

War and Independence: Trauma, Memory, and Independence in the Young Turkish Republic.

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The University of Utah held a conference on the emergence of the Turkish Republic following the destruction and dislocation of WWI. This conference was designed to produce the fourth volume of the path breaking multi-volume study of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and its modern consequences which still reverberate today. The Conference was opened by the Chairmen of the Political Science Dept. Brent Steele who noted that how proud the University and the Department were that Utah had become one of the leading centers for the study of modern Turkey and the Middle East. Professor M. Hakan Yavuz also offered introductory remarks highlighting the genesis of this multi-volume project by the Turkish Studies Program at Utah and the fact that it has already had a transformative impact on the field. He noted that scholars are now for the first time linking the historiography and modern developments in the Balkans, Caucasus, and the Middle East together stemming from a common five-century historical legacy. He also pointed out that Ottoman Eastern or Muslim Question in Europe was long neglected and even deliberately elided in discussions of the 19th century emergence of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and humanitarian interventionism in modern Europe and the Middle East. The Turkish Studies Project has been instrumental in the fact that these themes are no longer ignored in current scholarly studies of these topics. Professor Yavuz concluded by thanking the Turkish American Coalition for its continuing generous support to published the previous three volumes as well as the fourth volume. Yavuz also thanked to the Turkish Historical Society for their invaluable support for this conference.

First Panel Ideas and Ideals of the Republic:

The participants included prominent scholars from the US, UK, Turkey, Japan, Greece, and Armenia. The opening remarks by Professor Istar Gozaydin aimed to set the tone of the conference and the thesis of the 4th volume. Professor Gozaydin argued that it is very important to reexamine the founding philosophy of the Republic in light of the current developments in and around Turkey. She insisted that just like any other country, Turkey is experiencing increasing sentimentality surrounding the founding episodes of the Republic. She examined the role of ideas in the early Republic by focusing on the writings and impact of Ziya Gokalp. After examining Gokalp's ideas, Professor Gozaydin indicated the impact of his ideas on Mustafa Kemal and the early reforms of the Republic. The second paper was presented by Professor Levent Koker of Gazi University, who wrote the first scholarly study on Kemalism. Professor Koker examined the ambiguities of the founding principles of the Republic. He argued that Kemalism, the modernist and nation-building ideology of the Republic is embedded in a series of ambiguities. He focused on the issue of national identity and its conception of sovereignty and its relations with populism. Koker concluded that the old Kemalist republic as we knew it is gone and today there is a concerted effort to re-root the state on new Islamo-authoritarian ideology.

Hiroyuki Ogasawara of Kyushu University presented a detailed analysis of the emergence of early Republican historiography and the attempt to base the new Turkish national identity on competing visions centered on Central Asia, the Selcuk and Ottoman heritage, and the civilizations of Anatolia and Western Europe. Finally, Umut Can Adisoniz of the University of Kent brought in a political science and international relations perspective to underscore how ontological insecurity drove the identity politics of the nascent republic and its desire to forge both a modern nation and state drawing on Western models.

Panel Two: The Foreign Policy of the Early Republic

This panel focused on the vital relations between the newly born Turkish Republic and the Soviet Union. Eldar Abbasov from the Moscow Research Institute examined the history and archival sources for early Turkish-Soviet relations following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Dr. Abbasov indicated that the Republic owes its existence to the support of Lenin. By utilizing Russian archives, Abbasov showed how the new Soviet Union supported the resistance movement against Western imperialism. Sevtap Demirci also explored to what extent the Soviet Union served as a model or inspiration for various Turkish modernist and political movements. Cemil Hasanli in turn examined how the relations vacillated between cooperation and competition between Turkey and the Soviet Union. He concluded his lecture by insisting that economic development (search for investment) and also civilizational shift that Mustafa Kemal wanted to achieve played a key role in why he identified with Western Europe more than the Soviet Union.

Panel Three: International Contexts of the Republic

Garibet Moundjian examined the intriguing history of “hidden” Armenians in the early republic who navigated between conflicting demands of secular citizenship and ethno-religious identity. By utilizing Armenian sources, Moundjian showed the role of the Armenian Revolutionary Army, known as Tasnaks, in the Kurdish rebellions in Anatolia. Similarly, Pamela Sezgin of the University of Georgia looked critically at both the positive and negative experiences of Turkish and immigrant Jewish communities in the period between 1919-1950. Dimitris Stamatopoulus of the University of Macedonia examined the domestic variables which drove Venezelos’ Megali Idea and the disastrous invasion of Asia Minor in 1919. Finally, Seyhun Al of Izmir University critically looked at how the Republican efforts to create a homogenous nation-state catalyzed the Kurdish Question in Turkish politics.

Panel Four: Regional Relations

Mesut Casin of Yeditepe University looked at regional relations in the context of Ataturk’s desire for “peace at home-peace abroad”. Eric Hooglund the editor of *Middle Eastern Critique* looked at Turkish-Iranian relations in this period and how Reza Pahlavi was influenced in his modernization campaign by the example of Ataturk and the Turkish Republic. Professor Hooglund focused on the similarities and differences of the modernization projects of Ataturk and Reza Shah. He concluded that the reforms of Ataturk have been much more successful than in Iran because of the modernization of the Ottoman Empire that started with the Tanzimat. Finally, Christopher Gunn of Coastal Carolina University used primary sources to underscore American and French rivalry in Cilicia and the Levant. He also underscored how religious supremacism shaped the approaches and attitudes of leading American missionaries and educators toward the Ottoman State- a topic often overlooked or downplayed by the existing literature.

Panel Five -Conclusions

In the final panel, Kemal Silay of Indiana University and Betul Tarhan of University of Georgia examined the literary construction and contestation of national identity in Resat Nuri Guntekin’s path breaking novel *Yesil Gece* which interrogated secular and religious identities and worldviews. Michael Gunter presented original source material on Clarence Streit’s visit to Ankara. Finally, Mujeeb Khan concluded by noting how the Turkish Studies Project funded by the Turkish Coalition of America has impacted cutting edge scholarly work like the recent writings of Usamma Maqdisi which stress that the history of the early modern Balkans, Caucasus, and Levant cannot be separated. Khan also highlighted how the Ottoman Muslim, Jewish, Kurdish, and Armenian Questions have a common ontology and that these questions still inform contemporary politics. Khan concluded that the multi-volume study at the University of Utah has already made a major contribution to the field.

The conference ended with the concluding remarks of Professor Yavuz by indicating the role of the experiences of the founding fathers of the Republic in the Balkans. Yavuz insisted that the Republic was built with the tragic experience and deep wounds that can be traced back to the Balkans. He said: ‘we cannot understand the founding fathers and their vision of the Republic if we ignore the pains, deportations, and extermination they faced in the Balkans.’