referred not to the ethnic Turks but to the Ottoman Muslim *millet* which included Turks, Kurds and other Muslim communities. However, the use of *millet* in its religious sense was transformed, particularly after the establishment of the Republic and the abolishment of the Caliphate, into a modern political term implying 'nation'. Furthermore, post-republican Turkish historiography, for a host of ideological and political reasons, has retrospectively returned the modern use of this term to the early period of the Kemalist movement (1919-1924). Thus, in order to understand the birth of the Kemalist movement, it is crucial to note the specific use of '*millet*'. As it will be seen later in this text most Turkish historiography and some of the non-Turkish historians fail to make reference to this important semantic distinction.

2. The Rise of Kemalist Movement

The rise and development of Kemalism is closely linked with the failure of Kurdish nationalism. Post-Republic Turkish historical writings had depicted and still depict Mustafa Kemal as a 'super hero' a 'near God', a man who fought against darkness, backwardness, enslavement and imperialism, in short, everything which was an obstacle in the way of progress, civilization, modernity and freedom. (See related works) [6] The period from 1918 to 1923 has been presented by Turkish historians as a period of national liberation, and as a war of independence launched by the Turkish nation under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal against world imperialism. Such writings on Mustafa Kemal by Turkish historians have affected many non-Turkish scholars on the subject. (see related works) [7] The consequence of such historical discourse contributed more than anything else to the misrepresentation of Kurdish national question on number of points: firstly, the Kurds as a nation and their land, Kurdistan, as a country, were and still are not recognized.

Secondly, in close connection with the first point, Kurdish history became a sub-history, a complementary part of Turkish history. Thus, as an appendix of Turkish history there is an implicit presumption that the Kurds do not constitute a national group on their own merit. This resulted in the Kurds being stripped of history and land and reduced them from a nation to a sort of undefined minority, categorized as a Muslim minority. Such a case can be illustrated in the work of many eminent historians. For example, in W. Yale's *The Near East* where he says,

'the *Turks* were not at first aware that the Allies were planning to partition the *Turkish territories* in Europe and Anatolia. It was not long, however, before they were forced to realize that the Allied Powers were motivated solely by their national and imperialist interests in utter disregard of the wishes of the Turkish people.' (W. Yale, op. cit., p.275) [Italics added]

Who were these Turks and what were these Turkish territories? Before the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the sense of being Turk and identifying with a particular piece of territory was not more advanced than the same sense among the Kurds, Arabs or others. Indeed, as Robinson indicated 'few possessed any real sense of national identity, but they did possess a deep sense of identification with Islam and of resentment of the western infidel. Contemporary observers noted that the ordinary Turk, asked who or what he was, was inclined to answer: 'I'm a Muslim' not 'I am a Turk.'" (R.D. Robinson, op. cit., p.37) This in fact is not surprising at all, due to the fact that political nationalism was a foreign concept for the Middle East before WWI. The so-called Turkish territories of Anatolia included the greater parts of Kurdistan and Armenia. Yale obviously ignores the Kurds and Kurdistan. He writes: 'The resolution passed by the First Congress of Erzurum proclaimed the right of the *Turks* to resist every territorial occupation and all intervention designed to establish Greek or Armenian control over any part of Anatolia.' (W. Yale, op. cit., p.280) [Italics added] Neither the Erzurum Congress nor any other Congresses in the period 1918-1922 ever referred to the Turks but rather to the '*millet*' a term with a religious connotation. Yale is reading and writing history in retrospect. Yale goes further: 'a little less than four years after the signing of the armistice of Mudros, Turkey was saved from partition. The European imperialists had met with a prophetic set back to their power in the Near East.' (Ibid., p.287) Did Turkey, then, constitute a nation-state? Who was saved from partition? 'Turkey' then and today includes a great part of Kurdistan. According to the Sevres treaty, Kurdish autonomy and possible independence were officially granted. Would the creation of a Kurdish state and an independent Armenia separated from the Ottoman Empire have meant partition of Turkey as the territory of Turks? The Ottoman Empire itself had participated in the war alongside Germany and Austria with expansionist purposes. Like Germany and Austria, the Ottoman Empire were defeated and had to face certain consequences. Nobody, for example, blames the Greeks for launching an independence movement and freeing themselves from Ottoman rule. Why then were the Kurds and remaining Armenians, if they had gained their independence and their territories from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, seen as having imperialistic designs over 'Turkey'. It is understandable for most of the Turkish and Turkish educated historians to neglect the Kurdish issue in their analysis as any attempt to include the Kurds would have meant persecution by the legislative bodies of Turkey. The case of Ismail Beşikçi is well known. However, it is difficult to grasp the reasons behind the western and other non-Turkish scholars' negligence of the same issue.

This in itself suggests that a critical analysis of the Kemalist movement, its roots, intention and policies, is necessary for a clear perception of Kurdish history and the development and failure of Kurdish nationalism.

2.1. Prelude to Kemalism: Young Turks

Mustafa Kemal and almost all his close associates who participated in the establishment of the Turkish Republic were members of the CUP. (F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London and New York, (Reprinted 1998), pp.48-9; F. Başkaya, *Paradigmanın İflası: Resmi İdeolojinin Eleştirisine Giriş*, Doz, İstanbul, 1997, 6th ed.) [8] As Yapp argued "Turkish nationalists of 1922 were the inheritors of the Young Turk revolution; indeed although the policies of the leaders of the CUP were denounced for having ruined the Ottoman Empire many of the nationalists were by origin themselves Unionists and the Defense of Rights groups which had been the precursors of the Grand National Assembly were commonly built on the base of branch organizations of the CUP.' (M.E.Yapp, op. cit., p.151) Roshwald also claimed that 'Kemal Atatürk's post-war vision of Turkish nationalism was clearly rooted in the ideas and practices of certain elements within the CUP.' (A. Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001; Zurcher, E. J. *Turkey: A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, London- New York, 2003, p.58) [9]

The CUP movement, both its policies and objectives, signify a continuity of the Ottoman endeavor towards modernization and centralization that had begun during the late 18th century. (E. Zurcher, op. cit; F. Ahmad, op. cit; M. Yegen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürd Sorunu*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999; for a critical reading of this period see F. Başkaya, op. cit., and I. Küçükömer, *Düzenin Yabancılaşması*, Bağlam, 2nd ed. İstanbul, 2001) [10] The CUP was in turn

a continuation of the Young Ottomans who in turn were a product of the bureaucratic reforms initiated during the Tanzimat. As the evident decline of the Ottoman Empire became more and more obvious during the 18th century, the Ottoman administration attempted to save the Empire and turn the tide of decline by searching for a new way forward. They thought that they found one by observing western success and imitating western culture and politics. Beginning with Mahmud II, the Ottoman state embarked upon centralization and modernization policies which dominated the political objectives of the Empire and modern Turkey for the next two centuries. Right from its inception, the policies of centralization and modernization contained irresolvable contradictions which had been inherited from the classical Ottoman administration and political structure. Centralization meant the extension of central control of the Ottoman administration over the periphery, which in turn caused dissatisfaction among the autonomous subjects of the Empire content with the classical center-periphery relations. The centralization projects of the Ottoman administration faced resistance amongst its ethnic, religious and cultural groups who enjoyed their autonomous status in their relations with the central state. As chapter II indicated, such centralization policies instigated huge unrest and resulted in the great Kurdish revolts. The conflict between centralization and decentralization, as well as the absorption of western modernity and reaction against it by traditionalists, dominated the political and social life of the Empire. The contradiction here is that while the Ottoman officials and intelligentsia worried about the disintegration of the Empire into its ethnic and religious components, and sought a social panacea by introducing western modernization, this modernization in turn further accelerated the disintegration of the Empire, as it separated from its subject peoples one by one. (For a detailed analysis of this period see M. Yegen, op. cit., pp.66-75) The loss of Greece in the first half of the 19th century was followed by Muhammad Ali's centralization policies in Egypt, and in the early 20th century the loss of what remained of the Balkans, and Tripoli. This inherent contradiction inevitably had a great impact on the political actors of the Imperial administration and intelligentsia. (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.59; F. Ahmad, op. cit., p.33; M. Yegen, op. cit., p. 88) The Young Turks were not immune from this.

The rise of the Young Turks began in the late 19th century to save the Empire from disintegration by reimplementing the 1876 Constitution, which had been suspended by Sultan Abdulhamid II. Like its predecessors, 'the fundamental question' for the Young Turks, rightly argued Lewis 'was survival, the survival of the Ottoman state which they and their fathers had for generations saved, and both their actions and their discussions revolved around this central problem: Bu devlet nasıl Kurtarılabilir? How can this state be saved?' (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.208) In other words, as Şerif Mardin claimed, the strongest intention of the Young Turks was to prevent the disintegration of the Empire. (Ş. Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895-1908*, İletişim, 7th ed. 2000, p.301) [11]

In this early period the Young Turks gathered around the concept of Ottomanism, which was as Roshwald argued 'a vague term denoting the cultivation of collective political identity based on civic equality among the peoples of the Empire.' (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.59) As a panacea for the fundamental problem of keeping the empire intact, while simultaneously pursuing the centralization and modernization policies to elevate the empire to the level of western civilization, Ottomanism proved to be too weak or too late to work. As Lewis acutely noted

'the spread of nationalism among the subject peoples of the Empire, and the final contamination, by the nationalist virus, of even the Turkish masters of it, ended forever the 'Ottomanist' dream of the free, equal, and peaceful association of peoples in a common loyalty to the dynastic sovereign of a multi-national, multi-denominational empire.' (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.214)

Thus, as Roshwald argued 'Ottomanism, (...) was a very loaded term.' (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.59) Right from its inception the Young Turk movement contained within itself two tendencies: the tendency towards decentralization which was spearheaded by the liberals supported by the ethnic groups of the Empire and the centralization tendency, which was pursued by nascent Turkish nationalists. The tension within the movement came to the surface at the first congress of the Young Turks in Paris, which resulted in the division of the movement around these two tendencies. (O. Tiftikçi, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Burjuvazinin Evrimi*, El Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2003, pp.156-162; A. Özer, *Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyete: Siyasal Kurum ve Düşüncelerde Süreklilik ve Kopuş*, Sis Yayıncılık, Ankara, 2000, pp.36-37) [12] The Liberal tendency never succeeded in getting a unified organization under the leadership of Prince Sabahattin. However, the nationalist tendency was rejuvenated a few years later led by Ahmet Rıza. The division of the Young Turks at the Paris congress revolved around the crucial question of the future structure of the state and its relations with the regional ethnic and religious elements of the Empire. Prince Sabahattin's liberal and decentralized view accommodated the autonomous structure of ethnic religious elements within the Empire. The prince was opposed by the Ahmed Rıza group who advocated unionist and centralized policies. (A. Özer, op. cit., p.36)

Thus, the coming to power of the CUP in 1908 and the restoration of the constitution created more problems than it solved. Though almost all ethnic and religious groups within the Empire applauded the 1908 constitutional revolution, the non-Muslim and non-Turkish communities were apprehensive lest the new regime be used as a means to revive

and strengthen the Empire under the leadership of the largest group, the Turks. (F. Ahmad, op. cit., p.33) Indeed, an ideological strain that emerged within the CUP in the early years of the 20th century was Pan-Turkism. (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.63) Leading Young Turks, figures such as Yusuf Akçura, Ziya Gökalp and others, were inclined towards pan-Turkism. Critically evaluating the possibility of creating an 'Ottoman *millet*', Akçura inferred that such attempts were doomed to failure for three main reasons: the nationalistic feelings of subject people of the Empire; Russian designs on the Ottoman Empire; and Islam which never recognized full equality between Muslim and infidel (gayri-Muslim). (Y. Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1998, p.28 -the first edition of this article was published in Egypt in *Türk* newspaper in 1904) [13] Contrary to the Ottoman *millet*, Akçura argued that the politics of Turkism would strengthen the link between the Turks and the non-Turkish Muslims of the Empire: those who had absorbed Turkishness to a certain degree, and those who had not absorbed Turkishness at all would be Turkified by politics of Turkism. Furthermore, argued Akçura, the ever-greater use of the politics of Turkism would secure the unity of all the Turks, from Central Asia to Europe. In such unity the most advanced and civilized Turks, those of the Ottoman state, had a great role to play. (Ibid., p.33) This idea of pan-Turkism gained considerable influence within the CUP, especially during the turbulent period of 1910-1913. The crucial point here is the assumption of assimilation of non-Turkish Muslim people within the Empire. Despite the circulation of pan-Turkish ideas within the CUP, in its official discourse, the CUP employed the term Ottomanism up to the Balkan war. However, amongst its inner circle, the CUP paid lip service to Ottomanism in order to disguise their inner purpose. (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.214)

The CUP, right from the time of 1908 revolution, had to face insurmountable problems and wars which had a great impact on subsequent CUP policies. Soon after the 1908 revolution, Bulgaria proclaimed its independence, and Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was followed by the Italian capture of Libya, and then finally the Balkan wars, all of which eliminated the Ottoman Empire from Europe and Africa. In short, from the time that the CUP came to power in 1908 the Empire lost 1/3 of its land and 1/5 of its population. Here lies the clue to explain the total ideological and political transformation from Ottomanism to pan-Turkism. In such a short time the loss of territory and population destroyed the multi-ethnic and religious composition of the Empire. (R. Melson, 'Provocation or Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry into the Armenian Genocide of 1915' in R. G. Hovannisian (ed) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick and Oxford, 1986, p.72, pp.61-84) [14] Apart from a sizeable Armenian community and other minor Christian communities, the Empire became a dominantly Muslim empire. Such harsh and unseen developments had a significant impact on the consequent evolution of the CUP. As Roshwald noted 'these experiences reinforced the sense that ethnic identity was a critical element in determining mass loyalties and that the future of the Ottoman Empire depended largely on the Young Turks ability to awaken nationalist passions among the Turkish populace... It is no coincidence, then, that the period of the Balkan wars marked the beginning of the CUP's open sponsorship and encouragement of pan-Turkist propaganda.' (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.107) From 1913 onwards centralism and Turkism became official policies pursued by the CUP and later inherited by the Republic. The CUP's Congress in 1913 provided the basic foundations of such policies: decisions to settle nomadic tribes; supporting the development of a national bourgeoisie etc. (T.Z. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler: İttihat ve Terakki, Bir Çağın, Bir Kuşağın, Bir Paritinin Tarihi*, vol.III, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000 (first edition 1952), p.293; M. Yegen, op. cit., p74) [15]

Under the CUP leadership the Ottoman Empire entered WWI alongside Germany in the hope of regaining its lost territories and prestige. The CUP leadership also 'saw the war not only as an opportunity to recoup some of the territorial loses of recent years but to fulfill ambitious pan-Turkist dreams.' (A. Roshwald, op.cit., p.106) The fact that the Arab part of the Empire did not participate in the call to Jihad, and joined the Allies, forced the Young Turks to implement further the pan-Turkist policy. As Roshwald argued 'pan-Turkism, then, was not just a propaganda device; it was a political ideology that came to dominate the CUP's definition of state interest during the Ottoman Empire's last years.' (Ibid., p.107) This in turn resulted in the Armenian genocide simply because they constituted a buffer zone between the Anatolian Turks and those Turks in the Caucasus. (Ibid., p.110) Despite the fact that the Kurds participated in the war effort, they also became victims of the CUP's regime although not on the same level as that of Armenia. Many Kurds were forcefully moved to inner Anatolia during the war years. (N. Kutlay, *İttihat Terakki ve Kürdler*, Beybun Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, pp.259-276) [16]

The defeat of the Empire at first seemed to have brought the century long question of 'bu devlet nasıl Kurtarılabilir?' to its ironic conclusion with the total disintegration of the state itself. However, the legacy of the CUP, its policies and ideas on Turkish nationalism become a crucial tool in saving the state, albeit not in a way the CUP had hoped. With a more realistic and sober analysis of post-war conditions, remaining members of the CUP preserved and fought for what they could save. The rise of Mustafa Kemal and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, contrary to what most Turkish historians claimed, was not a beginning in of itself, but the continuation of the Young Turks endeavor to save the state.

One of the important aspects of the CUP which needs to be scrutinized, so as to understand the post-war Kemalist movement, is the CUP's economic policy. It sought to create a 'bourgeois Turk' or what was known as a 'Milli İktisat' (national economy). The Milli İktisat policy that the CUP embarked upon aimed at eliminating Greek and Armenian people from economic activities. As can be recalled, the Greeks and Armenians were the most active groups in the economic life of the Empire, and in contact with French and British commercial centers. Başkaya argued that

'the CUP, after capturing power and during the WWI assumed that the life of the Ottoman Empire depended on the Muslimization of Ottoman capital. For that purpose, they pursued a policy to diminish the influence and economic power of Greek and Armenian merchants and traders in the economic structure of the Empire and transfer the financial and economic functions to the Muslim elements.' (F. Başkaya, op. cit., p.53)

The theoretical root of such 'Milli İktisat' policy had been laid down by the influential CUP theoreticians, Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura. Gökalp argued that the division of labour in the Ottoman Empire, military and bureaucracy (Turks) versus trade and industry (Greeks and Armenians) had brought about a 'mutual parasitism' as those ethnic groups lacked a 'common conscience'. Thus, the realization of 'Milli tesianud' (national solidarity) was not possible, primarily because 'Milli tesianud' required the existence of a community which had a 'common conscience.' It followed that Turks who had a 'common conscience' should undertake by themselves all kinds of economic activities. (Z. Toprak, *Türkiye'de 'Milli İktisat' 1908-1918*, Ankara Yurt Yayınları A.Ş. 1982, pp.30-35; U. Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, London, Luzac and Company, 1950, pp.140-46) [17] Akçura, in a similar vein, suggested that the Turks should develop a capitalist bourgeoisie who would assume the role so far played by non-Turkish elements. He argued that the kingdom of Poland lost its independence due to the fact that its bourgeoisie was made up of Jews and Germans. (S. H. Astourian, 'Genocidal Process: Reflections on the Armeno-Turkish Polarization in the Armenian Genocide', in R.G. Hovannisian *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, Macmillan, London, 1992, p.72, pp.53-79) [18]

On these theoretical foundations a policy was soon implemented during the Balkan wars and particularly during WWI. The Turkish boycott of Greek shops, during the Ottoman, Greek and the European Powers' negotiations over the Aegean Islands, was extended to Armenian and other non-Muslim groups, which caused the ruin of hundreds of small Greek and Armenian tradesmen. (Ibid., p.70) The Milli İktisat was forcefully implemented during the war. This policy was put into practice by a number of methods: firstly, discriminatory CUP policies ensured the nationalization of the economy by offering Turkish traders the lion's share of the market; secondly, under the war conditions Greek and Armenian businessmen were dispossessed. For example, the number of Greek merchants, traders and others from the west coast area of the Empire who immigrated into Greece was about 130,000 during the war years. Their companies and businesses were handed over to the leaders of CUP. (O. Tiftikçi, op. cit., p.258) During the four years of the war the accumulation of Muslim business capital accelerated rapidly with the help of the government. (F. Başkaya, op. cit., pp.55-7) In the countryside land which had belonged to the deported Armenians was quickly transferred to Muslims: 'In the countryside, whereas big landlords and the emerging class of 'middle peasants' acquired a good share of the lands vacated by the Armenian peasants, Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus settled on the rest... In other areas of Anatolia, "the properties of persons who have been dispatched elsewhere" were either distributed free or sold for a song to anyone who applied to the Committee for them and proved themselves of the same political persuasion or of pure Turkish or preponderatingly [sic] Turkish nationality.' (S.H. Astourian, op. cit., pp.71-2) Astourian notes that the processes of Milli İktisat 'enriched the supporters of the CUP. High functionaries, former officers, and Unionist bureaucrats turned into capitalists; merchants from Salonica and large landlords took over the lands of the Armenians and their possessions in international trade; and Turkish provincial property-owners formed the nascent middle class.' (Ibid., p.72) However, some sections of the Kurds, mainly landlords and members of ex-Hamidieh regiments, participated in the Armenian massacre, and profited by looting the deported Armenian properties, land and personal belongings. (K. M. Ahmad, *Kurdistan During the First World War*, Saqi Boks, London, 1994, pp.145-183) [19] It was these newly developed 'Milli bourgeoisie' who built on the ruins of the Armenian and Greek peoples' enterprises, and that most actively participated in and responded to the call of the Kemalist movement. (D. Avcıoğlu. *Türkiyenin Düzeni*, op. cit.,; F. Başkaya, op. cit.,; O. Tiftikçi, op. cit.,)

2.2. The End of the War and the Coming of Mustafa Kemal

The Ottoman Empire under the Young Turk leadership had to concede defeat and concluded an armistice on 31st October 1918 at Mudros. E. Zurcher, op. cit., p.138) The armistice contained 25 articles which included the military occupation of the Straits, control of all railway and telegraphic lines, demobilization and disarmament of the Ottoman troops and most importantly (under article 7) the Entente had the right to occupy any territory of the Ottoman Empire if it considered its security to be under threat. (J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Middle East, A Documentary Record, 1914-1956*, vol. II, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc, Princeton, New Jersey, London, 1956, pp.36-7) [20]

As soon as the Armistice was concluded the CUP leaders left the country (1 November 1918) as they feared that they would be held to account for their treatment of the Armenians. Despite the fact that the CUP leaders had left the country, the CUP organization remained intact, and they 'controlled parliament, the army, the police force, the post and telegraph services and many other important organizations. Purges were started by the new regime in 1919, but neither it nor the Entente had enough manpower to replace the majority of Unionist officials.' (E. Zürcher, op. cit., p.140) The CUP, even before the end of the war, prepared the ground for the political and military struggle in Anatolia during 1915 in case the British and French navy managed to break through to the Dardanelles. A sub-organization of the CUP, the Teşkilat-i Mahsusa was ordered to store arms and ammunition in secret depots in a number of places in Anatolia. The Teşkilat which was reconstituted in October 1918 as the Umum Alem-i Islam İhtilal Teşkilatı (General Revolutionary Organization of the Islamic World) was instructed to begin guerrilla resistance in the interior. This organization had played a significant role in the Armenian genocide and maltreatment of the Greek populace in the Empire. Not surprisingly, they feared retribution should they give up their arms and disband. (Ibid., p.140) The CUP leaders also established, before they had left the country, the *Karakol* organization with the purpose of protecting the Unionists in the post-war situation and shielding them from the revenge of the Christian communities and possible retribution of the Entente. A second crucial purpose was to strengthen the resistance in Anatolia and the Caucasus by sending able people, money, arms, and supplies from the capital. (O. Tiftikçi, op. cit., p.317) The other important steps taken by the CUP, alongside an armed resistance movement from Anatolia, was to prepare public defense organizations which took the shape of the formation of 'societies for the defense of the national rights.' These societies played a vital role in the establishment of the resistance movement in Anatolia.

These points on the CUP leadership's preparation for resistance movement have been mostly ignored by official Turkish historiography which based its analysis on M Kemal's speech in which the CUP leadership was accused of dragging the nation and the country into the war, and after the defeat of leaving the country and running away to save their own lives. (M.K. Atatürk, *Nutuk*, Mercek, İstanbul, 2002, p.7) [21] The implicit assumption here is that it was solely M. Kemal who created, organized, led and successfully executed the 'nationalist' movement and saved the 'nation and country'. This assumption was also shared by number of western scholars. Toynbee, for example, claimed that 'a Turkish soldier, Mustapha Kemal Bey, come forward to save his country from oppression and despair' (A.J. Toynbee & K.P. Kirkwood, *Turkey*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1926, p.78) [22] H. Allen also inferred that

'he [M Kemal] was the chief initiator of the movement for the defense of Anatolia contrary to the wishes of the Sultan's government in 1918-1919. The force of his personality, his determination, his endurance, his executive ability, but, above all, his inspiring generalship, which led Turkey's small but brave Nationalist army to victory against the invading Greeks in 1922, raised him to the highest pinnacle in the heart of his fellow-countrymen.' (H.E. Allen, op. cit., p.46)

Robinson goes so far as to claim that 'without Kemal there might not now be a Turkey' and that Mustafa Kemal was a hero who combined the qualities of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Frank Roosevelt in one. (R. D. Robinson, op. cit., p.20 and 91) Helmreich believed that 'the Nationalist movement, which first appeared in May 1919, was founded by Mustafa Kemal Pasha.... The Nationalist movement was independent of the Young Turks in its origins, and subsequent Allied charges that the Nationalists were mainly a continuation of the old CUP were without foundation.' (P.C. Helmreich, op. cit., p.230) A Turkish historian D. Avcioglu enthusiastically put forward the view that 'Atatürk, before everything else, was the creator of the Turkish nation.' (D. Avcioglu, *Türkiyenin....* op.cit., p.338)

The resistance movement in Anatolia was prepared, organized and launched long before Mustafa Kemal landed at Samsun on May 1919. Prominent army commanders, like Kazim Karabekir got themselves appointed to the interior with the full intention of initiating the resistance movement. Karabekir at his own request was appointed to the 15th Army corps situated in Erzurum. He and likeminded officers urged Mustafa Kemal to join them, as the only solution to save the country was resistance from the interior. (K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, Emre Yayınları, İstanbul, pp.39-63; K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları*, Emre Yayınları, İstanbul, 1995, pp.33-42; O. Tiftikçi, op. cit., pp.365-377) [23] Mustafa Kemal opted to remain in Istanbul in the hope that he could be appointed in the Cabinet. Ahmad inferred that 'he was willing to serve as war minister in the Sultan's government during the armistice. But he was rejected by the pashas because of his social class.' (F. Ahmad, op. cit., p.49) While Mustafa Kemal remained in Istanbul he had tried to establish good relations with the British authorities, the Sultan and the liberals. The place he chose to stay, Pera Palace, was full of officers of the Allies' High Commissioners. Lord Kinross mentioned a meeting between Mustafa Kemal and Ward Price who was working for the Daily Mail on 14 November 1918. Through Price, Mustafa Kemal offered his services to the British and asked him to put him in touch with the British authorities. (L. Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, Weidenfeld/Nicholson, London, 1964) [24] He reiterated his inclination toward the British in an interview in *Minber* daily newspaper in 17 November the same year. (O. Tiftikçi, op.cit., p.371) He had close contacts with Avni Pasha, *Bahriye Naziri*, and M. Ali Bey, *Dahiliye Naziri*. (Ibid., p.376) It was such close contacts with the Ottoman

administration, his publicly expressed opinion towards Britain, and the fact that he was not closely associated with the CUP triumvirate, what led Damat Ferid Pasha, British authorities, and the Sultan all to agree to send Kemal to Anatolia as General Inspector of the 3rd Army with extra responsibilities. His duties included to restore order and law, hasten disarmament and to disperse the established Şuras (Soviets) in Eastern Anatolia. Şuras had proliferated in areas close to the Soviet Union. As General-Inspectorate, Kemal was in a position to command both civil and military authorities in Anatolia. (The General-Inspectorate covered the areas of Trabzon, Erzurum, Sivas and Van provinces and Erzurum and Samsun towns. The civil authorities of these provinces and towns were under the command of the General-Inspectorate. The army commanders of Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Elazig, Ankara, and Kastamonu provinces had also to obey the Inspectorate.) With such a superior commanding post, Kemal was in a good position to lead the resistance movement.

3. The Resistance Movement

3.1. Composition of the Resistance Movement

Those behind the resistance movement were mainly military officers, Muslim landowners, traders (eşraf), ulema and the administrative officials. It may be argued that the resistance movement in Anatolia was based on the collaboration and alliance of these groups of the Ottoman Empire. The backbone of the resistance movement was the military officials. Almost all the low-mid-high ranking military officers participated in the resistance movement right from the beginning. Leading figures like Kazim Karabekir, Rauf Bey, Ali Fuat, İsmet İnönü and others played significant roles. The common characteristic of all those military officers was that they were ex-Unionists, and they had a huge stake in the preservation of the state and the army, which the Allies had the intention of reducing considerably (but not destroying).

The Muslim landlords, traders (eşraf), tribal leaders, ulema, and especially those who enriched themselves on the ruins of the Armenian and Greek population of the Empire were the first to rally behind the military officers. (F. Başkaya, op. cit., F. Ahmad, op. cit.; O. Tiftikçi, op. cit;) Zürcher was right to indicate that 'in the towns of Anatolia, the "Defense of Rights" organizations were generally supported by the Muslim landowners and traders. Many of them had become wealthy through government contracts and by taking over the land, property and businesses of the deported or emigrated Greeks and Armenians for next to nothing, they thus had a very strong incentive to resist the Greek and Armenian claims.' (E. Zürcher. op. cit., p.154) It is not surprising to note that one of the first 'Defense of Rights' associations was established and active in Erzurum. In this locality the landlords, merchants and others were afraid that the Armenians, who had been removed from the area during the war time, might return and claim their possessions. The provinces which sent delegates to the Erzurum Congress were mainly those of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Mus, and Erzincan—provinces that the Armenian nationalists claimed to be part of Greater Armenia. (F. Başkaya, op.cit., p.56) The other prominent 'Defense of Rights' associations were established in Trakya, *Trakya Paşaeli Mudafa-i Hukuk-i Milliye Jamiyeti*, where the possibility of Greek occupation threatened those who possessed the former Greek properties. Ş. Sureyya argued that during the 'National resistance movement, in all the cities and towns Mustafa Kemal had come into contact with, the eşraf and ulema were the vanguard of the people.' Although, bizarrely, he then goes on to contradict himself by claiming 'It would be misleading to characterize the resistance movement as a middle-class movement.' (Ş. Sureyya, op.cit., p.20) Karpat also stressed the pivotal role of the middle class in the countryside: 'various sub-groups of the new middle class came to dominate the social and political life of the Turkish countryside, especially after the 1880s. The Young Turks' revolution of 1908 and Turkey's 1919-1922 War of Liberation were led by the central elites but carried to a successful conclusion by the participation and support of the middle class in the countryside.' (K. H. Karpat, 'Introduction: Turks Remember Their Otoman Ancestors', in K.H. Karpat (ed) *Otoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Brill-Leiden, 2000, p. xiii, pp. vii-xxii) [25] Thus, the 'War of Independences' can be classified as a movement with a strongly middle-class coloring, rather than a mass popular movement, a point that will be further elaborated.

The so-called 'War of Liberation' in Asia Minor was in fact a resistance movement to oppose Armenian, Greek and the Kurdish nationalists' claims. Indeed, the resistance was not aimed at the British and French forces but rather the Armenian, Greek and the Kurdish nationalists' forces. The fact is that while under the British occupation, the regions of Antep, Maraş, and Urfa did not mount resistance against the occupiers. Quite the contrary, the local population welcomed the Allied forces. Even the *Kuvayi Milliye* leaders in Istanbul advised people in Maraş and Antep to be well behaved with the British and French forces who occupied Maraş and Antep. (D. Avcioğlu, *Milli Kürduluş...* op. cit., pp.8-9) Only when in the spirit of the Sykes-Picot agreement the British were replaced by French troops, which contained a number of Armenians, did initial resistance gradually develop. Some Kemalists writers argued that the resistance against the Armenians originated from a fear of Armenian retributions and illegal claims on Turkish land and property. (D. Avcioğlu, *Milli Kürduluş*, op. cit., pp.6-9; H. İzzettin Dinamo, *Kutsal İsyan: Milli Kürduluş Savaşının Gerçek Hikayesi*, vol.5 May Yayınları, İstanbul, 1967, pp.163-4) [26] However, the real motive for Turkish resentment against the Armenians was the fact that the Armenians were trying to repossess their confiscated and plundered properties that had been taken during the Armenian exile and genocide of 1915. Those who had enriched themselves by the ruin of the

Armenian people had real cause for alarm. It was this fact that propelled them towards the Kemalists. This explains why the local notables and the resistance leaders were not worried about the Allied occupying forces, but were welcoming and inviting them in, while they were agitated and violently resisted the Armenian people who wanted to return back to their homes. (İ. Beşikçi, *Kürdistan üzerinde Emperyalist Bölüşüm Mücadelesi, 1915-1925*, Yurt Kitap-Yayın, Ankara, 1992, pp. 178-184) [27] It also explains why it was that the aforementioned provinces during the British occupation did not opt to send delegates to the Sivas Congress which was held by the Kemalists.

The third group, the administrative officials both in the capital and the provinces of Anatolia also supported the resistance movement. Particularly those workers in the postal and telegraph section proved to be crucial, as they provided the communication which was imperative for the resistance movement to unify local forces and responded quickly to any eventuality. In a dispatch to Curzon, Captain Hurst informed him that

'he [M. Kemal] has been carrying on a large telegraphic correspondence with the surrounding towns and beyond, so much as to have practically monopolized the telegraph, and his officers have been seen in several, or most, of the towns and villages of the neighborhood, where their influence has certainly not made for conciliation.' (FO 371/4158/96979, Calthorpe to Curzon, despatch, Istanbul 21/6/1919, enclosing report by Captain L.H. Hurst, Samsun, 12/6/1919) [28]

The provincial governors and local administrative officials followed the orders of the resistance movement, which practically reduced the Ottoman central administration to the capital and its environs. The participation of the administrative body in the resistance movement was thanks to the CUP's country-wide organization. The role of those ex-CUP officers serving in the capital, in particular at the Ministry of War, during the Allied occupation was crucial. (E. Zürcher, op. cit., pp.138-167; O. Tiftikçi, op. cit., pp.390-500; B. Lewis, op.cit., pp.234-287)

Despite the fact that the peasantry constituted the bulk of the population, mass participation in the resistance was limited, and force had to be applied in order to mobilize the peasantry for military activities. This was most evident in the case of military deserters, as was debated in a close meeting of the Grand National Assembly on 5 July 1920. The Konya MP, Vehbi Bey, in his speech refers to the urgency of the issue of military deserters: 'the issue of deserters within the army is known by all our friends. Two hundred were dispatched from Konya and only 30 of them arrived at Karahisar. A three-hundred military convoy was reduced to a hundred and fifty in three days. If a solution cannot be found in a month a serious consequence is imminent.' The same Vehbi Bey underlines the reason for such large-scale desertion: 'the peasant is fed up with for sacrificing themselves on behalf of town traders (eşraf). They are opposing the saying that "they (eşraf) are Gazis, we (peasants) are martyrs." This time we want to be Gazis and they to be martyrs. This is what preoccupies the soul of the soldier.' (TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, vol. I Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, p.87) [29] In the same meeting the Trabzon MP, Husrev Bey said 'it becomes clear that the level of desertion in our county has risen considerably and therefore our forces at the front are wavering. The government should punish these people.' (Ibid., p.88) Military desertion became so endemic that a law proposed to the Grand National Assembly by the Representative Committee (Vekiller Heyeti) towards the end of 1920 included:

- Those who do not obey the call to military service are to have their homes burnt, their properties confiscated, their families deported; and those who continue not to obey shall be hanged upon their arrest
- Those who desert from their military unit are to be sentenced according to the article 3
- Each village council of elders (Köy İhtiyar Heyeti) is responsible for catching the deserters and surrendering them to the government. Should the council not obey such orders themselves they shall be liable to and subjected to article 3
- Those who hide deserters and encourage and support deserters shall be subjected to article 3.' (For this proposal see: S. Ağaoğlu, *Kuvayi Milliye Ruhu*, İstanbul, 1964, pp.123-125; D. Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin*, op.cit., pp.309-310; F. Başkaya, op. cit., p.66)

Such harsh measures signify limited and involuntary mass participation in the resistance movement.

3.2. The Formation and Development of the Resistance Movement

As mentioned above, soon after the armistice small resistance groups were established in a number of localities in Anatolia by the initiative of the CUP. These groups increasingly agitated due to the Greek army landings at Smyrna (İzmir). These initial resistance groups were, through the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, gathered under a unified organization withheld clear objectives and a program. Soon after Mustafa Kemal arrived at Samsun on 19 May 1919, a meeting was held between resistance leaders in Amasya which produced what is famously known as the *Amasya*

Tamimi (Amasya Proclamation) on 21 June: (Mustafa Kemal, Rauf Orbay, Ali Fuat, Refer Bele, and Kazim Karabekir through telegraphic consultation in Erzurum).

- -The unity of the fatherland and national (milli) independence are in danger
- -The Istanbul government is unable to carry out its responsibilities
- -It is only through the nation's (*millet*) effort and determination that national independence will be won
- -It has been decided to hold immediately a National Congress in Sivas, the most secure place in Anatolia
- -Three representatives from each province should be sent immediately to the Sivas Congress' (Shaw and Shaw, op. cit., 344)

The fact that the *Defense of the Rights of Eastern Anatolia* had already arranged a meeting to be held in July in Erzurum under the leadership of Kazim Karabekir, Mustafa Kemal attended it to secure the support of Kazim Karabekir and the local resistance leaders. The Erzurum Congress reached important decisions in the formulation of the resistance movement's objective and provided the basic elements which the Sivas Congress duly adopted. Its ten-point resolution had an immense impact on Kurdish nationalism as well:

- The province of Trabzon, the district of Samsun, and the provinces of Erzurum, Sivas, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Van, and Bitlis, sometimes called the "six provinces," are an integral whole which cannot be separated from each other or from Ottoman territory for any reason.
- To preserve the integrity of the Ottoman country and our national (milli) independence and to protect the sultanate and the caliphate, it is essential that the national forces (Kuvayi-i Milliye) be put in charge and the nation (*millet*) will be recognized as sovereign.
- As all occupation and interference will be considered undertaken on behalf of establishing Greek and Armenian states, the principle of united defense and resistance is resolved. The bestowing of new privileges on Christians in such a manner as to alter political control and social balance will not be allowed.
- In case the central government, under foreign pressure, is forced to abandon any part of the territory, we are taking measures and making decisions to defend our national (milli) rights as well as the sultanate and the caliphate.
- We affirm the legal rights, as indicated in the laws of the Ottoman state, of non-Muslims with whom we share our Fatherland. The protection of their property, life, and honor is among the basic tenets of our religious practices, national traditions, and legal principles. This policy is confirmed by the consensus of our Congress.
- We are calling for a decision based on right and justice, one that respects our historic, cultural, and religious rights, and that rejects totally the theory of dividing [Ottoman]countries (memleketler) and separating peoples, who are true brothers, co-religionists, and inseparable from each other, and who are within the boundaries established by the armistice signed by the Allies on October 30, 1918 and are in eastern Anatolia, as well as in other regions, inhabited by a majority of Muslims and dominated by Muslims culturally and economically.
- Our people (*milletimiz*) honor and respect humanitarian and progressive developments and are appreciative of our own scientific, industrial, and economic conditions and needs. Therefore, on condition that the internal and external independence of our people and our state, and the territorial integrity of our fatherland (*vatan*) shall be conserved intact, we will accept with pleasure the scientific, industrial, and economic assistance of every state which will not nurture imperialistic tendencies towards our country and which will respect the principles of nationality as indicated under Article 6. We await, for the sake of preserving humanity and peace, the urgent signature of a peace based on these equitable and humanitarian conditions, which we consider to be our great national (milli) objective.
- In this historical age when the nation (*millet*) determines its own destiny, it is essential that our central government submit itself to the national will. As made clear by past events and their results, government decisions not based on the national will have no validity for the people and are not respected by foreign nations. In consequence, before the nation is forced into taking matters into its own hands to look for a remedy to its anguish, our central government should proceed without delay to convoke the National Assembly (Milli Meclis) and submit to it all the decisions to be taken relating to the fate of the nation (*millet*) and the country.
- "The Society to Defend the Rights of Eastern Anatolia" (*Şark-i Anadolu Mudafa-yi Hukuk Jamiyeti*) is the union of societies born out of the sufferings and calamities experienced by our land. This assembly is totally free of party interests. All Muslim compatriots are the natural members of this assembly.
- A Representative Committee (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*) chosen by the Congress will work in its name to establish national unity on all levels from the village to the province. (Shaw and Shaw, op.cit., p.244; K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları*, op. cit., pp.104-107)

The Erzurum Congress was followed by the Sivas Congress in early September which reiterated the fundamental principles of the Erzurum Congress. At the Sivas Congress resolution was passed to unify all the defense of rights associations under one name "The Society to Defend the Rights of the Provinces of Anatolia and Rumeli" (Anadolu Rumeli

Mudafa-i Hukuk-u Milliye Jamiyeti). The most important aspect of these two congresses was their clear objective to govern a territory which limited itself to the Ottoman boundaries unoccupied prior to the Mudros Armistice, and thus signified a sharp deviation from the CUP's pan-Turkism directed at uniting the entire Turkic race in Asia and Europe. These boundaries constituted what was to become to known as the *Misak-i Milli* (National Pact) which included that part of Kurdistan which was within the Ottoman Empire as well the Armenian territories. Within the borders designated by the National Pact, two main ethnic groups constituted the majority, the Turks and the Kurds, both of which are Muslim. The National Pact was adopted by the last Ottoman parliament, which were dominated by the Unionists and people sympathetic to the resistance movement on 28 January 1920. (E. Zürcher, op. cit., p.144; O. Tiftikçi, op. cit., pp.404-409) The National Pact 'which was the official statement of aims of the resistance movement consisted of six articles:

- The territories inhabited by an Ottoman Muslim majority (united in religion, race, and aims) formed an indivisible whole, but the fate of the territories inhabited by an Arab majority which were under foreign occupation should be determined by plebiscite.
- A plebiscite could determine the fate of the "Three Vilayets" of Batum, Kars and Ardahan, which had been Russian from 1878 to 1918.
- The same should hold true for the fate of western Thrace
- The security of the capital, Istanbul, and of the Sea of Marmara must be assured. The opening of the straits to commercial shipping would be a subject for discussion with other interested countries.
- The rights of minorities would be established in conformity with the treaties concluded between the Entente and European states.
- *The economic, financial and judicial independence of the Empire* should be assured and free from restrictions (i.e. a return of the capitulations would be unacceptable). (E. Zürcher, op.cit., p.144; Shaw and Shaw, op.cit., p.348; K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, op. cit., pp.466-467) [italic added]

The formal occupation of Istanbul and the arrest and exile of leading nationalist parliamentarians brought the Ottoman parliament to an end—a fact which was exploited by Mustafa Kemal who immediately called the MPs to come to Ankara and take up their seats in the 'National Assembly'. 92 members of the Ottoman parliament managed to reach Ankara, and together with 232 representatives elected by the Defense of Rights groups they formed the Grand National Assembly which met for the first time on 23 April 1920. From then on, the resistance movement took on the character of a complete government and all legislation by the Istanbul government after 16 March (the day of Istanbul's occupation by the Allied forces) was officially declared void. (E. Zürcher, op. cit., p.158)

Military victories against the Greek army in the west and the Armenians in the east finally secured the victory of the resistance movement and resulted in the Lausanne treaty signed on 24 July 1923. (E. Zürcher, op. cit., p.167; Shaw and Shaw, op. cit., pp.365-6; M.E. Yapp, *The Making of The Modern Near East 1792-1923*, Longman, 1987, pp.317-322) [30] With the Lausanne treaty the former Allied Sevres peace treaty became void, together with the hope of Armenian and Kurds to establish their own independent states.

3.3. Was the Resistance Movement a 'War of Liberation/Independence'

With a very few exceptions, almost all Turkish historians and a considerable number of non-Turkish scholars on Turkish history and politics agree in classification of the period from 1919-1922 as the 'War of Independence' or the 'War of Liberation' of Turkish nation. (see [6] and [7]) S. Sureyya suggests that the 'national movement by its essence was a struggle of the nation against enslavement.' (Ş. Sureyya, op.cit., p.30) Referring to the 'National Pact', Toynbee inserts that it was 'in reality, a Declaration of Independence of the Turkish nation. This laconic declaration of the rights and demands of an oppressed people (...) has built up the superstructure of a virile and strong Turkish state on a western pattern.' (Toynbee and Kirkwood, op.cit., p.85) B. Lewis infers 'the Kemalist Revolution brought new life and hopes to the Turkish people, restored their energies and self-respect, and set them firmly on the road not only to independence, but to that rarer and more precious thing, that is freedom.' (B. Lewis, op. cit., p.287) M.K. Oke believes that 'the Turkish nation took its fate into its own hands and the period of "Defense of the Rights" was initiated in Anatolia which set the stage for the National struggle for independence.' (M.K. Öke, op. cit., p.178) He continues: 'with "national sovereignty" Mustafa Kemal implied freeing the country of external enemies and giving the nation its right to self-determination.' (Ibid., p.197) Yapp classified the period as the 'War of Independence', which 'had been won by an alliance of which the core was formed by officials and local notables.' (M.E. Yapp, *The Near East...* op.cit., p.151) For J. McCarthy 'the War of Independence marked a fundamental change in the Turks themselves and in their government ... (the Turks) saved the Turkish heartland of the old Empire and guaranteed a home for the Turks in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace.' (McCarthy, op. cit., p.371) Shaw and Shaw inferred that the resistance movement developed into a full war for independence and that 'Turkish nationalism was not imperialistic' and their 'emphasize was on building a modern state for the Turks

within the boundaries of the Republic created by the treaty of Lausanne.' (Shaw and Shaw, op.cit., p.376) Zürcher classified the period as the struggle for Independence. (E. J. Zürcher, op. cit., pp.138-167) Most Kurdish historians and nationalists, ironically, also refer the period as the War of Independence/Liberation. For example, Nezan suggests that 'the Turkish War of Independence was strongly supported by the people, who sought to defend their lands against the savage violence wrecked upon the population by the Greek invaders.' (K. Nezan, 'Kurdistan in Turkey', in G. Chaliand (ed) *A People Without A Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, Zed Books Ltd., London, 1993 (1980), pp.46-49, pp.38-94) [31] Lazarev, a Soviet historian on Kurdish nationalism infers that the Kemalist movement was a national independence movement which organized the patriotic and anti-imperialist forces of the Turkish community. (M.S. Lazarev, *Emperyalizm ve Kürd Sorunu, 1917-1923*, Özge Yayinlari, Ankara, p.111) [32] In a similar approach C. Celil and other Soviet historians on the Kurds, identify the resistance movement as an anti-imperialist and national liberation and independence struggle. (C. Celil et all., *Kürd Siyaset Tarihi*, Peri Yayınları, İstanbul, 1998, p.127) [33]

This study would challenge such views and suggest that the Kemalist movement was just a continuation, an extension, of WWI, launched by mainly ex-CUP officers to save the Ottoman state and the country from the disintegration and division which the Allied powers had planned. It was neither a national liberation movement nor anti-imperialist.

Most of the analyses of the Kemalism mentioned above and others are mainly based on the premises that the so-called 'Turkey' today was/is as a historical territory populated mainly by Turks with some minor ethnic and religious groups such as Kurds and Armenians and others. At the time of Mudros Armistice the remaining unoccupied Ottoman territory was assumed to be dominated by Turks and that they were therefore entitled to the land as a sovereign ethnic group. As such, the treaty of Sevres, which allowed the establishment of an independent Armenia and Kurdistan, was perceived as the partitioning of Turkey and the end of the Turkish nation. For Yale, acceptance by the Turkish people of this treaty [Sevres] signed by their Sultan's government would have been the death knell of the Turkish nation.' (W. Yale, op. cit., p.285) Allen argued similarly that 'with the close of the World War, Turkey was subjected to a series of humiliations by the countries which had been her victorious foes. The Allies (...) proceeded to partition up the country, forcing disgraceful terms ... with the treaty of Sevres.' (H.E. Allen, op.cit., p.141) Such a perception implies that there existed a Turkish nation identified with a particular territory, and that this territory was occupied and colonized by foreigners (imperialists) attempting to sweep the Turkish nation off the earth. The intention here is not to suggest that the Allied powers did not have imperialistic plans over the Ottoman Empire. They certainly had such plans, but their plans did not concern the Turkish nation but rather the Empire which contained multi-ethnic groups who had already developed nationalist sentiment and ideas, such as the Armenians and the Kurds. Confusion between the Ottoman Empire and Turkey has not been referred to by the scholars and historians in their analysis of this particular period. This confusion in turn causes historians to misrepresent historical facts, for example, Yale claimed that 'the resolution passed by the first congress of Erzurum proclaimed the right of the Turks to resist every territorial occupation and all intervention designed to establish Greek and Armenian control in any part of Anatolia.' (W. Yale, op.cit., p.280) For Sonyel the Sivas Congress 'laid the foundation for the salvation and complete independence of the Turkish nation. It delimited the boundaries of new Turkey, inhabited by a Muslim majority, united in religion, culture and race.' (S. R. Sonyel, op. cit., p.34) This 'Muslim majority', however, for Sonyel, was 'predominantly Turkish people'. (Ibid., p.8) The Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, contrary to Yale and Sonyel statement, did not proclaim the right of the Turks but the right of the *Millet*. The term *Millet*, prior to the establishment of the republic, was mainly used to refer the Ottoman Muslim people. Implicitly the use of *millet* included both the Turks and the Kurds. Indeed, half of the main participators at the Erzurum Congress were the Kurdish representatives whose principal objective was to prevent the Armenian claim to the 'six vilayets' which the Kurds claimed as part of Kurdistan. Throughout the period of 1919-1922 the Kemalists used the term *millet* in its religious sense not in the modern sense of nation. (For the term *millet* see M. Yegen, op. cit., p.91; B. Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, Ağaç Yayıncılık, 1992, p.11; A. Yıldız, op. cit., pp.50-2) [34] This was in parallel with the initial objective of the resistance movement which was to save the Caliph and the Sultanate. The last article of the National pact refers to *the independence of the Empire* rather than Turkey or Turkish nation. This explains why some sections of the Kurdish populace, particularly those close to the Armenians and within the six vilayets, participated in the Kemalist movement.

Fikret Başkaya acutely notes that any analysis of post-Republican Turkish history and the evaluation of the social formation of Turkey without consideration of the Kurdish issue would be stunted (incomplete) (F. Başkaya, op. cit., p.76) This is indeed true for most of the scholarly works carried out by Turkish and non-Turkish scholars on the history of resistance movement. Referring to Anatolia and the '*Misaki Milli*' as the land of the Turks, implicitly ignores the Kurds and Kurdistan. *Misaki Milli* included Ottoman Kurdistan which the Kemalists managed to keep under their control, apart from Mosul province. Thus, Shaw and Shaw were not right when they said 'Turkish nationalism was not imperialistic [expansionist, a.a]: it did not seek to achieve greatness by regaining lands ruled by the Ottomans.' (Shaw and Shaw, op. cit., p.376) Nor was the assumption of Helmreich correct when he suggested that 'Kemal realistically confined his territorial ambitions to the preservation of an Independent Turkish state in that area where Turks constituted the

majority of the population.' (P.C. Helmreich. op. cit., p.230) The Turks never constituted the majority in Kurdistan; this is a clear misrepresentation of historical fact. Even today after eight decades of forceful assimilation policies and internal deportation, in so-called eastern and south-eastern Anatolia (in effect, Northern part of Kurdistan) the Kurds clearly constitute the majority. It was true that Kemalists were realistic, they rejected other choices, they could not regain or re-create the once the Great Ottoman Empire nor they would be able to pursue pan-Turkist dreams, but they calculated that they could retain the rest of the unoccupied territories of the Empire which included large part of Kurdistan by the time the Mudros Armistice. The Armenians who were diminished considerably in size during the 1915 deportation did not constitute the majority in areas they claimed to be part of an Independent Armenia. In those areas the Kurds constituted a majority. Thus, while it was true to suggest that in the post-war period the Muslim community made up the majority, it would be unjust to identify this Muslim community as Turks. In the area, what was/is called Kurdistan, Kurds composed the main ethnic group, and they had developed a sense of Kurdishness and nationalist sentiment albeit conflated with a Muslim identity.

The notion that the Kemalists launched and successfully carried out a 'War of Independence' is not convincing at all. Firstly, who did they liberate the Turks from? The idea suggests that the Ottoman Empire and 'Turkey' was a colonized country under direct foreign rule. The Ottoman Empire participated in an imperialist war with the hope of regaining its lost territories and, for some of the CUP regime to create a Great Turkish state which included the entire Turkic race in Central Asia. Like Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire had to face the consequences of the war and defeat. The so-called 'War of Independence' was a continuation of WWI and resistance to the conditions of peace terms, mainly to prevent the establishment of Armenian, Greek (Pontus) and Kurdish independent states. Referring to Sevres as partitioning of the Ottoman Empire is one thing, but referring to it as partitioning Turkey is another. The process of disintegration, thus the partitioning, of the Ottoman Empire, as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity, had begun long before WWI once the idea of nationalism had begun to take root among the subject people of the Empire. 'Turkey' on the other hand, as we understand today, was non-existent. The European use of Turkey basically meant the Ottoman Empire, and the subject peoples, including the Turks themselves, never referred to the Ottoman Empire as Turkey. Thus 'Turkey' as a modern nation-state prior to the 1922/3 did not exist as a national political entity. This is the crux of the matter: confusing the Ottoman Empire with Turkey in the modern sense inevitably led historians and scholars to assume that the Sevres treaty as imperialist design to partition Turkey and put an end to the Turks. As such the treaty of Lausanne, therefore, was seen to be rebirth of the Turkish nation and a victory for national independence, without consideration of the fact that the same Lausanne treaty officially divided Kurds and partitioned Kurdistan. The bulk of the Turkish historiography sees the treaty of Lausanne as a victory against imperialism and the successful result of a genuine national liberation movement, as if the treaty of Lausanne was signed against the wishes of the imperialist powers of the time.

The Treaty of Sevres certainly meant the division and partition of the Empire amongst the Great Powers. It must also be remembered that the same treaty also divided the Kurds and their lands into the zones of influence controlled by the Allies. A small part of Kurdistan, according to the provisions of Sevres, was allowed to gain its independence. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, New York, 1924) [35] The provisions for establishing an independent Armenian and geographically limited an independent Kurdish state, two main non-Turkish elements within the unoccupied territory of the Empire after the Mudros armistice should not be read as imperialistic design against 'Turkey', as a matter of fact these provisions were the only positive aspects of the treaty which allowed the oppressed peoples of the Ottoman Empire the right to self-determination. As can be recalled, the Arab provinces of the Empire during the war separated from the Empire as they were allied with the Entente powers against the Ottomans in the hope of establishing a greater Arab state. The Kemalists did not pretend to claim the Arab provinces, as became clear in the 'national pact', but they did claim the remaining parts of the Empire, including Kurdistan, Armenia, Turkish dominated Western Anatolia. The Kemalists during the 1919-1922 period fought not against the Great Powers but the Greek army in the west, the Kurdish nationalist uprising in the Dersim area (Koçgiri) and the Armenians in the east.

The notion that the Turkish nationalists defeated the imperialist powers was an illusion fashioned by post-Republic, official Turkish intelligentsia as a tool in the formation of Turkish identity. (For a critical reading of Kemalism and anti-imperialism see F. Başkaya, *Paradigmanın İflası*, op. cit.; İsmail Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1990; İ. Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi, Güneş-Dil Teorisi ve Kürd Sorunu*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1991; İ. Beşikçi-*Bilim, Resmi İdeoloji, Devlet-Demokrasi ve Kürd Sorunu*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1990) [36] The Kemalist objective formulated in the 'national pact' was not against the imperialist powers' interest, on the contrary, it collaborated to a certain degree with the French and Italians. France and Italy supported the Kemalists in order to check British domination in the Anatolia and Middle East. Thus, it is not surprising to see that it was French and Italy who rushed to recognize and support the Kemalist movement alongside the newly established Soviet Union. The Kemalist success, with the help of these three powers, was against the demands of the Kurds and Armenians and the Greek army's

occupation of western Anatolia, which caused unrest among the Muslim population in Anatolia. The Greek [occupation of Izmir and the western part of Anatolia in fact enabled the Kemalists to strength their hold on the mostly Muslim population of Anatolia and 'legitimized' their position against the Sultan's government.

The Kemalist movement, upon the final and decisive victory over the Greek army, and over Armenian and Kurdish nationalism, embarked upon a new Turkish state which was as Roshwald rightly argued 'built on a legacy of genocide and ethnic cleansing and propagated by a dictatorial regime with little patience for the niceties of pluralistic policies.' (A. Roshwald, op. cit., p.186) A myth was created about Mustafa Kemal and the resistance movement in the post-Republic era by Turkish historians, journalists and others, and was adopted by most western scholars as well. The common denominator of all these analyses was to ignore the Kurdish nation, or at least to reduce them to the minority status. Perception of the Kurds as an ethnic minority group, not as a nation with a right to self-determination inevitably stripped the Kurds of their national territory. As a result, Kurdistan as a country with which Kurds identified themselves, was not recognized. Thus, Kurdistan became 'Turkey', 'Iraq', 'Iran' or 'Syria'. W. Hale, for example, stated that 'the United States, which might have provided protection to an independent Armenia or Kurdistan on *Turkish soil...*' (W. Hale, op. cit., p.70) Since when have Kurdistan and Armenia been Turkish soil? The writer does not provide any explanation. A recent biography of Atatürk by Mango provides more evidence: 'Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is one of the most important statesmen of the twentieth century... For peoples ruled by foreigners, he showed a way to national independence in amity with the rest of the world. He believed that the struggle for genuine independence should be waged by each nation for itself in the name of an overarching secular ideal of progress common to all, ... [H]e was an anti-imperialist only in the sense that his idea was a universal commonwealth of civilized people..' (A. Mango, op. cit., p. xi) The same writer later contradicts himself by inferring that 'on the Kurds and other ethnic groups in Turkey, Atatürk shared the views of reforming Turkish nationalists. Namik Kemal, the "poet of Liberty" who had inspired Mustafa Kemal in youth, had written as early as 1878: "We must try to annihilate all languages in our country except Turkish (...) Language (...) may be the firmest barrier –perhaps firmer than religion- against national unity."' (Ibid., p.537) Namik Kemal's successors, the Young Turks not only annihilated a language but an entire ethnic group within the Ottoman Empire, and their successors, the Kemalists, in their turn, tried to do the same in the Republic era to the Kurds, but unlike their predecessors they failed.

4. The Kemalist Movement's Kurdish Policy, 1919-1922

The Kemalists right from the start pursued a dual policy in respect to the Kurds and Kurdistan. While on the one hand the Kemalists tried hard to integrate the Kurdish notables within the resistance movement, on the other hand they pursued a cunning policy to destroy the organizational structure of growing Kurdish nationalism, in effect, the Kurdistan Teali Jamiyati and its branches in Kurdistan, notably its Diyarbakir branch. This dualism was necessitated by pressing historical and political conditions of the time. It was also an indication of the resistance leaders' experience in state administration, a crucial advantage which Kurdish nationalists lacked.

The formation and development of Kemalist policy in respect to the Kurds and Kurdistan must be analyzed within the framework of interconnected factors which were as follows: a) growing Kurdish nationalist activities; b) Great powers policies on Ottoman Empire as a whole and in particular, Kurdistan and Armenia; c) logistical, military, and organizational needs of the resistance movement.

The resistance leaders, like Kazim Karabekir, as early as November/December 1918, had persistently claimed that the survival of the state and the *millet* require a unified resistance movement to be launched from the east where the threat of the Armenians was real. He urged like-minded military officers in Istanbul to return to or to be appointed to the military posts in the east and prevent the demilitarization and disarmament of the Ottoman army. (K. Karabekir, *Istiklal Harbimiz*, op. cit., pp.46-48) He himself got appointed to the commanding post of the 15th army corps in Erzurum where the Ottoman army remained intact, and eventually attacked the Armenian Republic in the East. The historical tension and disputes between the two major ethnic groups, the Kurds and Armenians, in the east of the Empire was further tempered in the post-war period as both groups claimed rights on the disputed area as their own (six vilayets), provided the opportunity for people like Karabekir to stress Armenian threats as an effective means to pull the Kurds to the resistance side. To an Ottoman delegate sent from Istanbul to Erzurum, Karabekir warned:

'our enemies are trying to create a great Armenia. Here [in these regions] our Kurdish brothers constitute a majority. Those *who strive for Kurdish independence are our enemies*. Their intentions are to separate the Kurds from us and then make them [these regions] Armenia. They are going to destroy Kurds, therefore Turks and Kurds, as brothers, should not yield to this disaster.' (K. Karabekir, *Kürd Meselesi*, Emre yayınları, İstanbul, 1994, p.10) [Italics added]

For him, Kurdish nationalist demands were poisonous, and would have to be stopped:

‘it was evident that propaganda such as borders readjustment, Kurdish independence and etc. were not going to stop. Against such poisons I have already immunized (şerbetlemek) all the Kurds by [saying] that “they want to make [turn] Kurdistan [into] Armenia, but we will never let our Kurdish brothers be crushed.’ (K. Karabekir, *Istiklal Harbimiz*, op. cit., p.113)

This issue of an ‘Armenian’ threat was continuously propagated by Mustafa Kemal to win the collaboration of Kurdish tribal and religious local leaders in Kurdistan. In his letter to a known leading family member in Diyarbakir, Cemilpashazade Kasim Bey, Mustafa Kemal suggests: ‘I will not allow the Kurds to establish an independent Kurdistan under British protection, because such theories are absolutely a British plan for the interests of Armenia.’ (Atatürk: *Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri*, vol.II, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, p.288) [37]

The Kemalists blended their ‘Armenian threat’ issue with the Islamic unity of the Ottoman elements. The Kemalists from 1919 to 1924 refrained from referring to the nationalist discourse, which had become the backbone of Kemalism from the mid-1920s to date. The Erzurum and Sivas Congresses referred to the ‘indivisible’ unity of Islamic elements of an unoccupied part of the Empire. The Kurds, in Kemalist discourse in this period, were, a ‘true brothers’ of the Turks, together with constitutes the Ottomans. Thus, they had common objective in solidarity and resistance to save Caliph/Sultan, who was under ‘infidel’ occupation. This indeed was a powerful tool which proved to work in the interests of Kemalists. Substantial numbers of Kurdish notables participated within the resistance movement and had taken seats as MPs for Kurdistan at the Grand National Assembly. They, indeed, naively believed that the unity of Turks and Kurds was essential both for the survival of the Caliph and the Kurds themselves against the ‘imperialist’ backed Armenians who claimed to incorporate Kurdistan into Armenia. The excessive Armenian claims (six vilayets) contributed towards such naivety. A Kurdish MP from Bitlis, Yusuf Ziya Bey who later was hanged by the Tribunal Courts (*Istiklal Mahkemeleri*) for his participation at the Kurdish uprising in 1930s, in his speech at the GNA enthusiastically speaks to the MPs:

‘Europeans say that “the largest minority group in Turkey are Kurds”. I am the son of a Kurd, therefore, as a Kurdish MP I ensure you that Kurds do not want anything but only the well-being and happiness of their big brothers, the Turks. We Kurds refused and crushed all the rights given to us by Europeans with the Sevres Treaty.... We shed our blood with the Turks and we did not and will not separate from them.’ (*Türk Parlamento Tarihi, 1919-1923*, vol.II, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Vakfı Yayınları, Ankara, 1995, p.343) [38]

The case of the Cemilpasha family is a good indicator of the extent of the Kemalist influence amongst the leading Kurdish notables. While members of the Cemilpasha family, like Ekrem Cemil, Kadri Cemil, played a significant role in the establishment of a Kurdish Club in Diyarbakir, their uncle, Mustafa Bey, allied with Mustafa Kemal influenced leading Diyarbakir notables to switch their alliance to the resistance movement, which caused the weakness of Kurdish nationalists. (E.C. Paşa, *Muhtasar Hayatım*, Brüksel Kürd Enstitüsü, Bruxelles, 1991, pp.38-44; K.C. Paşa, *Doza Kurdistan: Kürd Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kürduluş Savaşı Hatıraları*, Öz-ge Yayınları, Ankara, 1991 (1st ed. Beirut 1969), pp.54-56) [39]

The rise of organizational post-war Kurdish nationalism was one of the main worries of the resistance movement. They perceived the Kurdish nationalists as their rivals and challengers. It was this concern that caused the Kemalists right from the beginning to emphasize Kurdish and Turkish unity in public, whereas they were busy trying to prevent the proliferation of Kurdish nationalism in Kurdistan. The Kemalists classified the Kurdish nationalists as an ‘alien force in the hands of imperialist powers, mainly England, who working to partition the Ottoman land for the interests of greater Armenia. This notion of Kurdish nationalists as imperialist agents is still popular amongst Turkish historians and politicians. (See for example: T.Z.Tunaya, *Mütareke Dönemi*, op.cit, pp.208-214; C. Kayra. *Sevr Dosyası*, op. cit., p.118; D. Perinçek, *Kemalist Devrim: Kürduluş Savaşında Kürd Politikası*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, pp.93-104; D. Avcioglu, *Milli Kürduluş Tarihi*, op.cit., pp.139-142) [40]

The resistance movement initially tried to integrate the Kurdish Club in Diyarbakir and the Kurdistan Teali Jamiyati in Istanbul into the Defense of Rights organizations. (D. Avcioglu, *Milli Kürduluş... op.cit.*, p142) However, when they failed to convince them, they opted for forceful closure of the Kurdish Club in Diyarbakir. (E.C. Paşa, op.cit., p.44; K.C. Paşa, op.cit., p.56) This action was taken by the governor, military officers and Defense of Right organization of the city. The closure of the Diyarbakir Kurdish club is highly significant as it reveals a number of important points. Firstly, the governor of Diyarbakir was representing the Ottoman government and central state and so the military officers. This suggests that the central Ottoman government was also uneasy about the rise of the Kurdish nationalism. The closure of the Kurdish Jamiyati in Diyarbakir, thus, was a collective response of both the Ottoman central state and the

resistance movement. Mustafa Kemal's response to the closure was evident in his congratulatory letter to the authorities in Diyarbakir:

'in such historical days where the whole nation (*millet*) has united in order to defend its independence and existence, it is a highly essential and patriotic duty to disperse any association which may lead the country towards partition. Any kind of view which purports to live dishonorably under the protection of a foreign state like a slave [will not be allowed], therefore *action taken against the Kurd Club was highly approved by me as well.* (.....) I would strongly advise that support should be given for the establishment of a 'Defense of Rights organization in Diyarbakir and surrounding areas.' (*Atatürkün Bütün Eserleri*, vol. II. op. cit., p.379)

The Kemalists' harsh response towards Kurdish nationalism was met with protests by the leading Kurdish organizations of the time, and they petitioned the High Commissioners in Istanbul to take action against them. One such petition was sent by the Kurdish Democratic Party to the British High Commissioner, and states:

'The Turks have always pursued a policy of extinguishing all Kurdish national aims and ambitions, and even to-day continue the same policy with vigor and violence. To prove the truth of this statement we venture to mention only a few exemplary cases. The central government has sent a Vali to Diyarbakir, who does not hesitate for a moment in applying a most exceptionally cruel system of administration against the Kurds there. His main purpose is to kill and uproot our national aspirations. All petitions bearing Kurdish names or signatures receive no attention whatever. In fact, we do not imagine or recollect a more tyrannical rule than that which the Turks unblushingly continue to perpetuate. The gates of their police stations and courts of justice are practically closed against the supplications of our people (...) The Diyarbakir and Siirt branches of the Kurdistan Forward Association [KTJ] have been forcibly suppressed by the Turkish Authorities. Notwithstanding the repeated efforts of the Committee -which struggles for the salvation of our nation- those two clubs are still closed. At Urfa the Turkish authorities are determined not to permit the opening of a branch of the said Society there. Our own Democratic party still remains unrecognized by the Ministry of Interior.' (FO 371/4193, 16 October 1919, 146642, from Kurdish Democratic Party to the British High Commissioner in Constantinople) [41]

In their counter-propaganda against Kurdish nationalism, the Kemalists, alongside the Armenian issue, employed in their discourse an important and attractive concept, a pseudo-anti-imperialism. For Kemalists, imperialist powers of the world had long desired to partition and divide the Ottoman lands and therefore they always played on the multi-ethnic and multi-religious characteristics of the Ottomans. Now that the Ottomans constituted two remaining elements, Kurds and Turks, both Muslim people, the imperialists, in order to divide the Ottomans further, were using the Kurdish issue to realize their imperialistic intentions. For Kemalists, most Kurds were good people and had nothing to do with such imperialistic designs over the Empire, but unfortunately some minority Kurdish notables who sold themselves for money, were supporting English imperialists to bring about the end of the Ottoman Empire and therefore the end of both Turks and Kurds. Those Kurds who collaborated with imperialist powers were also serving the interests of the Armenians, who, as part of an imperialist design, were attempting to create an independent Armenia. In early Kemalist discourse, those minority Kurds who 'sold their spirits for money' were the Kurdish nationalists. (*Atatürk, Nutuk, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1995, p.81*) This intensified counter-propaganda was oriented towards two ends: firstly, the Kemalists tried to diminish the influence and proliferation of Kurdish nationalist organizations in Kurdistan by directing *Kuvay-i milliye* forces as well as local and central administrative authorities in Kurdistan against them; secondly they sought to channel and manipulate general Kurdish resentment against the Ottoman central government towards external enemies, the infidel, greedy and merciless imperialists.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study demonstrates that the Kemalist movement's rise in post-WWI Anatolia was deeply intertwined with the suppression of Kurdish nationalism and the continuation of Ottoman centralization policies. By critically analyzing the conceptual confusion between "Turkey" and the Ottoman Empire, and the dual strategies employed by Kemalists toward Kurdish aspirations, the article reveals how mainstream historiography has marginalized Kurdish identity and territorial claims. Recognizing these historical complexities not only enriches our understanding of early Republican Turkey but also provides valuable insights for contemporary debates on ethnicity, nation-building, and

historical justice. This study encourages a more inclusive approach to history, which can foster greater societal awareness and inform future efforts toward reconciliation and equitable policy-making.

References

- [1] B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p.1
- [2] A. Yıldız, *Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları, 1919-1938*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2nd ed. 2004, pp.106
- [3] D. Avcioğlu, *Türkiyenin Düzeni: Dün-Bugün-Yarın*, Tekin Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1998
- [4] B. Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, Ağaç yayınları, İstanbul, 1992
- [5] Ş. Sami, *Kamus-i Türki*, vol.III, Tercüman, İstanbul, 1986
- [6] D. Avcioğlu, *Milli Kurtuluş Tarihi: 1838'den 1995'e*, İstanbul Matbaası, 1974; D. Avcioğlu, *Türkiyenin Düzeni*, op. cit., S. Sonyel, *Atatürk- The Founder of Modern Turkey*, Turkish Historical Society Printing House, Ankara, 1989; S. Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923: Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement*, SAGE Publications, London, 1975; S. Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, vol.I, Basbakanlık Basimevi, Ankara, 1973; T.Z.Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol.II :*Mütareke Dönemi*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999 (1st edition by Dogan Yayınları 1952); C. Kayra, *Sevr Dosyası*, Boyut Kitapları, İstanbul, 1997; Ş. S. Aydemir, *Tek Adam: Mustafa Kemal, 1919-1922*, vol.II Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1964; T. Sorgun, *Mütareke Dönemi ve Bekirağa Bölüğü*, Kum Saati Yayınları, İstanbul, 2003; D. Perinçek, *Kemalist Devrim: Kurtuluş Savaşında Kürd Politikası*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999; Mim K. Oke, *The Armenian Question, 1914-1923*, K.Rustem & Brother, the University Printing House, Oxford, 1988; U. Mumcu, *Kazım Karabekir Anlatıyor*, um:ag Vakfi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1990; U. Mumcu, *Kürd İslam Ayaklanması 1919-25*, um:ag Vakfi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991
- [7] H.E. Allen, *Turkey's Transformation: A Study in Social and Religious Development*, Greenwood Press Publishers, New York, 1968; R. D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic, A Case Study in National Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963; A. Mango, *Atatürk*, John Murray, London, (Reprinted ed 2002); J. McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks, An Introductory History to 1923*, Longman, London and New York, 1997; G. Lewis, *Turkey*, Ernest, Benn Limited, London, 1965; S.J. Shaw & E.K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol.II: *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, (Reprinted 1988); P.C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1974; B. Lewis, op. cit.; W. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, Frank Cass, London, 2000; L. Evans, *United States Policy and the Partition of Turkey, 1914-1924*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1965; M.E. Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War: A History to 1995*, 2nd ed. Longman, London, 1996; W. Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors 1801-1927*, Frank Cass and Co Ltd., London, 1966; W. Yale, *The Near East, A Modern History*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, London, 1958.
- [8] F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London and New York, (Reprinted 1998); F. Başkaya, *Paradigmanın İflassı: Resmi İdeolojinin Eleştirisine Giriş*, Doz, İstanbul, 1997, 6th ed.
- [9] A. Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001; E.J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris & Co ltd Publishers, London- New York, 2003
- [10] M. Yegen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürd Sorunu*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999; for a critical reading of this period see F. Başkaya, op. cit., and I. Küçükömer, *Düzenin Yabancılaşması*, Bağlam, 2nd ed. İstanbul, 2001
- [11] Ş. Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasal Fikirleri, 1895-1908*, İletişim, 7th ed. 2000
- [12] O. Tiftikçi, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Burjuvazinin Evrimi*, El Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2003; A. Özer, *Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyete: Siyasal Kurum ve Düşüncelerde Süreklilik ve Kopuş*, Sis Yayıncılık, Ankara,
- [13] Y. Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1998, p.28 (the first edition of this article was published in Egypt in Türk newspaper in 1904)
- [14] R. Melson, 'Provocation or Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry into the Armenian Genocide of 1915' in R. G. Hovannisian (ed) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick and Oxford, 1986
- [15] T.Z. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler: İttihat ve Terakki, Bir Çağın, Bir Kuşağın, Bir Partinin Tarihi*, vol.III, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000 (first edition 1952)
- [16] N. Kutlay, *İttihat Terakki ve Kürdler*, Beybun Yayınları, Ankara, 1992

- [17] Z. Toprak, *Türkiye’de ‘Milli İktisat’ 1908-1918*, Ankara Yurt Yayınları A.Ş. 1982; U. Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, London, Luzac and Company, 1950
- [18] S. H. Astourian, ‘Genocidal Process: Reflections on the Armeno-Turkish Polarization in the Armenian Genocide’, in R.G. Hovannisian *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, Macmillan, London, 1992
- [19] K. M. Ahmad, *Kurdistan During the First World War*, Saqi Boks, London, 1994
- [20] J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Middle East, A Documentary Record, 1914-1956*, vol. II, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc, Princeton, New Jersey, London, 1956
- [21] M.K. Atatürk, *Nutuk*, Mercek, İstanbul, 2002
- [22] A.J. Toynbee & K.P. Kirkwood, *Turkey*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1926
- [23] K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, Emre Yayınları, İstanbul; K. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları*, Emre Yayınları, İstanbul, 1995
- [24] L. Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, Weidenfeld/Nicholson, London, 1964
- [25] K. H. Karpat, ‘Introduction: Turks Remember Their Otoman Ancestors’, in K.H. Karpat (ed) *Otoman Past and Today’s Turkey*, Brill-Leiden, 2000
- [26] H. İzzettin Dinamo, *Kutsal İsyan: Milli Kürduluş Savaşının Gerçek Hikayesi*, vol.5 May Yayınları, İstanbul, 1967
- [27] İ. Beşikçi, *Kürdistan üzerinde Emperyalist Bölüşüm Mücadelesi, 1915-1925*, Yurt Kitap-Yayın, Ankara, 1992
- [28] FO 371/4158/96979, Calthorpe to Curzon, despatch, Istanbul 21/6/1919, enclosing report by Captain L.H. Hurst, Samsun, 12/6/1919
- [29] TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, vol. I Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
- [30] M.E. Yapp, *The Making of The Modern Near East 1792-1923*, Longman, 1987
- [31] K. Nezan, ‘Kurdistan in Turkey’, in G. Chaliand (ed) *A People Without A Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, Zed Books Ltd., London, 1993 (1980)
- [32] M.S. Lazarev, *Emperyalizm ve Kürd Sorunu, 1917-1923*, Özge Yayinlari, Ankara
- [33] C. Celil et all., *Kürd Siyaset Tarihi*, Peri Yayınları, İstanbul, 1998
- [34] B. Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, Ağaç Yayıncılık, 1992
- [35] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, New York, 1924
- [36] İsmail Beşikçi, *Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1990; İ. Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi, Güneş-Dil Teorisi ve Kürd Sorunu*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1991; İ. Beşikçi-*Bilim, Resmi İdeoloji, Devlet-Demokrasi ve Kürd Sorunu*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1990
- [37] Atatürk: *Atatürk’ün Bütün Eserleri*, vol.II, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999
- [38] *Türk Parlamento Tarihi, 1919-1923*, vol.II, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Vakfı Yayınları, Ankara, 1995
- [39] E.C. Paşa, *Muhtasar Hayatım*, Brüksel Kürd Enstitüsü, Bruxelles, 1991; K.C. Paşa, *Doza Kurdistan: Kürd Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kürduluş Savaşı Hatıraları*, Öz-ge Yayınları, Ankara, 1991 (1st ed. Beirut 1969)
- [40] D. Perinçek, *Kemalist Devrim: Kürduluş Savaşında Kürd Politikası*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999
- [41] FO 371/4193, 16 October 1919, 146642, from Kurdish Democratic Party to the British High Commissioner in Constantinople
- [42] Atatürk, *Nutuk*, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1995