

Defensive- vs. liberal-nationalist perspectives on diversity and the Kurdish conflict: Europeanization, the internal debate, and *Türkiyelilik*

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Introduction

The main goal of this article is to highlight the importance and implications of a debate that is ongoing in Turkey over the meaning, social-political role, and regulation of Turkey's ethnic-cultural diversity, especially that of its Kurdish component. By itself, this debate can neither bring about any significant change in the political realm nor have a major influence on the "mainstream" Turkish social-political discourse.¹ Despite significant changes during the last decade or so, this discourse continues to predominantly reflect the diversity-phobic, dominant beliefs and values of Turkish nationalism.

The current debate, however, is important because it can be seen as necessary, though insufficient, for any future transformation of the mainstream discourse as a result of which the beliefs and values that the mainstream discourse reflects would become more compatible with pluralistic democracy and EU norms. This is because the current debate not only poses normative challenges to the diversity-phobic beliefs and values, it also shows that these beliefs and values are not inevitable products of modern Turkey's history, culture, or nation-building by critically

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- 1 What I mean by mainstream here is the "generally acceptable social-political discourse, denoting the way people openly write and talk when they cannot control their audience, i.e., in the presence of people they do not necessarily know and trust." Defined in this way, the mainstream discourse includes the discourse used by the mainstream media, politicians, state actors, and any other actors when these actors cannot control their audience and feel the need to be socially and politically correct. For an extensive discussion and the important difference from the state discourse, see, Murat Somer, "Resurgence and Remaking of Identity: Civil Beliefs, Domestic and External Dynamics, and the Turkish Mainstream Discourse on Kurds," *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 6 (August 2005): 591-622. At times, the latter may overlap with the mainstream discourse, but it is argued that the two are different and are subject to partially separate dynamics.

reexamining the historical circumstances and decisions that led to their evolution. Hence, it elucidates the alternative paths on which these could have evolved without necessarily undermining the fundamental goals and principles of the nationalists, such as nation- and state-building and modernization/westernization. It thus offers alternative ways in which mainstream actors can evaluate the cause-effect relations that existed during the formative years of the Turkish state- and nation-building as well as during the country's recent past. Changes in these causal beliefs are necessary if the transformation that the Turkish mainstream social-political discourse has been undergoing in the recent past is to bring about a more pluralistic-democratic mainstream discourse. This last point requires more explanation.

The current debate can be seen as a sequel to the partial transformation of the mainstream discourse that took place during the 1990s. I discuss this earlier transformation in another article that attempts to demonstrate, and argue, three things.² First, during the period from 1984 to 1998, the mainstream Turkish discourse on Kurds changed significantly in that the Kurdish category became visible and acceptable as an identity category. Second, this transformation resulted to a significant degree from internal societal dynamics: despite resistance from within the state, and through the piecemeal actions of individual and collective domestic actors.³

Third, the discursive transformation was "shallow" in the following sense. While Kurdish difference and its distinct identity were increasingly acknowledged, mainstream beliefs regarding the desirability or acceptability of any Kurdish ethnic-cultural and political rights and expressions did not necessarily change. On one hand, the discursive transformation enabled more differentiated descriptions of society in public-political platforms. It thus created an important potential for a more pluralistic-democratic understanding of national unity. On the other hand, it did not necessarily transform actors' skeptical causal beliefs regarding how ethnic-cultural (minority and other) rights and expressions in general, and Kurdish rights and expressions in particular, would affect national (social and political) unity. Many continued to believe that such rights and expressions tend to cause social and political disintegration.

Changes in such beliefs require discursive transformation in a deeper, more qualitative sense. This in turn necessitates the conduct of open and self-critical debate among a wide spectrum of societal and state actors on a

2 Ibid.

3 At the same time, significant rethinking and diversification appear to have taken place among the state elite.

series of difficult questions and issues. These include the links between human, ethnic and national minority rights, the definitions and compositions of minorities, and the relationship between cultural-linguistic pluralism on one hand, and social cohesion and political stability on the other.⁴ Furthermore, the debate has to address the dominant social and political understandings, and the current and historical contents of Turkish and Kurdish identities.

Unlike the discursive changes in the 1990s, the current debate directly addresses such issues and questions and appears to be open, self-critical and inclusive to unprecedented degrees. A comprehensive evaluation of these observations and of the current debate's scope and weight in society would require the review of a wide and representative range of the contributions to the debate. Similarly, in order to be able to predict the future evolution of this debate and of the Turkish mainstream discourse, one would have to examine a number of ideational and social-political factors.

The objectives of this article are more modest and narrow. The focus of the analysis will be on the ideas and questions motivating the debate, with only a preliminary discussion on the domestic and external political contexts. I will offer the distinction between defensive- and liberal-nationalist perspectives, to be defined below, as a useful way to analyze the debate's nature and implications. I will then put forward some theses regarding policy implications, in particular, on the recent *Türkiyelilik* debate. The methodological focus is more on forming and illustrating these theses than on providing historical and current evidence to substantiate them. As a prelude to a more comprehensive and representative study, I will discuss four recent books that exemplify and contribute to the current debate.⁵ These four books are not meant to constitute a representative sample to any degree. They comprise a biased sample displaying what I argue to be some important features of the debate, and therefore are useful as a platform upon which these features can be discussed, allowing for comment to be made on some of the major questions being debated.

These books demonstrate, however, that the current debate goes beyond the relatively limited circles of academia, elite politics, or political activists. Importantly, two of them, one by Hasan Cemal on the Kurdish question and another by Fikret Bila on the PKK are written by prominent journalists. They target the general public as well as the state elites.⁶ The other two, Erik

4 Here, I use the term minority in a purely numerical sense, not as a political status or category.

5 Fikret Bila, *Hangi PKK?* (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 2004), Hasan Cemal, *Kürtler* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2003), Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), Erik Jan Zürcher, ed., *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye'de Etnik Çatışma* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005).

6 In fact, in accordance with a new marketing strategy of Turkish publishing houses, these two books

Zürcher's collected volume on ethnic conflict in Turkey and Baskın Oran's work on the minorities question in Turkey are written by able scholars in a way that also addresses a wider audience. In particular, Oran's book is the product of an important project, first commissioned and then disowned by the government, to stimulate an official and societal reexamination of the definition of minorities and how they relate to national identity and unity. The project and the report that came out of it unleashed intense controversy in the media. Overall, these books suggest that the debate over questions of diversity is ongoing both among societal actors and within the state (and perhaps to a lesser extent, between the two).

Defensive- vs. liberal nationalist perspectives

In one way or another, all four books *engage* the current and historical expressions of two layers of Turkish nationalism, which I call here the defensive- and liberal-nationalist *perspectives*.⁷ Both may be described as nationalist perspectives because of their shared sensitivity to the maintenance of a cross-ethnic national identity and common political culture, and to the perceived interests and unity of the Turkish nation-state. However, they differ as to how these can and ought to be pursued. From the *defensive-nationalist perspective*, actual and enforced cultural-linguistic homogeneity (and to a lesser extent, religious homogeneity in a cultural, identity-related sense) is the insurance for state survival and for social cohesion and political-territorial unity.⁸ To differing degrees in different periods, this perspective has been the dominant Turkish-nationalist perspective and has predominantly shaped both the mainstream-societal and the official discourse and ideology.

Disguised and marginalized by the defensive-nationalist perspective, however, there appears to have always been a *liberal-nationalist* (or proto-liberal-nationalist) perspective.⁹ This perspective never became the

were even available for purchase in major supermarket chains, at significantly lower prices than were being charged in bookstores.

- 7 Note that I am referring to perspectives, not ideologies or political projects. The term perspective is used to denote a set of beliefs and values that are loosely connected and not necessarily coherent with each other. Also note that the books discussed in this article are not necessarily meant to represent any one of these perspectives.
- 8 The choice of the term "defensive" nationalism as opposed to "offensive" nationalism is not intended to convey any normative judgment or justification.
- 9 The term liberal-nationalist is used here in the specific sense that is described, i.e., beliefs and values regarding the management of diversity. It is not used in reference to a liberal-nationalist *ideology* or political project, although liberal ideas might have been one source of the liberal-nationalist perspective. On the unsettled notion of liberal-nationalism as an ideology, see, among others, Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2001), David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Yael Tamir,

dominant perspective for either state or mainstream societal actors. At least partly, the reason for this was the crucial events and developments that formed Turkey's state- and nation-building experience, which will further be discussed later. However, the liberal-nationalist perspective appears to have managed to reproduce itself as a critical and alternative set of beliefs and discourse. According to this perspective, the state's allowing, or even institutionalizing, more freedom of expression for ethnic-linguistic particularities may be a better way to strengthen national unity. This is because it would encourage people who were marginalized or alienated by Turkish state- and nation-building to associate themselves voluntarily with the national polity and/or identity. Thus, it may also be better insurance for state survival. In a nutshell, the defensive-nationalist perspective is diversity-phobic (especially of the Kurdish variety) and has an expectedly uneasy relationship with pluralistic democracy, while the liberal-nationalist perspective tends to be more tolerant and supportive of diversity and more compatible with pluralistic democracy.

Note that I use the term liberal in reference to attitudes toward ethnic-cultural diversity and freedom of expression. In other words, the term denotes here the extent to which one respects, or embraces, diversity (rather than seeks homogeneity) and other individuals' autonomy in choosing and expressing their group identities. It is not necessarily used in reference to the more general, political-economic and ideological sense of the term. Thus, I am not claiming that actors who express liberal-nationalist views in one way or another necessarily adhere to liberalism as an ideology or a political-economic project. Liberal-nationalist views in the sense that is used here (and, for that matter, defensive-nationalist views) can be found among center-right as well as social-democratic actors. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine whether, and to what extent, the distinction here crosscuts the distinction between state-centered and society-centered models of Turkish modernization.¹⁰

Also note that the distinction between defensive- and liberal-nationalist perspectives is one between sets of beliefs and values, not necessarily one between actors. Distinctions between actors, such as rigid

Liberal Nationalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). On the relation between liberalism and Turkish nationalism, see, among others, Taha Akyol, "Liberalizm ve Milliyetçilik," in *Milliyetçilik*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002), Simten Coşar, "Milliyetçi Liberalizmden Liberal Milliyetçiliğe," in *Milliyetçilik*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002). On liberal state elites and Turkish state-building, see, among others, Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

10 For the distinction between state-centered and society-centered models, see, Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

distinctions between state vs. society, military vs. civilians, or Turks vs. Kurds, can be misleading because they often overlook the actual diversity of beliefs and values within each of these social groups and institutional and individual actors. Thus, they may fail to notice the ideational sources of change that may lie in those beliefs and values that are suppressed by the dominant ones within each actor, or even within the same person. For example, it is possible that a person is aware of one perspective and feel some affinity for it, although his or her political preferences and behavior are predominantly shaped by another perspective. The effect on behavior may also be context-dependent: for example, in a political context, a person's reactions may reflect the defensive-nationalist perspective, while the same person may seem to hold the liberal-nationalist perspective in a social context. This may explain the seemingly paradoxical observation that although Turkish politics has been predominantly shaped by authoritarian attitudes toward difference, social life in an everyday sense has continued to reflect many aspects and attitudes that are relatively flexible and tolerant, if not liberal, towards diversity. Finally, it is possible for people to sympathize with the liberal-nationalist perspective without expressing it in public-political settings.¹¹

The defensive-nationalist perspective (henceforth DNP) has come increasingly under question in Turkish society since the 1980s. This has resulted largely from an increase in socio-economic mixing throughout the country and a rising suspicion by civil actors of, and autonomy from, the state and its state-centered model of modernization.¹² Since 1999, integration with the EU has accelerated this process. Simultaneously, the DNP has become more vocal and organized.¹³ In return, the liberal-nationalist perspective (henceforth LNP) might have been and may be gaining less vocal and organized momentum. In order to begin to understand the future evolution of these perspectives and the kind of debate that may bring about change, one needs to have a closer, and more critical, look into their past and present underpinnings.

The current debate and the evolution of Turkish nationalism

What produced the beliefs, especially those regarding ethnic Kurds, forming the basis for the DNP? This question is important because it might demonstrate that the dominant beliefs and values of Turkish nationalism

11 For an elaboration of these points, see, Somer, "Resurgence and Remaking of Identity."

12 Among others, Bozdoğan and Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity*.

13 In fact, the immediate effect of the current debate might be to strengthen the DNP because many who are threatened by the debate's critical nature and by the possibility of change may be turning to the DNP even more strongly and vocally.

were not culturally or historically predetermined. Not surprisingly, the current debate reflects a great deal of effort to understand the historical evolution of these beliefs and values.

Oran argues that one historical lesson, and one historically produced mental category/social norm (and its seemingly subconscious transplantation onto present society), underlies the mainstream Turkish suspicions of ethnic-linguistic and religious diversity.¹⁴ The historical lesson is the role that ethnic and religious nationalisms played in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the partially successful strategy of outside powers to use the Empire's non-Muslim subjects (and to a lesser extent Muslim Kurds) as a fifth column while promoting the breakup. The historical norm/mental category is drawn from the Ottoman *millet* system. According to this system, non-Muslim *millets*, i.e., those who were outside the politically dominant, Muslim core group, enjoyed significant autonomy. Anachronistically, one could compare this autonomy to the status of minorities today. Although enjoying "rights" and opportunities that can be interpreted as liberal for their time, these groups were viewed by the Muslims as socially and politically inferior.

According to Oran, this conceptualization of minorities as having second-class status is affecting the way Turkish nationalists imagine the Turkish nation and the status of minorities in it.¹⁵ The resulting belief structures produce a reflexive association of minorities with inferiority and untrustworthiness, disdain for the prospect of being given this status, and suspicion of the idea that there can be minorities within one nation. Accordingly, Oran argues that the Turkish delegate put up adamant and successful resistance against any notion of 'Muslim' minorities, during the negotiations leading to the Lausanne Treaty, which marked modern Turkey's international recognition.

However, in today's pluralistic-democratic understanding in the world, minorities are seen neither as inferior nor as a threat. They are associated with positive rights (or temporary entitlements that fall short of assigning rights, such as affirmative policies aimed at maintaining a language or at achieving economic equality with the majority). Similarly, they are associated with negative rights (or temporary protections) protecting minorities from majority tyranny. Such rights are intended to level the playing field among citizens of different cultural-linguistic, religious, and

14 Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar*.

15 During the Ottoman times, the Muslim *millet* was not expected to be homogeneous in an ethnic-linguistic sense; religious identity and tradition would produce homogeneity. When it became clear that the modern Turkish nation would be based on secular principles, language became the principal standard of homogeneity, although many also sought to cultivate actual and imagined ethnic bonds.

ethnic-national backgrounds: to generate effective equality (as opposed to merely legal equality) by allowing them to express and cultivate their differentiated identities and backgrounds if they choose to do so. However, as Oran stresses, while such rights may include those to *internal* self-determination (e.g., to democratic self-governance), they exclude *external* self-determination (e.g., to unilateral secession). Thus, the democratic world's dominant image of minorities is no longer that of a threat to a country's territorial unity.

French nation-building is another ideological inspiration underlying the DNP's emphasis on cultural-linguistic homogeneity. And, the assimilationism of Turkish nation-building might not have been as different from that of the French as some contributions to the current debate seem to maintain. For example, Eugen Weber could take issue with Oran's passing claim that the French nation (or a strong and ethnically neutral French identity) had already existed when French nation-building embarked upon assimilating the linguistic-cultural minorities in the country.¹⁶

How did the DNP come to dominate the major texts, practices, and discourse of the state? If the current debate reveals that the dominant form of Turkish nationalism emerged as a result of critical choices and contingencies during Turkish state- and nation-building, this would make significant practical difference. If the outcome was not preconditioned by social, cultural and economic structures, there must have been other, counterfactual paths that some actors favored. This would make it more difficult to conceptualize Turkish nationalism as a monolithic set of beliefs and values, and easier to imagine that alternative beliefs and values may prevail in the future.

It would be wrong to argue that the ideological influences, and historically formed mental frames discussed above, can alone explain the formative stages of the Turkish state- and nation-building. These cultural frames and ideologies being the same, the DNP could nevertheless have become less dominant and the LNP could have had more influence in shaping mainstream ideology and state discourse and practices. For example, both the French model and a native suspicion of the concept of minorities within the core nation would still have been compatible with a more liberal attitude toward the use of Kurdish in non-official settings and

16 Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 18-19, 132-35. For a recent and succinct discussion of the French and Turkish nation-building models, see, among others, Cengiz Aktar, "Osmanlı Kozmopolitizminden Avrupa Kozmopolitizmine Giden Yolda Ulus Parantezi," in *Milliyetçilik*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002).

the expression of ethnic particularities in public-political spheres. As things turned out, Turkey pursued a strict policy of cultural-linguistic assimilation and exclusive identification with the national identity. What explains the *extent* of the DNP's dominance in Turkish state- and nation-building?

During the formative years of the Republic, it appears that crucial, violent events and critical decisions by both internal and external actors contributed to this institutional outcome. Such major events and decisions include the abolishment of the Caliphate, the Sheikh Said Rebellion and its political repercussions, and Mosul's relinquishment to the British Mandate in Iraq. We can hypothesize that the DNP prevailed and that the LNP was marginalized, as a result. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this outcome to a certain degree represented an incomplete compromise between the ideas representing the DNP and the LNP. Thus, dominant nationalist values and state practices reflected some influence of the LNP as well. This compromise can be considered incomplete in the sense that it does not seem to have produced a coherent set of values and institutional principles backed by strong elite and societal consensus.¹⁷ The importance of these points will become clear below.

Various contributions in Zürcher's (2005) volume discuss the crucial events and developments during state- and nation-formation in Turkey.¹⁸ As Bozarslan's discussion implies, alongside such developments, and Turkish nationalism's increasing domination by the DNP, Kurdish nationalism was changing.¹⁹ It was transformed from a predominantly cultural and relatively marginal movement that put a high value on common religious-cultural bonds and a common homeland with Turks, to a predominantly political version of nationalism that aspired to a separate nation-state together with Kurds in neighboring countries. Bozarslan lists four factors to account for this transformation: even before any

17 In addition to having more time during state-building, popular pressures could have compelled nationalist elites to resolve this incompleteness. However, Turkish state- and nation-building did not benefit from such a reality-check because it barely resulted from processes of negotiation between the elites and the masses. Among others, see Çağlar Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990's," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997). The path-dependent nature of institutions, i.e., that the evolution of institutions in response to changing political and other environmental conditions is constrained by the past trajectory of these institutions, may help to explain how this incompleteness was reproduced over time. More attention to the mechanisms of such production may help to develop such an explanation. For path-dependency and mechanisms of reproduction, see, among others, Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 2 (1999).

18 Zürcher, ed., *Türkiye'de Etnik Çatışma*.

19 Hamit Bozarslan, "Kürt Milliyetçiliği: Zımni Sözleşmeden Ayaklanmaya 1919-1925," in *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye'de Etnik Çatışma*, ed. Erik Jan Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005).

assimilationist state practice began, the intuitive understanding that Kurdish elites had during the foundation of the Republic that language rather than religion would be the primary source of legitimacy for the emerging state; the division of the lands where Ottoman Kurds lived between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq; the abolishment of the Caliphate; the disappearance of the threat of Armenian nationalism, which had previously pulled Kurds to Turks; and the fear that Turkish nationalists could then turn against the Kurds.

Nevertheless, Bozarslan argues that early Kurdish rebellions were not necessarily waged in pursuit of a separate nation-state; in the spirit of the old Ottoman “tacit contract” with local elites, they were waged as a means to renegotiate the terms of their relations to the Turkish state.²⁰ In fact, he maintains that discontented Kurdish elites consisted of those who primarily opposed the emerging, centralized-bureaucratic nature of the state and those who primarily opposed its Turkishness. The state’s harsh reaction to the rebellions strengthened the latter type of elites by revealing that the state no longer recognized the tacit contract, he argues.

However, one cannot understand the evolution of Turkish nationalism by exclusively looking at the evolution of Turkish-Kurdish relations. It is necessary to examine the whole experience of Turkish nationalists in relation to all rival nationalisms and to the external powers who were negotiating the partition of Ottoman lands into new nation-states. The current debate includes a number of contributions directly or indirectly supporting this view. For example, Akçam’s contribution in Zürcher’s book claims that two factors critically influenced the evolution of Turkish nationalism: persecutions by, and violent conflicts with rival Armenian nationalists on one hand, and the actions of international powers in reaction to the mass expulsion and massacres of Armenians during the First World War on the other.²¹ It maintains that Turkish nationalism could have evolved differently (e.g., . become more liberal toward minority questions) if the Allied powers had chosen to place the blame for the expulsion and massacres on individual perpetrators, as the Kemalists were arguing for, rather than embarking upon the partition of the Ottoman-Turkish heartland, as they did.²²

20 For the Ottoman “tacit contract,” see, Şerif Mardin, “Freedom in an Ottoman Perspective,” in *State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980’s*, ed. Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

21 Taner Akçam, “Sevr ve Lozan’ın Başka Tarihi,” in *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye’de Etnik Çatışma*, ed. Erik Jan Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005).

22 Similarly, Şeker argues that Turkish nationalism could have evolved to be more tolerant of Christian minorities. Nesim Şeker, “Türklük ve Osmanlı Arasında: Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrası Türkiye’de “Milliyet” Arayışları ya da “Anasır Meselesi,” in *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye’de Etnik*

Turkish identity and *Türkiyelilik*

As argued, the image and actuality of cultural-linguistic homogeneity are necessary for the cohesion of Turkish national identity and unity according to the DNP. Not surprisingly, during the current debate critics of the DNP have targeted its conceptualization of Turkishness and the associated state practices in areas from citizenship rights to education. However, while some critics like Oran²³ maintain that Turkishness is inherently an ethnic category, others such as Cemal²⁴ criticize state practices without making this assumption. As we will see, this difference is important because it affects the policy implications that are derived.

Various contributions in Zürcher, especially that of Adanır,²⁵ demonstrate the composite and multiethnic nature of Turkish nationalism and identity. Furthermore, they discuss how the experience of ethnic conflicts elsewhere affected the attitudes of Turkish nationalists toward minority issues in Anatolia. With the advance of Russian nationalism in the Caucasus and as predominantly Christian peoples in the Balkans developed rival nationalist movements, massive numbers of non-Turkish-speaking Muslim people were driven out of these areas into Anatolia. Thus, these people were added to Anatolia's already mixed ethnic mosaic. As a result of these developments during the nineteenth century and around the turn of the century, Turkish nationalists, and the people they aimed at mobilizing, were an ethnically diverse lot. Furthermore, many had vivid memories of persecutions by rival nationalist movements and bloody disintegration along ethnic or religious lines, which must have influenced the mental frames (beliefs and values) within which they evaluated their subsequent experiences. For example, in support of this view, Bozarslan quotes court statements during the trial of Sheikh Said, which suggest that the judges used the memories of Balkan nationalisms and disintegration (such as those in Bosnia and Albania) as references while trying Kurdish rebels.²⁶

These discussions undermine Oran's claim that Turkishness is an inherently ethnic category. The fact that Turkish nationalists were an ethnically diverse group makes it unlikely that they would have promoted an ethnic definition of Turkishness. In order to support his thesis, Oran

Çatışma, ed. Erik Jan Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005). The likelihood of both counterfactual scenarios is questioned by Zürcher, Zürcher, ed., *Türkiye'de Etnik Çatışma*, 14-15.

23 Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar*.

24 Cemal, *Kürtler*.

25 Fikret Adanır, "Bulgaristan, Yunanistan ve Türkiye Üçgeninde Ulus İnşası ve Nüfus Değişimi," in *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye'de Etnik Çatışma*, ed. Erik Jan Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005).

26 Bozarslan, "Kürt Milliyetçiliği."

cites numerous examples of state discourses and practices that often appear to reflect an ethnically exclusive notion of Turkishness. In addition, he points to state practices opposing the provision of negative and positive minority rights (or temporary entitlements and protections), discussed above, that would enable Turkish citizens of all ethnic and religious backgrounds to share equally in the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, which is Oran's main interest. The underlying assumption, which enables one to conclude that the state adheres to an ethnic definition of Turkishness, appears to be that these state practices and discourses should be the product of a coherent and consistently pursued state ideology.

An alternative interpretation that can be put forward here is that the various influences during the critical junctures of state- and nation-formation resulted in the (incomplete) compromise between the DNP and the LNP discussed above. This produced institutions and practices that were not always consistent over time and with each other. Such a compromise may also explain the later, textual and practical "oscillations of [the state's definitions of] Turkish citizenship between political and ethnic definitions."²⁷

The resulting Turkish state nationalism turned out to be a mixture of civic and inclusive, and ethnic and exclusive values. It was one that had ethnic overtones (in some periods more than in others) but was nevertheless based in *cultural* (and secular) nationalism, as Şeker's contribution to Zürcher's volume also concludes.²⁸ It would be wrong to argue that the culture on which this nationalism was based was one that was already there fully formed, and one that exclusively belonged to ethnic Turks. Instead, both the nation and its culture may be seen as assimilatory projects themselves and were created by (mostly elite) actors whose own identities were in the making. There is no doubt that these projects favored the Turkish language and those (ethnically Turkic or not) who were more ready than others to adopt this new identity project, Turkishness, as their primary identity. It does not follow, however, that Turkishness is an ethnic category itself: some pious ethnic Turks might have had more difficulty adopting it than did secular ethnic Albanians. Turkishness is a national identity. It is a product of the Turkish project of nation-building and modernization, which was aimed at transforming a historically existing linguistic-cultural category and state identity into a new and more inclusive national identity by integrating a multiethnic and multicultural geography.

27 Mesut Yeğen, "Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 55.

28 Şeker, "Türklük ve Osmanlı Arasında."

This seemingly rhetorical discussion has significant practical import. This is because it seems to lead Oran and others to conclude that, since Turkishness is necessarily an ethnic category, a better (and, as sometimes argued, the only) way for the state to promote Turkey's unity is to abandon (presumably via constitutional and other changes) it in favor of a non-ethnic category such as *Türkiyeli*, which means "from Turkey." This is a major policy prescription that comes out of Oran's book, and the "Minorities Report" on which the book is based. This policy prescription unleashed an intense public debate.²⁹ Is it a viable project? One may pose four objections or reservations.

First, identity categories need historical depth or "thickness" in order to prove successful as a unifying project; as one author put it succinctly in reference to another national context: "it is not enough to construct identities. To be successful, these identities have to be accepted."³⁰ That *Türkiyelilik* may have such potential depth or appeal is a premise that needs substantiation. Second, depending on internal and external political developments, *Türkiyelilik* can become exclusionary as well. Take, for example, the scenario in which Kurdish statehood becomes reality in Iraq, and Turkey fails to resolve its domestic Kurdish problem democratically. The resulting social and political polarization may feed the perception that Kurds are not really "from Turkey." Third, as Bila reports in detail,³¹ Öcalan, the now imprisoned leader of the PKK (now also called Kongra-Gel) has also chosen recently to put forward the idea that the state should promote *Türkiyelilik* as opposed to Turkishness. This makes it unlikely that any political actor can successfully promote this idea in the foreseeable future, in the face of a strongly anti-PKK, Turkish public opinion.

Political considerations aside, perhaps the primary reservation about the idea of *Türkiyelilik* may be its possible implications for the Turkish identity itself. It may feed the false perception that, while *Türkiyelilik* is ethnically heterogeneous and neutral, Turkishness is a homogeneous ethnic category. This perception may strengthen ethnic nationalism and legitimize the

29 For contending views in the mainstream media, see, for example, Şahin Alpay, "Önemli Olan Ayrımcılığın Son Bulması," *Zaman*, November 9, 2004, Can Dündar, "Atatürk'ün Sansürlenene Demeci," *Milliyet*, October 30, 2004, Oktay Ekşi, "Malum Rapor Üstüne," *Hürriyet*, October 21, 2004, "Genelkurmay'dan Azınlık Tepkisi," *Milliyet*, November 2, 2004, Ömer Lütfi Mete, "Yine 'Türkiyelilik' Sibiryalılığına Dair," *Sabah*, October 29, 2004, Derya Sazak, "Cumhuriyetimiz Tek Soya İndirgenemez, Interview with Prof. Kaboğlu," *Milliyet*, November 1, 2004, Haluk Şahin, "Türkiyeli, Türk, Alt-Kimlik, Üst-Kimlik," *Radikal*, October 22, 2004.

30 Anatoly M. Khazanov, "A State without a Nation? Russia after Empire," in *The Nation-State in Question*, ed. T.V. Paul, G. John Ikenberry, and John A. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 87.

31 Bila, *Hangi PKK?*

actions of those who would rather suppress diversity among Turks, thus alienating those who identify with a pluralistic conception of Turkishness. As a result, the outcome may fail to serve pluralistic democratization, in contrast to what the proponents of this identity project appear to expect.

The point here is not that *Türkiyelilik* is not (or cannot be) a unifying identity category for those who hold it dear. Nor is it the point that people should in any way be compelled to identify themselves as Turks rather than Kurds, Laz, or Alevis. Instead, three points can be made. First, identities can have as many definitions as those holding them; this is true for cultural-linguistic as well as “territorial” identities. However states define them, people self-identify with various combinations of national and subnational (or minority) identities.³² Thus, while some people (ethnic Turks or Kurds) may continue to define Turkishness as an ethnic category, wherever state institutions have to represent or interpret Turkishness, they can portray it as an ethnically plural, composite national category. This would enable people of different ethnic backgrounds to associate with it if they choose to do so. In other words, Turkishness in the sense of an overarching state identity would be defined as compatible with various ethnic categories.³³

Second, from the point of view of democracy, one should resist the idea that social-political identities *themselves* are objects of state regulation and enforcement.³⁴ Instead, the state can adopt a citizenship-based rather than identity-based strategy. It can constitutionally recognize the cultural-linguistic heterogeneity of the nation, without necessarily inventing a new national identity. Equally as important, it can provide and enforce new citizenship rights and practices with a view to ensure that people with different cultural-linguistic backgrounds enjoy equal freedoms, responsibilities, and opportunities.³⁵ These rights and practices should be designed to promote the positive-sum perception of interests between citizens of different backgrounds and identities.³⁶ Unifying, overarching

32 Michael Keating, *Plurinational Democracy: Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

33 Murat Somer, “Turkey’s Kurdish Conflict: Changing Context and Domestic and Regional Implications,” *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2004).

34 Equally, one should resist identities’ becoming objects of oppressive (ethnic-cultural or national) group enforcement.

35 A citizenship-based strategy can take various forms. For an extensive discussion see the contributions in E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu, eds., *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences* (London: Routledge, 2005). Also see Şükrü Hanioglu, “Üst Kimlikler Olarak Türklük ve Türkiyelilik,” *Zaman*, November 11 2004, E. Fuat Keyman, “Çokkültürlü Anayasal Vatandaşlık,” *Radikal*, November 21, 2004, Mesut Yeğen, “Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler,” *Radikal*, December 5, 2004.

36 For a theoretical treatment, see, Murat Somer, “Failures of the Discourse of Ethnicity: Turkey, Kurds, and the Emerging Iraq,” *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 1 (March 2005).

categories including *Türkiyelilik* and various definitions of Turkishness can be expected to arise from this social practice, as a spontaneous product.

Third, the diagnosis that the allegedly ethnic nature of the Turkish identity has been the persistent and predominant reason for the Kurdish conflict ought to be approached with caution. Cemal's contribution to the current debate demonstrates the weakness of such a diagnosis. This self-critical account of the Kurdish conflict implies that the gist of Turkey's Kurdish conflict may not lie in the ethnic exclusiveness of Turkishness. Instead, it may lie in the fact that, with large portions of society, the state failed to establish a state-society relationship based on mutual recognition and heartfelt acceptance (*gönül bağı*). Cemal's observations reveal that millions of people, including himself and prominent figures such as former president Özal and novelist Yaşar Kemal, have, to differing degrees, embraced Turkishness as an overarching national identity, without thereby committing dissimulation or abandoning their ethnic consciousness.³⁷ What most of these people, and others who fell by the wayside during Turkish nation-building, want, may not be a new national identity. Rather, it may be respect and recognition for their various backgrounds and identities and truly equal opportunities in the social and economic realms. In addition to state democratization, this requires social debate and democratization.

Cemal's work provides insights into the experiences, sentiments and deliberations of a wide spectrum of societal actors who are reevaluating the Kurdish conflict, more or less from the point of view of the LNP. The book makes a major attempt to be balanced in its moral evaluations and policy prescriptions. While unequivocal in its condemnation of the PKK violence and Kurdish separatism, it highlights and criticizes the repressive state practices that appear to have forced many Kurds to turn to radicalism. It is also unequivocal in its celebration of ethnic diversity of Turkey and of Turks and in arguing that a more affirmative approach toward this diversity may strengthen rather than weaken Turkey's national unity.

The state and the current debate

Despite the aforementioned significant changes during the last two decades, the state continues to be the dominant actor in Turkey with respect to the Kurdish issue. Thus, the discourse and practices of the state actors will be a major determinant of the way the mainstream public-political discourse will evolve. Where does the state stand in the current debate?

37 Cemal, *Kürtler*, 543-44..

Bila implies that the views of state actors are not necessarily monolithic, static, or coherent.³⁸ The book draws on official statements as well as on detailed, written and verbal, communications with state actors, including the military. It argues that since the early 1990s, a new strategy has evolved within the state, one that is amenable to Kurdish cultural-linguistic rights within the framework of Turkish constitutional citizenship.³⁹ One may call this a quasi-LNP. For example, the government and National Intelligence Agency supported legal reforms that would open the way for Kurdish cultural rights in 2000, while the armed forces belatedly expressed their opposition to them. However, the military quietly acquiesced when the reforms passed in 2002, suggesting that its opposition was soft, or softening.⁴⁰

Another example that can be derived from Bila's reports is that the armed forces have pronounced through written statements their strong commitment to a non-ethnic and inclusive conception of Turkish national identity. However, in recent incidents, the military publicized contradicting views regarding the extent to which this conception should allow acceptance and discussion of Turks' ethnic heterogeneity.⁴¹ Such contradictions support the aforementioned idea that state institutions do not necessarily reflect a coherent, ethnic or non-ethnic, notion of Turkishness.

Bila also reports on the PKK claims that it has abandoned separatism in favor of coexistence with Turks within a "democratic republic." Thereby, Kurds, at a minimum, would be given cultural-linguistic autonomy, and, at a maximum, would be recognized as a founding entity on par with Turks (but not necessarily under federalism). Bila reports that the state actors are convinced that these changes are insincere and purely tactical. However, he finds that these changes are plausible and in line with the new incentive structures under the prospects of Turkey's EU membership.⁴² In this context, an important emerging division within the PKK—and, for that matter, within Kurdish nationalism—is one between those who pursue pan-Kurdish goals and cooperation with Kurds in the region, and those who pursue Turkey-specific goals such as the recognition of Kurds as a

38 Bila, *Hangi PKK?*

39 *Ibid.*, 279-80

40 *Ibid.*, 143-44.

41 An apparent example of this is the military's reactions to press allegations that one of Atatürk's adopted daughters was of Armenian origin. See, among others, the press release by the military, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Basın Açıklaması No: Ba-03/04* (accessed March 13, 2005); available from <http://www.tsk.mil.tr/bashalk/basac/2004/a03.htm>. and "Tolon: Gökçen'in Ermeni Olması Bizi Sevindirir," *Milliyet*, February 22, 2004.

42 Bila, *Hangi PKK?* 128-29.

founding nation of Turkey in a context of democratization and Europeanization.⁴³ Here, Bila pinpoints the contradiction in the PKK's claim that it has adopted democratic politics, and its announced readiness to use force against opponent Kurdish groups.

In lieu of a conclusion

Since 1999, three developments, the abatement of violent separatist threats to state security, Turkey's accelerated integration with the EU, and Iraq's restructuring, have intensified the internal debate on questions of diversity. Until recently, the PKK's military withdrawal and subsequent organizational and ideological fragmentation have enabled the debate to be less constrained by violence and security considerations.⁴⁴

The uncertainties in Iraq raise the possibility of Kurdish statehood along Turkey's borders. The election of the Kurdish leader Talabani to Iraqi presidency has raised Kurds' status in the region. These developments provide new momentum for various forms of Kurdish nationalism inside and outside Turkey. Meanwhile, the straining of Turkish-US relations as a result of the inability of the two governments to resolve their differences on Iraq has diminished Turkey's perceived leverage over the developments there. All this compels actors across Turkey's ideological spectrum to develop new discursive and political strategies. While expanding the political strategies available to Turkish Kurds, EU membership requires that Turkey adopt new and more pluralistic social and political norms regarding the status and treatment of subjectively defined cultural-linguistic minorities. These external influences are critical in motivating and sustaining the internal debate.

However, without a thorough internal debate and a new consensus on the dominant values of Turkish nationalism, any externally motivated transformation of the domestic actors' beliefs and values toward more acceptance of diversity would remain thin. That is, it would fall short of being embedded in well-informed and well-deliberated convictions and in strong moral interest. Thus, it would also be unstable in the sense that it could easily be reversed for example in response to internal and external political developments, thus jeopardizing Turkey's EU integration as well. Hence, at the end, the domestic debate is necessary, though insufficient, if

43 Ruşen Çakır, ed., *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu* (İstanbul: Metis, 2004), offers another valuable source of information on the various viewpoints among a wide spectrum of Turkish Kurds.

44 In response to the recent escalation of violence between the security forces and the PKK, 150 intellectuals made a declaration in June 2005 that invited the PKK to unconditionally cease armed activities and the government to enact further reforms of democratization. See, among others, "İnsanlarımız Ölmesin," *Milliyet*, June 16, 2005.

all this will lead to sustainable democratic change. It will shape the long-run contours of Turkey's democratization and external relations.

Any claims in the present article should be evaluated by further research on the scope and depth of the current debate. Preliminary results of my ongoing research analyzing the content of the daily *Hürriyet* since 1999 suggest that the current changes extend beyond the mere phenomenon of rising interest in the Kurdish question. In addition to the fact that increasingly more articles and news are being published on Kurds in Turkey, much more importantly, the majority of these are now on the social and cultural dimensions of the Kurdish question, as opposed to the 'security' dimension. This is in contrast to the pre-1999 period and supports the view here that the current debate involves a critical reexamination of qualitative issues. This may be a positive sign from the point of view of prospects for a more balanced synthesis of the DNP and the LNP.

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