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An Examination of the Historiography of Milli Mücadele (National Struggle) in Context of the Early Republic of Turkey

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Keywords

National Struggle, Republican History, National Identity, Turkish Nationalism, Modernization.

Abstract

This study examines the developments that emerged in the historiography of the National Struggle (1919–1923) and its role in the formation of the national identity of the Republic of Turkey. By reviewing the major events of this period, it also evaluates the ideological and cultural dimensions associated with the historiography of the early Republican era. The research was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative method and an analytical-historical approach, drawing on documents and library-based sources. The aim of this study is to answer the following question: With the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, what approaches emerged in Republican historiography? The findings derived from an examination of the available sources related to the subject indicate that, following the departure from the multi-ethnic structure of the Ottoman Empire, the historiography of the early years of the Republic was founded on the principles of secularization, nationalization, and Westernization. The Thesis of Turkish History, which was formed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the nation-state by utilizing disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics. The distinction and importance of this research lie in the fact that, using a historical-analytical approach, it examines issues related to the historiography of that period and its relationship to the national identity of the Turkish Republic, as reflected in relevant scientific sources.

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بررسی تاریخ‌نگاری ملّی مُجادله (مبارزه ملی) در بسترِ جمهوری اولیهٔ ترکیه

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چکیده

این مطالعه تحولات پدیدآمده در تاریخ‌نگاری مبارزه ملی (۱۹۱۹-۱۹۲۳) و نقش آن در شکل‌گیری هویت ملی جمهوری ترکیه را بررسی نموده و با مرور وقایع مهم آن دوره، ابعاد ایدئولوژیک و فرهنگی مرتبط به تاریخ‌نگاری اوایل جمهوری را مورد ارزیابی قرار می دهد. این تحقیق با روش توصیفی-کیفی و رویکرد تحلیلی-تاریخی از طریق اسناد و منابع کتابخانه‌یی انجام شده است. هدف این مطالعه عبارت از یافتن پاسخ به این پرسش است که با گذار از امپرتوری عثمانی به جمهوری ترکیه، چه رویکردهای در تاریخ نگاری جمهوری رونما شده است؟ نتایج بررسی منابع موجود مرتبط به موضوع نشان می دهد که با گسست از ساختار چندقومیتی امپراتوری عثمانی، تاریخ‌نگاری سال‌های آغازین جمهوری بر بنیان‌های سکولاریزاسیون، ملی‌سازی و غربی‌سازی استوار شد. "تز تاریخ ترک" که تحت رهبری مصطفی کمال آتاتورک شکل گرفت، می‌کوشید با بهره‌گیری از رشته‌هایی چون باستان‌شناسی، انسان‌شناسی و زبان‌شناسی، مشروعیت دولت-ملت را تقویت کند. تفاوت و اهمیت این مطالعه در این است که ما با رویکرد تحلیل تاریخی نکات مرتبط به تاریخ‌نگاری آن دوره و پیوند آن با هویت ملی جمهوری ترکیه را که در منابع مرتبط و آکادمیک بازتاب یافته است، بررسی نمودیم.

1. Introduction

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk not only represented a change in political structures but also a profound transformation in historical consciousness. The period of the National Struggle (Milli Mücadele) and the early stages of the formation of the Republic became the focus of historians who sought to create a coherent narrative to affirm and strengthen the legitimacy of the new state and to foster a unified national identity. In contrast to the diverse, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious context of the Ottoman Empire, the historiography of the Republic in its early years emphasized secularism, nationalism, and modernization, aligning the writing of history directly with the ideological goals based on the nation-building program of the new regime (River, 2019).

The motivation for this research stems from the enduring influence of the historical narrative surrounding the national struggle, a narrative that continues to shape Turkey's national identity and political culture. The dominant historiographical narratives, disseminated through education, public commemorations, and state institutions, have played a pivotal role in consolidating national cohesion and legitimizing the founding ideals of the republic. Although hostile interpretations of the national struggle were promoted by foreign observers and political opponents, the Turkish leadership and society collectively resisted internal and external challenges and ultimately led the country towards modernization and national sovereignty (İnalcık, 2022).

Similar liberation movements in the Middle East and South Asia have faced similar struggles for historical representation. However, the historiography of these regions has often been reflected through Western-oriented perspectives that have led to distortions and obscured local agency and context. In contrast, the Turkish experience offers a unique case study of how history writing has been deliberately used as a tool for nation-building and identity formation. The central assumption of this research is that history, rather than being merely a passive record of the past, functions as a tool for ideological construction. From the War of Independence to the establishment of the Republic, successive generations of Turkish historians, influenced by positivist, nationalist, humanist, or Turko-Islamic frameworks, have actively participated in the production and revision of national identity. Understanding these historiographical developments is essential for assessing how Turkey's early republican identity was formed and continually redefined in changing political and intellectual contexts (Şeyhun, 2021).

The purpose of this research is to examine the process of formation of official and alternative historiographical narratives about the national struggle, focusing on the institutionalization of the "Turkish history thesis" and its ideological foundations. The research examines the role of various sources, including memoirs, official documents, monuments, and educational materials, in reinforcing or challenging dominant historical discourses. It also examines the ideological spectrum of historiographical interpretations, from Kemalist and Marxist critiques to hybrid Turkish-Islamic perspectives and revisionist approaches (Yalçın, 2023).

These components are of fundamental importance for understanding how national identity has been formed, contested, and reinterpreted in Turkey over time. Historiography has not only recorded the events of the national struggle, but has also actively participated in legitimizing the republic, shaping collective memory, and cultivating symbols and myths that maintain national unity. Structurally, this study first places the historiography of the early years of the republic within the broader context of the political and cultural reforms of the 1920s and 1930s. It then analyzes the methodological foundations of the "Turkish theory of history" and its positivist orientation. The following sections trace the evolution of historiographical paradigms from humanistic reinterpretations to the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and critical historiographies related

to the national struggle. The final section examines the relationship between contemporary developments and the historiography of that period in shaping modern Turkish identity and collective memory (Yavuz, 2026).

By revisiting the historiography of the national struggle in the context of the early republic, this article emphasizes the dynamic interplay between politics, ideology, and history writing. This study contributes to broader debates about the role of historiography in nation-building and the contested nature of collective memory in modern states. Over the past century, in parallel with profound social and political transformations in Turkey, the meanings attributed to the national struggle have evolved from a lived historical experience to an institutionalized, memorial-oriented framework; for new generations of scholars and citizens alike, this evolution underscores the enduring function of the historiography of the early republic as a foundational narrative that continues to shape national legitimacy and identity in contemporary Turkey (Yazıcı, 2011).

2.The Portrayal of the Relationship between Mustafa Kemal and Sultan Vahdettin

Ascending to the Ottoman throne on July 4, 1918, during the final stages of World War I, Sultan Vahdettin initiated administrative restructuring and assumed direct military command in response to deteriorating wartime conditions. However, sustained military failures against Allied forces and the imminent threat of defeat ultimately compelled both the Sultan and the Committee of Union and Progress to concede to an armistice (Aslan, 2008, pp. 36-38).

Prior to Mustafa Kemal’s arrival in Samsun, relations between the Ottoman government and the press were significantly strained. Following the post-armistice arrests of Committee of Union and Progress members in January 1919, newspapers openly aligned with political factions, prompting Sultan Vahdettin to enforce press censorship on February 9, 1919. The occupation of İzmir on May 15, 1919, solidified a sharp ideological divide within the Istanbul press between supporters of the Anatolian nationalist movement and loyalists defending the legitimacy of the Ottoman government (Ayhan, 2005, p. 169).

The Ottoman Empire, which entered World War I three months after the start of the war, fought on four main fronts (Eastern, Çanakkale, Western, and Southern). During the war, Mustafa Kemal Pasha held several high-ranking command positions, including the command of the Yıldırım Army Group and the Seventh Army, a position to which Sultan Vahdettin appointed him on 7 August 1918. After the surrender of Bulgaria, the impending Allied offensive against Thrace, Istanbul, and the Straits forced the Ottoman authorities to seek an immediate ceasefire, which eventually led to the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918 (Uslu, 2019, p. 19).

After the Armistice of Mudros, the Istanbul government, led by Sultan Vahdettin and Damat Ferid Pasha, actively opposed the independence movement in Anatolia and banned public gatherings on May 25, 1919, to suppress popular resistance. In Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's view, the disarmament following the Armistice allowed for unhindered Allied exploitation and reinforced the belief that Vahdettin's government was incapable of bringing national liberation to an occupied society (Uslu, 2019, p. 36).

After the entry of foreign forces into Istanbul and the resignation of the government of Ahmed Izzet Pasha on 12 November 1918, Taufiq Pasha formed two successive cabinets before Damat Ferid Pasha took over on 3 March 1919. German diplomatic reports emphasized the severe internal instability during this period, noting that Sultan Vahdettin was influenced by an unknown faction that claimed that the Ottoman state was no longer operating under a constitutional system (Tuna, 2023, p. 84).

Sultan Vahdettin officially approved Mustafa Kemal's appointment as Army Inspector on 30 April 1919, and instructions detailing his powers were issued on 6 May. These instructions,

prepared by the Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff, Colonel Kazim (İnanç), granted Mustafa Kemal remarkably broad powers, a historically significant development, despite the tight military supervision of the period (Özüçetin, 2004, pp. 69-70).

The first narratives indicate that Sultan Vahdettin's position in the last sessions of the Ottoman Parliament reflected the deep divide between the preservation of the monarchy and the continuation of the empire on the one hand, and the Anatolian national movement led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha on the other. Worried about the reaction of the Allies after the announcement of the National Pact, Vahdettin considered opposition to them a threat to the survival of the state and called on the representatives to exercise restraint. On March 16, 1920, at the same time as the Allies attacked the Parliament, Vahdettin rejected the request for support for the Anatolian movement and, believing himself powerless against British military power, considered resistance useless. As a result, the Istanbul government effectively separated from the emerging national movement, and the political rift between the monarchy and the nationalist forces deepened (Eraslan, 2019, pp. 15-16).

In contemporary Turkish historiography, revisionist narratives by scholars such as Murat Bardakci, Selim Koca, and Samiye Yalçın conceptualize Mustafa Kemal Pasha's dispatch to Samsun as a coordinated, top-down state operation, rather than an isolated act of resistance to the regime. This framework emphasizes the active role of the late Ottoman bureaucracy, including the monarchy, the Prime Minister, and key administrative ministries in formalizing his appointment as Inspector of the Ninth Army. Bardakci also attributes this institutional alignment to a network of interpersonal, familial, and social relationships that linked elite decision-makers. Finally, this historiographical perspective presents the Ottoman state apparatus as one of the main and driving factors without which the Turkish national struggle could not have taken shape (Bayrakdar, 2022).

Historiographical analysis of the national struggle in the early years reflects ongoing debates about the precise nature of Sultan Vahdettin's influence. However, historical perspectives influenced by works such as Falih Rafiki Atay suggest that the court's trust in Mustafa Kemal Pasha was rooted in his documented military competence and strategic composure during World War I. Rather than viewing him as a reckless adventurer, the Ottoman establishment recognized his proven ability as a commander and his pragmatism, particularly on the Syrian front, which provided a basis for trusting his operational judgment at the start of the national movement (Şirin, 2023, p. 49).

3.The Beginning of the National Struggle

Historiographical assessments of the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I trace a geopolitical trajectory that began with a secret alliance with Germany in August 1914 and the mobilization of forces on ten distinct fronts. In historical sources, the war presents a dual narrative: tactical victories at Çanakkale, Kutuzov, and Baku are interpreted as anti-colonial resistance and national solidarity, while the wider war led to severe economic exhaustion and eventual collapse on the Middle Eastern fronts. This systematic defeat culminated in the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918, an event that is usually interpreted in historiography as the final and effective phase of the Ottoman Empire's collapse (Türkmen, 2020).

Historiographical sources from the immediate post-Mudros period emphasize the rapid revision of the Allied geopolitical agreements and the failure to adhere to the terms of the armistice. Accounts document the immediate occupation of Mosul and Iskenderun by the British in November 1918 and point to strategic changes in the secret Sykes–Picot Agreement, particularly the transfer of Mosul to British control by the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. Furthermore, historical research emphasizes that military strategy and defensive

arguments based on geographical features motivated the initial expansion of British forces to Urfa, Marash, and Antep to create a northern defensive barrier against potential attacks (Keser, 2021, p. 165).

Historical reports consider the Greek invasion of Anatolia in May 1919 as a crucial catalyst that accelerated the Turkish national struggle and prompted a rethinking of Allied strategies. In historical accounts, this invasion is the fundamental turning point that shattered the empire's stagnation and united the Ottoman elite and military leadership under Mustafa Kemal Pasha in a coherent resistance movement against foreign occupation (Şimşek, 2008, p. 180).

Historical literature presents Mustafa Kemal Pasha's arrival in Samsun as a turning point that institutionalized the resistance movement. In historical discourse, the establishment of a regular military force in 1921 and the subsequent victories in the battles of İnönü are described as vital impetuses for national morale. Furthermore, documentary historical narratives, using primary archival evidence, particularly Mustafa Kemal's telegram to İsmet Pasha, the commander of the Western Front, highlight the strategic and symbolic importance of the victories of İnönü and the Western Front (Kuru, 2022).

Mustafa Kemal Pasha's arrival in Samsun on May 19, 1919, initiated the transformation of the decentralized Anatolian resistance into a unified, nationwide liberation movement. This institutionalization, which expanded from local networks to the Committee of Representatives (Hayat Tamsiliyya) after the Erzurum Congress, reached a turning point in the Grand National Assembly, whose executive leadership directed decisive military operations against foreign forces (Ünal, 2019, pp. 546-547).

During the national struggle movement, various activities were carried out to mobilize public opinion, which can be classified as press activities, social initiatives, sermons and demonstrations, as well as rallies and protests. One of the notable phenomena in the national debates was the role of associations. During and after the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, Rights associations emerged as organizations that represented Turkish society, and the role of these associations in organizing the national struggle became prominent (Yilmaz, 2019, p. 581).

The Independence Declaration, historically referred to as the Holy Alliance or the Commanders' Meeting, was held on 21-22 June 1919 at the Serai Duzo Barracks in Amasya. During this meeting, the Amasya Circular, which holds great significance in the history of the War of Independence, was adopted. In a sense, the Amasya Circular not only outlined the plan and program of the War of Independence but also indicated the first signs of the establishment of a new government. At this meeting, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, Ali Fuat Pasha, Rafet Bey, and Rauf Bey made important decisions concerning the entire country. The Amasya Circular represented a critical turning point in the history of the War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his colleagues concluded that the principles of national resistance needed to be formalized through a protocol and took an oath to struggle for the independence of the homeland and the preservation of its territorial integrity (Türkmen, 2018, p. 999).

Izmir, the production canter of Turkey, suffered greater damage during the War of Independence compared to Istanbul. Subsequently, heavy taxes and economic difficulties transformed the situation into a "catastrophe." In Izmir, not only producers but also the working class supported Fathi Bey due to the prevailing economic conditions, believing that through an opposition movement endorsed by Gazi Mustafa Kemal, the city's grievances would be addressed (F. S. Şirin, 2018, p. 287).

However, the findings indicating that the opposition was concentrated in İzmir, or more broadly in Western Anatolia, were identified quite accurately by British officials, despite being overlooked by some members of the ruling elite. The reason for the strong opposition in Western

Anatolia was the merchants, urban residents, and industrial workers who had been adversely affected by the economic crisis in the region since the beginning of the War of Independence (F. S. Şirin, 2018, p. 294).

Nejip Fazil, who addresses events related to the War of Independence in his works, assigns a special significance to Maraş during the national struggle. According to him, Maraş demonstrated a commendable example of heroism and, through its victorious outcome, served as a model for Anatolia, fostering hope for success. In his work (Tohum), he dedicates attention to the national struggle and specifically examines the independence movement in the context of Maraş (Güler, 2019, p. 86).

During the National Struggle, Kırşehir became an important canter of support. The people of Kırşehir assisted Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the delegation of representatives in safely reaching Ankara from the Kayseri border. A plan to arrest Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his companions had been devised by the Istanbul Government-aligned Governor of Ankara, Moheddin Pasha, during the Sivas Congress. This plan was uncovered by Kırşehir's national organization, led by one of the region's influential figures at the time, Muhammed Riza Bey. As a result, the Governor of Ankara was arrested, and the assassination plot was foiled (Kilinçer, 2006, p. 70).

Some historical perspectives conceptualize the Turkish National Struggle (1919–1923) as an anti-imperialist movement that culminated in the proclamation of the Turkish Republic. In academic discourse, the early republican era under Atatürk is seen as a conscious project of state modernization, national cultural development, and structural reform. Furthermore, mainstream scholarship views the subsequent presidency of Ismet İnönü as a period of institutional continuity, characterized by a dual focus on maintaining diplomatic neutrality during World War II while maintaining the path of modernization established during the Kemalist transition (Özden et al., 2023, p. 4).

During Inönü`s era, official historiography in Turkey underwent a significant revision rather than a break. While the nationalist and Westernist goals of the Turkish history thesis were maintained, its more extreme and mythic claims were moderated in favor of a more balanced and academically grounded approach. This revision indicated a change from the radical and exclusivist nationalism of the early republic to a historiography that emphasized historical continuity and cultural legitimacy. Inönü's policies sought to present the republic not as a revolutionary break with the Ottoman past, but as the culmination of a long civilizing process rooted in Anatolia. As a result, the writing of official history during this period emphasized the national identity and ideological foundations of Kemalism, and at the same time included a more comprehensive and experimental interpretation of Turkey's past (Çelik, 2016).

4.The Rise of Republican Historiography and Its Role in Nation-Building

Before the Republic system in Turkey, Historical periodicals existed with newspapers such as İkdam and Akşam contributing to historical writings and providing bibliographic resources. However, historical publications developed more substantially after the establishment of the Republic system. New institutions, the alphabet reform, literacy campaigns, and local history initiatives organized through community centers encouraged the growth of periodicals and historical studies. The 1933 university reform further revitalized academic life and helped historical scholarship reach a broader audience. Within this environment, (Tarihten Sesler), a monthly Turkish history magazine, emerged as an important early publication, gaining recognition for its successful publishing model and for introducing leading historians of the period to readers (T. Yilmaz, 2008, p. 18).

A significant part of historiography during the Republic was official and state based. This approach was a type of historiography that was rooted in the foundations of power, ideology, and the new bureaucracy, and that provided relevant contextual information. In this historiography, a set of documents and organizations operated that were often filtered and controlled, the authority of those institutions was strengthened, and their production was largely carried out by scholars and state institutions. Historians are needed for official history to enable the government to define itself and to establish the basis of its legitimacy (Ayhan, 2005, p. 2).

In the historiographical process of the Republic of Turkey, there are four approaches to writing the history of the National Struggle period. The first consists of historical texts produced from an official perspective; the second reflects an approach influenced by Marxist literature; the third comprises hybrid Turkish-Islamic texts; and the fourth consists of texts constructed from an Islamist perspective. All written works related to the history of the national conflict employ one or more of these approaches or intersect with other approaches. Each approach has its own distinct phenomena and requirements, which arise from differences of opinion that emerge when discussing or defining a particular phenomenon. Especially in the case of historical phenomena, having differing views regarding cause-and-effect relationships is more natural than not having them (Ayhan, 2005, p. 3).

The Republic of Turkey had entered a critical path in writing the history of the War of Independence. Since the earliest opposition movements, attempts at critical historiography have consistently faced obstacles. Among the most notable of these is the book confiscated from Kazim Karabekir Pasha, the commander of the eastern provinces during the War of Independence. This book, which has remained a topic of discussion, was later published, recompiled, and republished. Written based on archival documents, the book resembles a speech or a parade of documents; however, obtaining approval from the official ideology was extremely difficult. Studies examining the history of the War of Independence from a critical perspective have mostly been conducted from a leftist viewpoint or outside the country. Different claims can be made about the history of the War of Independence; however, these claims do not negate the extraordinary efforts and studies undertaken during the period (Ayhan, 2005, p. 4).

Moreover, the history of the Turkey`s constitutional era during 1920-1924 is closely linked to the political events that led to the establishment of the canter of power in Ankara. The turning point of this process was the Greek attack on the eastern coast of Anatolia in May 1919 and Mustafa Kemal’s landing in Samsun. In the historiography of the Republic, this latter event (Mustafa Kemal’s arrival in Samsun and the commencement of the national struggle) marks a decisive moment in modern Turk history. It represents the beginning of the consolidation of the resistance movement against the military occupation of Ottoman territories by the Allied Powers (Adamczyk, 2010).

Güloğlu, one of the prominent historians of the Republican era, decided to write the history of the Republican period. Güloğlu’s first book, History of the War of Independence, was published in 1968; this series comprises five books, which Güloğlu completed in 1971. He published his first book on the history of the Republic of Turkey in 1972, and the next in 1974. His final book was published after his death in 1982 (Okur, 2022, p. 462).

Güloğlu made significant contributions to Turk history and culture through his works written after the 1960s. Beginning with his study on the Erzurum Congress in 1968, he continued with analyses of the Sivas congress, the third constitutional period, and subsequently the history of the Republic. His books on the War of Independence and the Republican era are regarded among the most essential reference sources on the history of the Republic of Turkey. A distinctive feature of these works, which remain primary sources for contemporary historical studies today,

is that Güloğlu had either personally seen or known many of the individuals who participated in the founding process of the Republic of Turkey, that is, those who directly shaped modern history. By meticulously examining the proceedings of the grand national assembly of Turkey, the most significant institution of this movement, he documented the establishment and modernization process of the Republic of Turkey based on primary sources (Okur, 2022, p. 463).

In the 1960s and 1970s, when macro-level studies presenting a general socio-economic perspective on Turk history or offering Turkish political projections were particularly popular, works focusing on micro-historical analysis drew considerable attention. In fact, Mahmud Güloğlu's first book on the National Struggle, The Erzurum Congress, constitutes a micro-historical study, as it concentrates solely on the congress. At a time when such micro-historical studies were virtually absent, addressing a specific topic and examining it in detail represented a significant innovation in Turkish historiography. Mahmud Güloğlu emphasized that, without distinguishing between major and minor events, uncovering the truth of all past occurrences is essential in historical research. He regarded the comprehensive documentation of the events surrounding the establishment of the new Turkish government particularly the detailed and truthful reconstruction of the history of the War of Independence as an unavoidable necessity. Güloğlu's widely read books appear to evaluate historical sources with meticulous care. His study on the Erzurum Congress is divided into three main sections: "Before the Congress," "The Congress," and "After the Congress" (Okur, 2022, p. 464).

5.Turk history Thesis and Nationalist Historiography

Although the role of official nationalism and historiography of the Republic of Turkey was significant in the construction of Turkish national identity, the theses of Turk history and the geographical conception presented within this framework proved to be decisive. In early republican historiography, the ideas of Turkish-Turan nationalism considered the first form of unofficial nationalism came to the fore. Through the Turk history Thesis, the official ideology not only identified the origins of Turk history in Central Asia but also positioned the Turks at the center of all civilizations created through human migrations. Göloğlu argued that, through Anatolian civilizations, the Turks had been a self-governing people on these lands. However, the intellectuals of the period and their conception of Turkism reflected a very different understanding of history (Yücel & Bölükbaşi, 2019).

But the most crucial distinction lay in their acceptance of Turk history not based on geography, but rather on the principle of statehood. Although the Turks, first appeared on the historical stage in Central Asia, they exercised rule across the Middle East, Europe, Eurasia, and North Africa, spreading over vast territories. A spatially centered approach to historiography was, in fact, a product of Western thought. For instance, when one examines the histories of France, Germany, or England, it becomes apparent that these societies had remained in the same territories over time, thereby foregrounding geography in their historical narratives. By contrast, while the first political foundation of the Turks emerged in Khorasan, they continued their existence in Anatolia even after losing that region. A state-centered perspective on Turk history thus produced another important divergence in the official ideology and nationalist discourse of the Turanians. Within the historiography of the Republic of Turkey, this divergence can be explained through a holistic perspective (Yücel & Bölükbaşi, 2019, pp. 13-14).

The Kemalist historical thesis redefined Turkish identity by rejecting earlier Islamist, Ottomanist, and Westernist narratives, creating a secular and humanist conception of nationalism that positioned Turks as an integral part of world civilization rather than a people defined by religion. It viewed Islamic history as only one episode in the long civilizational story of the

Turks, whose influence stretched from China to Central Europe. Emphasizing universal and cultural contributions over religious or racial ones, this historiography portrayed Turks as a people who had experienced nearly all major religions and retained traces of each. The thesis celebrated unorthodox, mystical forms of Islam such as Sufism as genuine expressions of Turkish spirituality while upholding a secular outlook. Ultimately, as Atatürk emphasized, the Turkish nation respected all faiths but defined itself through culture and civilization, not religion, establishing a modern, secular national consciousness (Berkes, 1999, pp. 164-169).

One of the fields of historical studies during the Republican period was the formulation of Kemalist historical theses. In the process of building the nation-state, history served as a crucial tool to confer identity upon the new conception of the nation and to cultivate a collective consciousness. From the 1930s onwards, the ruling authority, within the framework of systematizing Kemalism, embarked on an intensive process of reconstruction, which included a thorough reshaping of history. The aim of this effort and reconstruction was, in fact, to create a uniform society in every aspect. During this period, the purpose of implementing new arrangements in both the fields of history and language was to forge a new national identity (F. S. Şirin, 2009, p. 347).

Social imagination infused memory elements transmitted across generations with new values and meanings, representing collective identity; historical events transformed memories into symbols, myths, and legends, while the actors of these events were elevated to the status of heroes and symbolic figures. During the Republican era, writers, artists, intellectuals, and the media played a catalytic role in this transformative process. For instance, one prominent figure in this phase was Faleh Rifki, who acted as a catalyst in the transition from empire to nation-state, contributing to the construction of the nation and the formation of its collective identity. The historical studies initiated under the leadership of President Atatürk, aimed at creating a new national identity, continued until the closure of the Turkish centers. Conducted under the supervision of the CHF (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası), these activities were intended to write a new history of Turkey. However, to systematize state-controlled historical research and to rewrite history textbooks, the first Turk History Congress convened in July 1932 (F. S. Şirin, 2009, p. 348).

During the Kemalist period, Turkish historiography adopted a secular approach that distanced itself from the Ottoman legacy. After Atatürk's death, historiographical perspectives diversified, and the 1940s saw the rise of "humanist historiography," which broadened historical interest to include the ancient civilizations of Anatolia and Ancient Greece. From the 1970s, the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis", particularly associated with the Association of Intellectuals, became increasingly influential, emphasizing Turkish identity, Islam, and national unity. After the 1980 military coup, this synthesis became a largely official state ideology, shaping historical writing as well as the reorganization of textbooks and school curricula (Akıncı & yilmaz, 2018).

6. Monuments, Symbols, and the Visual Representation of History

Memories of the national struggle are deeply rooted in Turkey's public spaces. Statues, portraits and photographs are widely displayed in schools, government buildings and prominent urban locations, while streets, parks, stadiums, airports, bridges and numerous educational institutions bear Atatürk's name. In schools, statues of Atatürk have a special place, along with the national anthem. Beyond commemorating Atatürk himself, his monuments serve as important symbols of collective memory and national struggle, tools for the project of state modernization that has shaped the public sphere in modern Turkey (Gur, 2013).

Before Atatürk's death in 1938, numerous statues, busts, and monuments had been erected in his honor in prominent public spaces throughout Turkey. The six major public monuments, built between 1926 and 1936, are particularly noteworthy because they commemorated the National Struggle and represented Atatürk's central role in it. These monuments did more than commemorate historical events; they helped to embody and disseminate the leadership's interpretation of the struggle as the official historical narrative of the republic. Through their constant presence in public space, Atatürk's monuments became important tools for the construction, reproduction, and visual representation of Turkish nationalism and collective historical memory (Gur, 2013).

Atatürk's book (Nutuk, 1927) became a foundational text in the historiography of the Turkish national struggle. Although presented as a narrative of the period from 1919 to 1927, it also served a political purpose by legitimizing Atatürk's leadership and the authority of the new republic. By opening the narrative with Atatürk's arrival in Anatolia and portraying the independence movement as a unified struggle moving towards the modern Turkish state, Nuuk marginalized alternative actors and more pluralistic dimensions of the resistance. Considering the book, the Republican People's Party further strengthened its connection with the national movement by associating itself with the Sivas Congress of 1919. In this way, Nutuk helped establish an official memory of the War of Independence and shaped the dominant Kemalist interpretation of history, in which historiography supported political legitimacy, continuity, and ideological consolidation (Zürcher, 2017, p. 175).

The monuments to Atatürk, built in the early days of the Republic, were closely linked to the commemoration of the War of Independence and the creation of a new national identity. These visual works also gave physical form to the official historical narrative of the struggle for independence. Atatürk's 1927 speech was similarly central to this process. Delivered in the context of the political controversies following the establishment of the Republic, the speech defended Atatürk's leadership and policies during the military and diplomatic struggle for independence. It subsequently became an influential source in Turkish historiography and played a significant role in establishing and perpetuating the official interpretation of the National Struggle (Gur, 2013).

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Atatürk and the Kemalist elite sought to build a new nation-state from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. This transformation was based on political, economic, and intellectual developments that had begun in the late Ottoman period and was closely related to earlier debates about Turkish nationalism. At the heart of these debates were questions about how to modernize Turkey economically while preserving its distinctive culture. Ziya Gökalp, the main theorist of Turkish nationalism, systematically addressed these issues in his 1923 work The Principles of Turkishness (Türkçülüğün Esasları). He distinguished between civilization and culture, arguing that technology and the material aspects of modernization were universal and could be adopted from the West, while culture was unique to each nation and therefore needed to be preserved (Gur, 2013).

Historiography in the early republican era was closely linked to the creation of a new political and administrative order and the creation of a nationalist mentality. It presented the republic as a radical break with the past, leading to a widespread rejection of the Ottoman legacy and the creation of a new ideological worldview. At the same time, this historiographical approach drew heavily on ideas associated with the Enlightenment and the political and cultural heritage of the French Revolution, using these concepts to support the intellectual foundations of the new Republican order (Akman, 2011).

During the early Republican period, Westernizing ideas were reinterpreted through a strongly nationalist framework and incorporated into Turkish historiography. Ottoman and Islamic elements were increasingly displaced by values shaped by secularization, nationalization, and Westernization. The rise of nationalist discourse also required a reinterpretation of accepted historical narratives in accordance with the needs of the new nation-state. As a result, historical writing, increasingly developed under state sponsorship, supervision, and direction. This state-centered historiographical project became most clearly expressed in the Turkish History Thesis, which represents one of the principal examples of official history-writing in Republican Turkey (Akman, 2011).

The formulation of the Turkish History Thesis was closely tied to the nation-building objectives of the early Republic. Supported by the state, it sought to create a shared historical consciousness, strengthen national identity, and provide the new nation with a common past. In line with the policies of modernization, secularization, and nationalization, historiography was transformed to promote a nationalist perspective. Education became a central tool in this process; the school system was reorganized in such a way, that students and citizens received nationalist education and internalized the values and historical understanding promoted by the new republican order (Akman, 2011).

Although official Kemalist historiography conceals the fact that the War of Independence had a strong religious dimension, it employed a concept akin to Jihad during the conflict. Following the War of Independence, the invitation of the Ankara Government to Lausanne marked the first indication of its political and legal recognition. With the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Turkish nation-state achieved full independence. Moreover, this treaty was accompanied by a separate agreement concerning the assimilation of the Turkish nation within the new modern state and the resettlement of Greek and Turkish minorities in their respective territories. The criteria employed in this struggle and the support for the national struggle policy were rooted in Islam. In the population exchange between Turks and Greeks, the determining factor was neither language nor the will of the people, but religious belief (Şimşek, 2008, p. 188).

7. Memoirs as Historical Sources in the National Struggle

In the process of creating a new nation, it was necessary to establish new holidays and ceremonies instead of the Ottoman ceremonial structures, and the participation of the public in these celebrations was actively encouraged. In this context, the opening of the grand national assembly of Turkey on April 23, 1923, as National Sovereignty and Children's Day, the proclamation of the Republic on October 29, 1923 (Republic Day), August 30, 1922, as Victory Day of the Great Offensive, and May 19, 1919, the day Mustafa Kemal landed in Samsun, as Youth and Sports Day were officially declared (Şimşek, 2008).

These new festivals carried specific messages: the emerging republican generation was expected to learn the ideology of the new regime and sever its connection with the ideology of the former regime. Among the newly established holidays, April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day, aimed to symbolize the ideas of the nation-state and national sovereignty, fostering loyalty around the republican regime. Republic Day symbolizes the new political structure and its founders, with the aim of fostering the ideology of republicanism. Victory Day serves as a symbol of independence and heroism, which are central elements of nationalist discourse. These practices demonstrate that the republican cadres, in line with their own nationalist ideology, reconstructed symbols and rituals that hold a significant place in the identity of communities (Şimşek, 2008, p. 257).

Examining the political and military preparation processes that took place in Istanbul prior to the National Struggle contributed to clarifying the methods, justifications, and outcomes of the National Struggle movement, as well as to an objective evaluation of the historiography of the War of Independence. Since the early 1980s, textbooks on "National Struggle and Kemalism" prepared by the education board of ministry of national education have begun to be published (Yapar, 2020, p. 307).

In the early years of the Republic, changes were made not only to the curriculum but also to textbooks, with primary school textbooks being designed within the framework of a national historical understanding. These books were published under titles such as National History, History Lessons for Republican Children, and Our History. As noted in the studies of Cengiz Dönmez and Kubilay Yazıcı, there has always been a general dissatisfaction with history textbooks in Turkey. The authors, citing Ilhan Tekli, show that this dissatisfaction stems from the perception of history as a tool for ideological conditioning. This dissatisfaction was expressed not only after 1980 but also before 1980. Accordingly, it can be understood that although political authorities may not have directly intervened in the writing of history, they often intervened in history lessons (Yapar, 2020, p. 315).

In the 1958 textbook prepared by Nariman Sardarlar and Fakhriye Çetinkal, a dialogue between Mustafa Kemal Pasha and Sultan Vahdettin is included. In this dialogue, it is seen that Sultan Vahdettin was unable to save the homeland but wished to save the nation. In another textbook titled "History of the Revolution" prepared by Enver Behnan Şapolyu, it is stated that Sultan Vahdettin "did not surrender to the occupying forces in order to protect his kingdom." Similar statements are also used in another book published by Enver Ziya Karal titled "High School Textbooks" (Yapar, 2020, p. 316).

Memoirs are important sources in modern historiography, particularly for the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. Their use expanded significantly after the Second Constitutional Era and increased further following the First World War and the War of Independence. Some memoirs include letters and documents that can strengthen their evidentiary value. However, because memoirs reflect the author's personal experiences, feelings, judgments, and interpretations, they are inherently subjective. Therefore, historians must approach them with a critical approach and carefully examine their credibility, perspective, and possible biases before using them as historical evidence (Gezginci & Şahin, 2020, p. 200).

Diaries are valuable sources for studying the Turkish national struggle because they often contain first-hand information that is not available in official documents. Many memoirs of that War were written by people who directly participated in or witnessed the events, especially officers and soldiers. These sources may also include official documents, maps, and sketches, which increase their usefulness for historical studies. Although personal experiences and perspectives must still be critically evaluated, memoirs, especially those written by senior military figures, provide important evidence for reconstructing events and understanding the perspectives of participants in the War of Independence (Gezginci & Şahin, 2020, p. 201).

Turkish popular historiography developed largely from the Ottoman historical tradition, which can be divided into traditional and modern phases. Both relied on written and oral records as well as ideological and factual sources. Official historiography also drew from these materials and passed them into modern historical writing. Rather than representing a complete rupture, the shift from traditional to modern historiography was gradual and continuous. Abdurrahman Şeref exemplifies this transition, as he was both the last major representative of traditional Ottoman official historiography and an important pioneer of modern Turkish historical writing (Güler, 2019, p. 9).

After Atatürk's death, official revolutionary historiography became less able to dominate historical interpretation, particularly as Turkey moved toward multi-party politics. Alternative and oppositional readings of contemporary history began to emerge, often challenging established accounts of political authority and the early Republic. Necip Fazıl, especially through Büyük Doğu magazine, became an important representative of this trend, using historical debates primarily for ideological purposes. The controversies surrounding figures such as Atatürk, Vahdettin, Abdulhamid II, and Medhat Pasha reflected broader political disputes over the interpretation of the past. At the same time, legal and political restrictions limited criticism of Atatürk; for example, Riza Nur's memoirs, which contained harsh criticisms of him, were banned. As a result, popular historiography developed under strong political pressure and often adopted a defensive or oppositional character in its treatment of major historical periods and personalities (Güler, 2019, p. 17).

During the one-party era, popular historiography was expected to reflect the discourse of political authority. However, the transition to multi-party politics brought greater intellectual freedom, and after 1950, popular historians increasingly explored overlooked or unexplained aspects of the past. Attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire also changed; the negative view regarding the one-party period gradually weakened after the 1940s. Since the 2000s, public interest in history has expanded considerably through television series, films, documentaries, novels, magazines, theatre, and other cultural productions. Academic interest in popular historiography also grew. Ahmet Özcan contributed significantly with his doctoral study Popular Historiography in Turkey (1908–1960), later published by the Turkish Historical Society, while workshops such as the 2016 meeting at Kocaeli University under Ahmet Şimşek helped establish popular and traditional historiography as more serious fields of academic inquiry (Güler, 2019, p.18).

8.Westernization, Secularism, and the Positivist Turn in Historiography

In the historiography of the Republic of Turkey, Westernization (orientation toward the West) is considered as a phenomenon, and this approach began both freely (unsystematically) and reluctantly. Following relatively bitter historical experiences and the significant yet interrupted modernization developments at the end of the Ottoman Empire, the failure to achieve long-term anticipated solutions, the loss of the empire during the process initiated by the First World War, the occupation of the homeland (Anatolia), and the resurgence of the War of Independence all left traces of radical Westernism in Republican-era historiography. The historiography of the new era can be characterized by features such as its chronology, the emphasis on objectivity in historical writing, and the complete stress on secular historiography. Ultimately, in the historiographical journey of modern Turkey from the 1930s to the present, the determining force is the ideological or political thought that the historian adopts, is influenced by, or seeks to influence (Şımşek & Esmen, 2021).

In the early period of republican historiography in Turkey, the influence of positivist methodology is evident. This is because, because the claims advanced during the founding phase to gain international legitimacy, they needed to be grounded on a scientific basis. Consequently, historical research within the framework of Turk history drew upon fields such as archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics to study historical facts. Turk history research institution, established by Atatürk, served as the primary supporter of these efforts. Most of the studies focused on the history of Turks in Central Asia. The works produced were utilized in national historiography with the assistance of disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics. For instance, Orhun Abideleri, written by Necip Asım Yazıksız in 1924, reflects the

positivist approach to historiography of that period. Furthermore, in 1928, Wells' Outlines of World History was translated, and Turk history research institution published it as a four-volume work (Ateş, 2017).

In addition to domestic sources on the history of the Republic of Turkey, information is also available in foreign publications and institutions. For instance, until 1958, research on Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the history of the Republic of Turkey was being conducted at the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences. In 1958, a Department of Oriental Studies was established within the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, examining both Turk history and economy, and this institute continues to operate to this day. Furthermore, one of the most significant recent developments in Azerbaijan concerning Turk history and the national struggle was the establishment of the Atatürk Research Center in 2001. The establishment of this center was motivated by objectives such as learning about and promoting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's state-building experience and conducting research on the history of the Republic of Turkey (Qasimov, 2018, p. 444).

Mustafa Kemal Pasha's anti-imperialist National Struggle attracted considerable attention in Soviet Russia and Azerbaijan and encouraged the development of expertise on Turkish history. Until 1958, specialists in this field were largely trained in Russia, after which the Institute of Oriental Studies in Baku began to assume part of this role. After the Soviet period, academic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey further expanded the field. Through bilateral educational agreements, many Azerbaijani students studied history at Turkish universities and later returned to Azerbaijan, where some continued research on Turkish history (Qasimov, 2018, p. 445).

In addition, bibliographic works published in the Soviet Union in 1959 and 1982, which focus on the Turk national struggle, include scientific articles and references concerning the years 1919-1923. Furthermore, articles related to the War of Independence appear in scientific journals published periodically in the Soviet Union (Abdykulova, 2019).

According to Aron Davydovich Novichev, the war of independence in Turkey and the personality of Atatürk can be considered at the forefront of Russian scientific research on Turk history. In addition to an important work on the history of Turkey since the Ottoman period, he also authored a work titled "The National Struggle in Turkey." Aron Davidovich argues that there are similarities between the October Revolution in Russia and revolutions in many countries around the world, citing the national struggles in Turkey as well as those in China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Mongolia, Iran, and Afghanistan as examples (Abdykulova, 2019, p. 647).

Furthermore, with Turkey's victory in the War of Independence, the most critical phase of political modernization and regime change shifted to Istanbul, and the developments that occurred during that period resonated in the international press, particularly in the United States. The abolition of the monarchy by the decision of the grand national assembly of Turkey on November 1, 1922, received considerable attention in the U.S. press (Ertuğrul & Uyar, 2020).

9. Conclusion and Evaluation

An examination of the written historical works related to the National Struggle of the Turkish people shows that the historiography of this event was not only an ongoing academic activity, but also a conscious element of nation-building and a national narrative to facilitate the process of national identity formation. Most of the official narratives of this period, emphasizing the thesis of Turkish history, secularism, and Westernization, sought to legitimize the new state and create a new collective identity that had its roots in the National Struggle and Atatürk's visions.

The results of this study also show that, in the process of the evolution of the historiography of the Republic, secular, quasi-Marxist, Turko-Islamic, and Islamist interpretations shaped the content and nature of the controversies of this historiography. The findings confirm how historiography was able to function as both a political tool and a cultural framework for the formation of identity in the newly formed Republic. This contributes to the broader field of historical and political studies by demonstrating the dynamic interaction between ideology, collective memory and historical writing. Beyond Turkey, this study offers comparative value for understanding the processes of nation-building in other post-imperial or transitional societies. The study also highlights the importance of critically engaging with history as a constructed narrative rather than a neutral record and encourages societies to be aware of how collective memory and national identity are formed. Since collective memory and feeling are constantly evolving and dynamic in the pervasive presence of digital space in today's world, future research could explore comparative historiographies in other regions, the impact of popular culture and digital media on historical memory, and the ongoing reinterpretations of national struggle in contemporary Turkish politics and education.

Acknowledgments and Declarations

I hereby declare that this is an original work and that all text and content included in this article are either original work produced by the author or derived from sources properly cited within the manuscript.

It is also noted that "Scholar GPT" was used to edit and refine the English text. After the editing and refining process, the manuscript was checked once again to ensure that no changes were made to the original content or intended meaning.

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in the article, and the manuscript for each source is also available from the author upon request.

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