

# SYMBIOTIC ANTAGONISMS

Competing Nationalisms in Turkey

EDITED BY

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THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH PRESS

*Salt Lake City*

DR  
434  
.S96  
2011

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15 14 13 12 11      1 2 3 4 5

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Symbiotic antagonisms : competing nationalisms in Turkey /  
edited by Ayşe Kadioğlu and E. Fuat Keyman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60781-031-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Nationalism—Turkey. 2. Turkey—Politics and government—1980- I. Kadioğlu, Ayşe, 1961- II. Keyman, Emin Fuat.

DR434.S96 2010

320.5409561—dc22

2010036996

Printed and bound by Sheridan Books, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan.

*For our children,  
in the hope that they will live in a world  
not shaped by competing nationalisms*

the finding of three AK-47 assault rifles in the trunk of the car of the apprehended men the public prosecutor of the town launched an investigation, but as he started exploration in the spot of the incident another civilian was shot to death and four others were wounded after being fired upon." See <http://www.ihd.org.tr/repsec/semdinli/semdinlireport.html> (March 15, 2008).

32. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=170375> (November 18, 2005).
33. For a few examples, see <http://www.atsizcilar.com/forum/kirolarin-hainlikleri-ve-ibret-alinmasi-gerekenyasanmis-olaylar-6027.html?s=180a96b8109e7bcd41823156ered5dee&camp> (January 14, 2006).
34. For such articles, see Fırat (2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

## TOWARD A NONSTANDARD STORY

*The Kurdish Question and the Headscarf, Nationalism, and Iraq*

MURAT SOMER

IN THIS CRITICAL ESSAY I PUT FORWARD TWO ARGUMENTS. FIRST, the Kurdish conflict entered a new period after the summer 2007 elections that resembles the conflict's formative period of 1923–26 in the following sense.<sup>1</sup> Both the possibilities and constraints of peaceful resolution resemble those that appear to have sown the seeds of this conflict in the formative period. Now as then, peaceful and sustainable resolution is closely interwoven with the status of Kurds in the region, especially in Iraq, and with the path of secular modernization. Specifically, it requires that Turkish and Kurdish nationalists and secular and religious-conservative modernizers resolve two "security" (prisoner's) dilemmas explained below.<sup>2</sup> These dilemmas are not the only mechanisms hindering resolution. But they receive insufficient attention in extant research.

The first dilemma arises because Kurds form a trans-state and transnational minority. This creates the possibility of pan-Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish secession. This dilemma must be credibly resolved via democratic processes involving domestic Kurdish political actors and cooperation with regional Kurds and states. The second dilemma arises because political elites who need to build a consensus over a modernization path that is

more amenable to ethnic-national diversity and Kurdish difference must resolve their separate conflict over secularism. Otherwise, elite divisions over secularism may undermine democratic processes in the Kurdish conflict. Attempts to recognize Kurdish difference within a framework of Islamic solidarity, by emphasizing the public role of religion, may reinforce the conflict over secularism. It is also questionable whether religious solidarity alone can be an effective recipe for an identity-based political conflict.

Because of these two dilemmas, two factors had and continue to have a major effect on the evolution of the Kurdish conflict: relations with Iraq (and its superpower patron), Iran, and Syria; and elite competition (and in the present period also middle-class competition) over the secular nature of Turkish modernization.

My second main argument regards how we should study the Kurdish conflict. In order to develop rigorous analyses with a potential to produce realistic policy implications, scholars should avoid "standard stories" that describe "self-propelled actors interacting with each other."<sup>3</sup> Instead the challenge is to build "deep" (nonstandard), causal stories that explain how agents respond to their social, political, and institutional environments, making good choices as much as they can. Standard stories produce descriptive narratives where actors are "self-propelled": they are assumed to act as they do because they are self-motivated to do so. In other words, standard stories transpire as if this was the only way they could transpire. In contrast, nonstandard stories produce causal narratives that account for what happened as well as what could have happened. In Max Weber's terms, they also account for "counterfactuals," which are "contrary to fact but not to logical or 'objective' possibility" (Levi 1997, pp. 31–32; Weber 1949 [1905]).

Building a nonstandard story requires distinguishing between the Kurdish question and the Kurdish conflict. This is important, because the latter was not the only logically or objectively possible outcome of the former. The Kurdish *question* emerged as soon as some people in areas where Kurds lived developed nationalist ideas (such as Kurdish, Turkish, Armenian, and Arab nationalisms), primarily during the nineteenth century. Thus the Kurdish question concerns the issue of what the status of Kurds would have been first within the Ottoman and Persian empires and then in relation to the majority-Turkish, Arab, and Persian states that replaced these multiethnic empires. How could Kurdish nationalists' aspirations to self-government be addressed

in the face of the competing nationalist projects? How feasible were Kurdish independence and autonomy? How could Kurdish ethnic-cultural difference be accommodated?

The Kurdish *conflict* emerged because the Kurdish question was not resolved peacefully and successfully. At least in the Turkish context, the dominant response of the state to the Kurdish question was oppression and denial rather than dialogue and accommodation. Kurdish ethno-political movements made their nationality claims predominantly through violent rebellion, which reinforced the distrust between them and the state. Why did the state and Kurdish movements show these reactions? The causal mechanisms underlying them should be properly explained.

The critical claim here is that the Kurdish conflict was not an inevitable result of the Kurdish question because the former was a direct product of nationalism while the latter was not. In the Turkish context, the Kurdish conflict resulted from the domestic and external political-institutional and geopolitical developments in the formative period 1923–26, as elaborated below in building a nonstandard story. In other words, the Kurdish question being the same, it can be argued that a counterfactual and less conflict-prone relation was possible between Kurds and the Turkish nation-state. The challenge is to develop a causal explanation of why such a counterfactual path was not embarked upon.

The first step to develop such an explanation is to conceptualize the Kurdish conflict in general terms in a comparative perspective to compare and contrast it with other conflicts in the world. My goal here is not to develop a full-fledged definition, so it is sufficient to mention four conditions that will help me to build a nonstandard story. First, it is a violent conflict mainly between the state and the ethno-political movements that claim to represent the will of a "minority."<sup>4</sup> Social-political conflicts among ordinary people from the majority and minority have so far been minimal in the Kurdish case, in comparison to cases like the Irish conflict or Kosovo.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the minority forms a trans-state ethnic-national group in the region. This distinguishes Kurds from cases like the Scots, who do not have ethnic kin in neighboring countries, and makes them resemble the Muslims or Tamils in India.

Third, the minority is semimixed with the majority society territorially, socially, and culturally, with a vague legacy of territorial and institutional

boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Ethnic Kurds are much more mixed with the rest of the society than, for example, the Slovaks and the Czechs were in the former Czechoslovakia. They are not as mixed, however, as, say, the Irish in the United States; they also constitute the dominant ethnic-linguistic group in major portions of the eastern parts of the country. Yet historically clear boundaries of the minority institutions and territory, which are visible in cases like Scotland and Catalonia, are weak in the Kurdish case.<sup>7</sup> Many Kurdish chieftains had semi-autonomy under the Ottomans until the nineteenth century. But vague and variable borders and limited territory excluded major portions of areas where Kurds lived and what Kurds today consider their historical homeland, such as Diyarbakır, which were ruled “directly” from the center.<sup>8</sup> The term “Kurdistan,” first used by Sultan Sanjar of the (Turkic-ruled) Great Seljuk state in the twelfth century, henceforth referred to administrative units or geographical areas with shifting borders and no necessary ethnic connotation.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, accommodating the nationality claims of the minority’s ethno-political movements requires elite consensus on the nature of the majority society’s nation-building and secular modernization. Other cases may also exhibit this characteristic. For example, the Tamils form an ethnic-linguistic group sharing the majority Hindu religion in India. Their status is closely related to the question of how secular and “Hindu” India is and how open secular Indian nationalists are to ethnic-linguistic pluralism. This relationship seems to be particularly strong in the Kurdish case, however, because of Turkey’s peculiar history of modernization.

In combination, the four conditions embedded in this definition create major “security” (prisoner’s) dilemmas. These dilemmas can account for most of the differences between the Kurdish conflict and other conflicts, such as the seemingly “most different case” of the Scottish question (Somer 2008).<sup>10</sup>

These dilemmas have been produced historically during the modernization/disintegration of the Ottoman and Persian empires. Many features of the Turkish, Kurdish, and other regional nationalisms that at first may seem to result from culture may in fact be institutional by-products of the security dilemmas unleashed during this period.

Turkish, Kurdish, and Western external actors have more than sufficient reason to seek to resolve these dilemmas. Up to 40,000 people have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands of villagers have lost their homes since the 1980s because of the direct and indirect consequences of the Kurdish

conflict. The eastern provinces with significant ethnic Kurdish populations remain among the country’s least developed areas (Mutlu 2002; Kurban et al. 2006). Following a two-decade-long violent rebellion, Turkish Kurds gained some important yet limited cultural rights, which mostly came through Turkey’s EU accession process since 1999. Democratic deficits and human rights problems associated with the conflict are among the major barriers before Turkey’s democratic consolidation and accession to the EU. Finally, peaceful resolution would help Iraq’s stability and regional economic development and reinforce the safe transportation of Iraq’s oil and natural gas to world markets through Turkey.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, the deterioration of the Kurdish conflict could potentially destabilize major portions of the Middle East.

#### THE FORMATIVE PERIOD: 1923 TO 1926

At the end of this period the new republican regime viewed Kurds and Kurdish culture as fundamental threats and had embarked on a long-term policy of oppression and assimilation.<sup>12</sup> The regime ruled out a different path that would have attempted to accommodate the Kurdish component of the nationalist struggle through some form of autonomy, administrative decentralization, cultural rights, or other kind of recognition. Some Kurds have fought the Turkish state for such rights or for independence ever since that time.

Could the Kurdish question have taken a more pluralist and less violent path in its formative period? Currently, two types of research try to answer these questions, producing standard stories.

#### *Standard Story 1: Self-Propelled Actors*

One type of research examines historical records and documents with a view to discovering the major actors’ goals and intentions in the formative period. How did Atatürk and nationalists plan to resolve the Kurdish question (Olson 1989; Oran 1990; van Bruinessen 2003)? Kurdish nationalists have long claimed that those Kurds who joined Turkish nationalists in the War of Independence (1919–22) had been promised some form of autonomy (Bayrak 2004; Bucak 1991; Ekinci 2000, pp. 137–67).

The records of the first, wartime parliament are illuminating. Members talked freely about Kurds and “Kurdish rights” as a component of one

(Muslim-Ottoman) nation (TBMM 1985 [1920–34]; Somer 2007a). British documents suggest that a draft resolution regarding limited Kurdish autonomy was discussed (Olson 1996, pp. 213–23). In a message to the army, Atatürk argued that the government would gradually establish local government in “areas where Kurds reside...in the interest of domestic politics as well as foreign policy.” This would be a part of a general plan to establish local governments wherever there was popular demand and “sensitivity” (TBMM 1985 [1920–34], pp. 550–51). He talked of such autonomy to journalists briefly before the proclamation of the republic in 1923, again as part of general decentralization (together with rights for other ethnic-regional groups). Atatürk wrote about his contacts with Kurdish notables, which led the majority of them to provide active support for the nationalist war.<sup>13</sup> Many Kurds vehemently opposed separation from Turkey and inclusion in what became Syria and later Iraq (Bayrak 2004, pp. 231–32).

Writers sympathetic to Kurdish nationalism cite such evidence to maintain that Turkish nationalists promised Kurdish autonomy to co-opt them during the war, only to discard these plans once they consolidated their nation-state. The “causal” narrative implicit in these accounts implies the existence of a preexisting and accepted plan to build a homogeneous Turkish nation and deny Kurdish rights; this plan was implemented by self-propelled Turkish nationalists as soon as they no longer depended on Kurds’ support (Ekinci 2000, pp. 137–62; Bayrak 2004).<sup>14</sup> Turkish writers tend to downplay the validity and importance of any promises of autonomy, even when they are critical of Turkish nationalist state policies.<sup>15</sup>

Such historical research is very important to uncover the facts of the period; it also helps to discern what the goals of the major actors were. On its own, however, even the best of such research could only produce limited results toward building a causal narrative. A major portion of the events and actors’ thoughts went unrecorded in this tumultuous period. More importantly, actors’ goals and intentions do not by themselves determine the evolution of political conflicts. These are constrained by structures and mediated by institutions and social and political mechanisms. Actors have limited control over these environments. And their priorities may change as the environment changes. Thus research should incorporate structural conditions (such as geopolitics and demographic changes), theory, and analytical construction.

Besides historical documentation, one important way to explain the fundamental dilemmas in this period is through what Thomas Schelling called “vicarious problem-solving”: how would the major actors have behaved, given their fundamental goals, different configurations of political and institutional environments, and perceptions of each other (Lichbach 2003, p. 12)?

For example, whatever their views were on the Kurdish question, how much importance did it carry for different Turkish nationalists, compared to questions such as secular reforms, the status of non-Muslim minorities, and integrating/assimilating the great influx of new Muslims of Turkish and non-Turkish ethnic origin? Factors that were only indirectly linked to Kurds and to nationalist ideology itself, such as demography, might sometimes have caused actors to change their positions on the Kurdish question. The influx began with the 1774 Ottoman-Russian war and gained major momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. It came mainly from the Balkans, Crimea, and the Caucasus. Besides economic changes, it was a product of the great “unmixing” of the Muslim and Christian populations that resulted from the overall Ottoman retreat and from the Russian expansion in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Consequently, as of 1922 Muslim refugees and immigrants or their second- or third-generation descendants could represent a quarter or more of Turkey’s population. Many of these were non-Turkish-speaking (Tekeli 1990; Brubaker 1995; McCarthy 2001).<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the question of their assimilation/integration must have been a major consideration for Turkish nationalists, in addition to the Kurdish question itself.

### *Standard Story 2: Self-Propelled Nationalisms*

Vicarious problem-solving can also complement current research on Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. In recent decades this research has produced a considerable amount of new knowledge regarding the historical trajectories and modern constructions of these two ideologies (Oran 1990; Bora 2002; van Bruinessen 2003; Özoğlu 2004; Vali 2005; Zürcher 2005; Yeğen 2006; Ahmed and Gunter 2007).

Especially but not exclusively in popular writing, however, this research has generated two tendencies that weaken its ability to produce causal explanations and feasible policy implications. The first is the tendency to personify nationalism, as if it was not an ideology or principle but an agent that makes decisions, wants things, learns things, and “collides” with other

nationalisms. A quick review of the language used in current research easily reveals this tendency: intentionally or unintentionally, "nationalism" (as opposed to "nationalists") is often used as the subject of actions and desires.<sup>17</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, this "nationalism as agent" is often treated as the self-propelled cause of a variety of phenomena ranging from the Kurdish conflict to democratic deficit. It even shapes its own evolution.

The second tendency is to examine nationalism mainly as a discourse. An example can be cited from a valuable and informative account of various versions of Turkish nationalism (Bora 2003). What motivates the study is "accelerated Turkish nationalism in the 1990s." This denotes a change that must be explained causally, and its occurrence and extent must be checked against evidence and measured. In order to do so, however, it would be necessary to decide "as what" nationalism should be examined. Should it be studied and measured primarily as a discourse, sentiment, ideology, principle, movement, or something else? What changed during the 1990s, why, and how? Bora argues that "one must consider Turkish nationalism... as a series of discourses and a vast lexis" where four main nationalist languages "speak using this lexis" (Bora 2003, pp. 436–37). Accordingly, at some point, he uses the terms "discourse," "language," and "dialect" seventeen times within two paragraphs describing different versions of Turkish nationalism. Fruitfully, the article also refers to nondiscursive factors such as economic globalization, the end of the Cold War, the Gulf War, and the Kurdish conflict. Nevertheless, the reader is advised to examine nationalism as a "discursive system" and focus on "discursive dynamics" in explaining it (Bora 2003, p. 450).

The point here is not to underestimate the importance of language in understanding nationalism or its role in the expression and internalization of nationalist values. The first point is that nationalist discourse is not the only or the most important manifestation of nationalism and that "language" is probably more an effect than a cause of changing nationalism. Thus it may be a poor measure and explanation of changing nationalism. Second, in shaping actions, "nationalism as discourse" competes against non-nationalist discourses (such as liberalism or religion) and against material interests. Third, "nationalism as discourse" cannot simultaneously explain political changes and its own shifts. While language plays an important role in facilitating and framing change, it is also true that "unless the facts themselves change, no amount of changing names changes them" (Hobsbawm 2008, pp. 60–61).

A better approach would be to treat nationalism as a vague ideology or set of principles that affects people's identities, loyalties, acts, and beliefs alongside other ideologies and material and nonmaterial interests. We can then examine its manifestations as discourse as well as social movements, actor choices, institutions, and government policies.

### *The Policy Implications of the Standard Stories*

The tendencies to personify nationalism and to examine it as a discourse turn the Kurdish question and conflict into nonquestions directly produced by either self-propelled nationalists or self-propelled nationalisms. Consequently, solutions are sought in targeting nationalism and nationalist speech per se rather than the political and social causes and causal mechanisms that drive nationalist actions, policies, and expressions.

In other words, conflict resolution is hinged upon the "transcendence of nationalism," with all its implications, through transition to a postnational, postnationalist society. As one author argued:

It is time to say a last good-bye to the Turkish nationalism which is rooted in the inter-war period—although this does not hold good for a couple of its declared, but unattained, goals: equality, democracy, and a modern secular state under the rule of law. The last good-bye concerns the underlying national identity, *Türklük* "Turkishness," based (among the Young Turks) on Muslim Turkish identity and (for Atatürk and many Kemalists) on an anthropological, ethno-racial identity. If the ethnically and religiously neutral *Türkiyelilik* ("being from Turkey") is not given pride of place as a cornerstone of Republican identity... modern Turkey's problematic ambivalence can hardly be overcome. (Kieser 2006, p. x)

I can only agree that Turkey's democracy in general and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict in particular would greatly benefit from critical reevaluations of nationalist identities and histories from a more pluralist perspective and in light of historical evidence and democratic deliberation. The *emergence* of identities such as *Türkiyelilik* (and more inclusive and pluralistic versions of other identities such as Turkishness and Turkish citizenship) would both reflect and benefit the development of a more pluralistic

democracy. These would help to include people who feel excluded by the officially endorsed Turkish identity. The problem is the importance attributed to nationalism and national identity as causes, not outcomes.

First, solutions are sought in new identity projects that define who people are. Can the discourse of new identities resolve complex political problems? What would prevent these new identities from evolving into exclusive projects themselves? For example, what would prevent the majority's perception of "being from Turkey" (*Türkiyelilik*) from beginning to exclude Kurds? What would prevent some people from beginning to exclude the Laz because they are only "from Turkey," not Turkish? An alternative causal approach is to focus on improving institutions, structures, and politics, which may produce more inclusive and pluralistic definitions of both new and existing identities. Certainly these new identities and identity definitions would not arise by themselves but would have to be generated by writers, intellectuals, and political leaders. But such efforts cannot resolve political conflicts or, for that matter, make people internalize these identities without improvements in political and social conditions. It should also be acknowledged that the minority and majority societies will always have asymmetric perceptions of identities such as Turkishness. Turks and Kurds do not and need not hold the same perception of what it means to be Turkish or "from Turkey" (Somer 2008).

Second, identities are assumed to be constructed and deconstructed at will. The possibility and desirability of this is often justified by the observation that Turkish nationalism and identity (and, for that matter, other nationalisms and national identities) were top-down elite projects imposed on society.<sup>18</sup> While the elite-driven nature of these projects is clear, their success cannot be explained by the will of the elites alone. Most elite-driven identity projects (whether nationalist, religious, or socialist) fail to become popular. Those that last are those that align with the material and social-cognitive changes already occurring within society.

Accordingly, political Turkification in the twentieth century appears to have built on, and transformed, a prior process of *cultural* (in particular linguistic) "Turkification" of the Ottoman society in the nineteenth century. This seems to have been largely a spontaneous process resulting from social-demographic and ideological transformations, state modernization, the development of Turkism in Russia, and the instrumentalization of Islam as a

state ideology (Karpat 2001, especially chapter 16, 2008). As a result of these "real" processes, a new and more comprehensive form of Turkish ethno-nationality gained prominence within the Ottoman dynasty, intellectuals, and larger societal segments.

Moreover, even if we assume that nationalist projects initially were purely elite driven, this does not necessarily imply that they can later be changed at will by new elites. Once they become embedded in the worldviews and self-images of ordinary people, identities only change through long-term social-cultural, demographic, and political processes. Processes such as EU integration and economic globalization may, for example, increase the relative weight of subnational, transnational, and supranational identities and worldviews over time. Identities are all multilayered and contested, however, and their contents and levels of contestation change through processes that are yet insufficiently understood (Abdelal et al. 2006).

In popular as well as academic writing, the view of nations as modern constructions tends to take on an additional meaning: "artificial" or "fake." It is indicative that Benedict Anderson's concept of a nation as an "imagined community" is misleadingly translated into Turkish as *hayali cemaat*, which means "imaginary community." A more appropriate translation would be *tahayyül edilmiş cemaat* or *hayal edilmiş cemaat*, meaning "imagined community."<sup>19</sup> Lost in translation are real factors such as civil service and print capitalism, which in Anderson's analysis changed people's notions of time and space and enabled the imagination of nations (Anderson 1983). From marriage to gender and religion, social identities are all socially constructed: they were imagined by people at some point in history. This, however, does not necessarily make them "less real" in the sense of being imaginary or transitory.

Nationalism may lose relative significance, but it is unrealistic to expect that a transition to a postnational world will occur in the foreseeable future. Nationalisms legitimize not only particular nation-states but also the global system of nation-states. Thus transcendence of nationalism hinges on global trends. Emerging powers such as Russia, China, India, and, for that matter, Turkey seem to be turning more nationalist rather than more postnationalist. Since 2001 nationalist expressions have increased in the United States. Even the EU, currently the most powerful postnationalist project, modifies the expression of national identities and interests, rather than eradicating them. The "banal" implications of nationalism are intact (see Billig 1995, chapter



5; Plattner 2003-4). In addition to following global trends, "banal" reproductions of nationalism and national identities are fueled in Turkey by defensive reactions to the Kurdish conflict, EU accession, and integration with the global economy (Somer 2007a, 2007b). Hence the potential usefulness of hinging the resolution of complex political conflicts upon transition to a postnational society would be quite limited.

### *Toward a Nonstandard Story*

Why did the formative period produce "defensive" dominant versions of Turkish and Kurdish nationalism that perceived each other as absolute threats?<sup>20</sup> Explaining why can also shed light on how Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms can become more compromising in the future. The following is an attempt to begin to construct a nonstandard story.

Most analysts who reject primordialist accounts of nationalism trace the development of Turkish and Kurdish nationalist ideologies to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman state tried to modernize and centralize. Turkish nationalists formed an ethnically diverse lot and were mainly concerned with the question of how to rescue the Ottoman state by turning it into a nation-state. They developed ethnic (pan-Turkic) versions as well as cultural-territorial variants. But, to differing degrees, they all drew on the Ottoman legacy and were aimed at turning Ottoman Muslims into a modern nation. Thus Turkish nationalists like Yusuf Akçura put forward nation-building strategies focusing on ethnic and cultural commonalities with Turkic people in the world. Others like Ziya Gökalp put more emphasis on the ideational, religious, and cultural traits uniting Ottoman Muslims in Turkey (Georgeon 2006). In these latter strategies, Turkishness was not employed as a historically fixed, exclusive ethnic category. It was used in a re-invented and more inclusive form, to denote a titular nationality and core ethnic culture.

The remaining Ottoman territories on which Turkish nationalists aimed to build a nation had an ethnically diverse population. The aforementioned great influx of ethnically diverse Muslims reinforced this characteristic throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus cultural-territorial models became relatively more influential in the way Turkish nationalists imagined the nation. While ethnic models also continued to influence the perception of Turkish identity, even these tried to

include Kurds in the perverted sense that they often tried to "demonstrate" that Turks and Kurds had common ethnic-racial roots or that many Kurds are or descended from acculturated rural Turks.<sup>21</sup>

By comparison and relatively speaking, Kurdish nationalism was aimed at mobilizing a people in a more limited geography with more cultural homogeneity and thus was predominantly ethnic. One of its salient features was Kurdish nationalists' emphasis on Kurdish ethnic difference from neighboring groups. A symbolic example is a letter that was reportedly written by Celadet Bedirhan, a Kurd, to Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk). In this letter Bedirhan chastises Turkish nationalists for trying to mix Turkish ethnicity with other ethnicities (Bozarslan 2005, p. 53).<sup>22</sup> A salient theme in much Kurdish nationalist writing is the resistance to "mixing," which in republican periods came to imply assimilation for many Kurds. Mixing is often opposed by using biological metaphors such as the "wrongness" of cross-breeding different animal species or "pure-bred" horses with others (Anter 1996). Like Turkish nationalists, many of whom also drew on putative ethnic-racial categories, Kurdish nationalists formed a diverse group and developed ideas emphasizing ethnicity, religion, and political loyalty to differing degrees (Vali 2005; Ahmed and Gunter 2007). But it seems clear that Kurdish nationalists were primarily concerned with the question of Kurdish ethnic-cultural distinction, and political and cultural well-being, in the face of the Ottoman demise and the emergence of Turkish and Armenian nationalisms surrounding them. Politically, they developed autonomist as well as pro-independence versions.

The emergence of these nationalist ideas, however, did not automatically create the Kurdish conflict. It did not make them inherently incompatible and conflict-prone. Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms initially had a lot in common. They shared a modernist zeal (Bozarslan 2005). They both had secular and Islamic-conservative variants. They could, for example, merge into one nationalist ideology that draws on a geographical (Turkey) or religious (Muslim) identity or coexist within one nation-state, with Kurds having (symmetrical or asymmetrical) autonomy from Turks or individual cultural rights. This happened in other cases. Pakistan was established as an Islamic republic, as the nation-state of the Muslims of Pakistan, and as a federal republic where regions associated with major ethnic groups and federally administered tribal areas have significant autonomy from the center. Scots

obtained first administrative then legislative autonomy within the British unitary state, which is evolving into a union state through asymmetric devolution to the Scottish and Welsh regions (Somer 2008; see also Seymour 2004).

The point here is not how stable and successful these other cases became. They show the logical and political possibility of different paths that nationalist movements can take. If the standard stories discussed above were correct, however, we were to believe that Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms and the underlying national identities are peculiar in the sense that they could never follow such paths.

Thus it is possible to put forward the following thesis. The Kurdish *conflict* resulted from six developments in the formative period from 1923 to 1926. This is not the place to “prove” the correctness of this thesis but to show its possibility and relevance for the current political debates.

First, Ottoman Kurds were divided among Turkey, Iran, the British mandate of Iraq, and the French mandate of Syria as a result of three developments: the Ankara Treaty (1921); the British defeat of Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji, who declared himself the king of Kurdistan in Iraq and might have favored unity with Turkey (1922–24); and the Lausanne Treaty (1923), which recognized Turkey as a nation-state and the heir of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>23</sup> These developments changed the geopolitical structures in a way that made a Turkish-Kurdish nation-state less possible. They rendered Kurdish nationalism and irredentism an existential territorial threat to Turkey’s political and territorial integrity.

Second, the Republic of Turkey was established soon thereafter without any recognition and rights for the Kurds (and other Muslim ethnicities), most of whom fought in the War of Independence. It was also established as a republic rather than, say, a constitutional monarchy where the Ottoman sultan was maintained as a symbol uniting Muslims of different ethnicities and representing tradition.

Third, Kurdish nationalists began to organize a rebellion, seeking support from the British, among others.<sup>24</sup>

Fourth, the republic was founded by a new (second) parliament, which was less representative of ethnic Kurds (and of Islamists and Islamic-traditionalists) than the first parliament of the nationalist struggle. The first parliament would have been unlikely to support the radical reforms of

secular modernization that Atatürk subsequently embarked on. One such crucial reform was the 1924 abolition of the caliphate, which was an important religious symbol uniting Kurds with the rest of Turkey. Another reform consolidated secular education and abolished religious schools and brotherhoods that fulfilled significant functions among Kurds, such as education in Kurdish.

Fifth, Kurdish religious figures who resented the regime’s secular reforms and secular Kurdish nationalists who resented the disregard of Kurdish ethnicity reacted with the violent Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, which the state brutally crushed. This turned the founding elites’ suspicions of Kurdish separatism into actual fear, while sowing the seeds of a disgruntled group of Kurdish nationalists deeply suspicious of the state and Turkish state nationalism. An important indirect result of the rebellion was the marginalization of those Turkish nationalists who would have harbored more moderate policies toward both religion and ethnic diversity and more gradualist reforms of modernization and nation-building. While a series of violent Kurdish rebellions followed until the late 1930s, the state launched a series of policies aimed at assimilating Kurds.

Sixth, “Iraqi Kurds” formally became part of the British mandate of Iraq in 1926.

### *Security Dilemmas over Territory and Values*

These six developments jointly created two security dilemmas. A security dilemma over *territory* was created through the transformation of Ottoman Kurds, who had hitherto been a major component of the Turkish nationalist project, into a trans-state ethno-national group. Within a separate neighboring state, Iraqi Kurds could always pursue irredentism. Accordingly, during the negotiations on the Lausanne Treaty, one of the concessions to British claims that Turkish nationalists resisted most, but conceded, was the separation of Mosul province, where ethnic Kurds and Turks constituted a majority, from Turkey. Turkish and British representatives disagreed over the ratio of ethnic Kurdish and Turkish populations but agreed that together they constituted a significant majority over the other groups.<sup>25</sup>

This security dilemma could only be resolved through cooperation with Iraqi Kurds and their British patrons. Kurds who were left within Turkey could have overcome this dilemma by credibly renouncing pan-Kurdish

nationalism. This would have been very difficult to do, however, even if Kurdish actors wanted to do so. Kurdish nationalism was already a mobilized force among some Kurdish elites, although it is unclear how much support it had among the ordinary Kurdish masses. In fact, Kurdish nationalists had good reasons to believe that violent rebellion, which they had resorted to in 1925, was their chance to obtain concessions from the government. This is what Kurdish elites traditionally did to obtain concessions from the Ottoman government. They might also have hoped that the threat of secession could force the government to concede autonomy.

Furthermore, the composition of nationalist elites produced a tradeoff between secular and (ethnically) pluralistic modernization. Turkish nationalists who led the War of Independence agreed on goals such as the establishment of a nation-state that would replace the Ottoman state and be on a par with its Western counterparts. But they had different visions as to how Ottoman, Turkish, secular, and Muslim this nation-state would be. They disagreed over the type of modernization. Religious nationalists opposed radical secular reforms. The nationalist struggle had started in the form of a Muslim nationalism (of Ottoman Muslims, including most Kurds) with many religious figures and conservative nationalists (Oran 1990; Olson 1996; Zürcher 2005, chapter 14). Many deputies in the first parliament held "a genuine belief that the Kurds should be dealt with by other than forceful means" (Olson 1989, p. 40). But the deputies who would have favored such means were also the ones who favored a modernizing yet Islamic state. They would have embraced more ethnic pluralism within a state emphasizing religious values and a nation bound together by faith and traditional culture.

This division created a security dilemma over *clashing values of secularism* between two types of nationalist elites. For both elites, ethnicity and the Kurdish question seemed to be secondary to the question of secularism (secular vs. religious modernization). For secularists, alliance with religious-conservative elites for the sake of ethnic pluralism would have meant less power to implement the secular reforms. For religious-conservative elites, promoting the recognition of the Kurdish component would have made them vulnerable to charges of separatism, thus also weakening their position on the issue of secular reforms. Indeed, the political ramifications of the Sheikh Said rebellion gave the secularist nationalists the perfect excuse to remove the more "liberal" government of Fethi Okyar and to sideline religious-conservative nationalists.

I am not suggesting that a less secular and more Islamic political model would have resolved the Kurdish question in the long run, especially given the existence of the territorial security dilemma. Islamic states do not necessarily perform better in resolving ethno-political questions. The foundation of Pakistan as an "Islamic state" did not prevent the secession of the Bengali Muslims later. The point is that the accommodation of the Kurdish claims with less than forceful means, say with some type of administrative decentralization, would have necessitated cooperation between secularist and religious-conservative elites. Such cooperation would have required a consensus regarding the nature of secularism, however, in addition to a consensus over the issue of ethnic pluralism.

Nor am I suggesting that the elites in the formative period were ideologically well equipped to address the Kurdish question democratically. For example, the religious-conservative elites were not democrats in today's sense, beyond an instinctive and antirevolutionary tendency to respect the tradition and the will and culture of the "people."

I am arguing that—absent the security dilemmas over territory and secularism—some elites would have had the *opportunity* and predisposition to develop policies more respectful of the Kurdish difference. This could have given rise to more recognition of diversity in one institutional form or another, especially with the development of democracy.

It should also be highlighted that opportunities do not automatically translate into actual policies. In the end, a more propitious formative period would have required agency (elites that developed feasible projects to accommodate the Kurdish difference). The same goes for the Kurdish elites. The importance of this point is clearer when we discuss the present period.

#### THE POST-2007 PERIOD

Turkey's Kurdish conflict went through several periods between its formative period and the present, which are examined in a growing body of writing. My focus is on the similarities between the current and formative periods.

As in the formative period, the question of secular modernization is a salient and decisive challenge for the Republic of Turkey, albeit in importantly modified forms. Today's Islamist and religious-conservative modernizers are as much a product of secular modernization that has occurred since

the formative period as the secular modernizers are. Also, compared to the religious-conservatives of the formative period, their worldviews are significantly shaped by their economic interests, which favor integration with the global economy (Yavuz 2003; Öniş 2007). They are also influenced by the current visions of modernity and postmodernity in the Western world and by the changing visions of Islamism in the world. Meanwhile, secular modernizers who largely led the transition to secular, multiparty democracy face the challenge of reconciling with the current standards of secularism and democracy in the Western world, which are more amenable to religious expressions. They also face the challenge of reconciling with the restrictions and requirements of economic globalization. These standards now allow less autonomy for nation-states and promote more society-centered models of development.

Following major public rows with the secularist military-bureaucracy and social groups over secularism in the spring of 2007, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won a landslide victory in the national elections of July 2007, receiving 47 percent of the national vote. This gave the party and Prime Minister Erdoğan a second term in government. Soon thereafter, one of the party's founders, former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs Abdullah Gül, was elected president.

The AKP is a reformist and pro-West political party. It combines a moderate or "new" Islamist ideology, which is effective in areas such as public administration, education, and social regulation, with a globalist economic outlook and a Muslim-conservative version of Turkish nationalism.

The AKP boasts that about a fifth of its members of parliament are ethnically Kurdish, primarily but not exclusively from eastern provinces. In eastern provinces with substantial Kurdish populations, the AKP increased its share of votes by about 150 percent between 2002 and 2007 (Somer 2008).<sup>26</sup> With about half of all votes in those provinces, it now is the first party. With about 30 percent of the votes in the region, the second party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), also entered parliament. The DTP is largely controlled by the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), although it is not a monolithic party and harbors various views and tendencies.<sup>27</sup> The PKK has fought the state for Kurdish self-rule since the 1980s. Since then its expressed goals have changed from independence to a vague notion of constitutional recognition of Kurds.

Like secularism, pan-Kurdish nationalism and relations with Iraq are salient questions, as in the formative period. Before the elections, the AKP government resisted increasing pressures from the military and opposition parties for a military campaign against the PKK bases in northern Iraq. Clashes between the PKK and security forces had increased since 2004, when the PKK ended its unilateral "cease-fire," and intensified in 2007. The PKK has a significant base within Turkey as well as within Europe and other countries. But its ability to sustain itself and organize attacks increased significantly following the American invasion of Iraq and the development of the de facto autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

The clashes with the PKK, which had practically stopped since the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan with U.S.-Turkish cooperation in 1999, restarted after the occupation. Turkey's refusal at the beginning of the war to allow U.S. land forces to use Turkish territory impaired Turkish-U.S. cooperation and boosted the U.S. alliance with Iraqi Kurds.<sup>28</sup> This significantly reduced Turkey's clout to influence American policies. Any operations without U.S. consent could gravely damage the decades-long close alliance between Turkey and the United States. A military operation causing civilian casualties also carried major risks for relations with the EU, which Turkey is trying to join. Especially before the elections, a military operation would have cost the AKP support in eastern provinces, where most people are weary of military conflict and want peaceful resolution. Amid increasing tensions over secularism and political pressures to take action against the PKK attacks, the government neither opposed nor authorized military action. Compared to the opposition parties, which were eager to support military operations, however, the AKP's position looked "pro-peace" and "pro-people," valuing the interests of the ordinary people in the region as much as state security interests.

Other factors also helped the AKP garner support among Kurdish and non-Kurdish voters in the east and gave it opportunities to address the Kurdish conflict in the new period. Erdoğan had a major advantage of credibility in the region. He presided over the relatively peaceful period since 2002 and did not play any role in government in the violent years of 1991–94. He was elected from the southeastern province of Siirt, where his wife is from. The AKP continued the EU reforms initiated by the previous government and legislated limited yet important cultural rights for Kurdish and other ethnic minorities.

The AKP stimulated development and helped the poor through projects of rural infrastructure and government health and aid programs and through the increased charity activities of Turkish-Kurdish Islamic faith-based groups. Regional economic well-being was also helped by cross-border trade with northern Iraq, where Turkey is a major investor and supplier, which was supported by the AKP's reluctance to use military measures against the PKK.

All in all, the AKP signaled to people that it was willing to adopt a more society-centered approach to the Kurdish conflict that would be respectful of people's ethnic identities and cultures and would give priority to peace and human welfare over state security. The AKP also benefited from the rising Islamic conservatism in the southeast and the neighboring Middle East.<sup>29</sup> Last but not least, the AKP benefited from its rivals' weaknesses. The opposition parties portrayed a security-oriented profile disregarding ordinary people's needs. The DTP focused on the political aspects of the Kurdish question, disregarding socioeconomic problems.

The AKP did not introduce any major legal-political initiative for a political solution of the Kurdish conflict, however, disappointing many of its Kurdish constituencies. Nor did it launch any major policy programs to induce systematic socioeconomic development in the east, beyond the aforementioned activities.

#### *Secular and Religious Kurdish Nationalism*

In general Turkish Kurds are thought to form a predominantly religious-conservative and traditional constituency, especially in the east (van Bruinessen 2000). Tribal, sectarian, and religious-communal bonds continue to play important roles. Tribal and religious leaders have significant authority. Yet ethnic Kurds do not form a monolithic or static population. They are being transformed by social-economic development and global ideological trends. As argued above, one reason why Kurdish nationalist elites failed to mobilize Kurdish masses for a Kurdish-nationalist project during the fall of the Ottoman Empire was their relatively pro-secular and modernist outlook. Within the republic, secular Kurdish nationalists pursued alliance with traditional Kurdish elites by downplaying secular Kurdish nationalism.

The transition to multiparty democracy in 1946 provided traditional Kurdish elites with new opportunities for political patronage. Many joined conservative parties on the center-right. In the 1960s a new generation of

Kurdish activists emerged. They were a product of relative socioeconomic development and upward mobility through education and the political opportunities provided by the liberal-democratic Constitution instated after the military coup of 1960. This new generation had a pro-secular outlook, was less dependent on traditional social-religious bonds, and was ideologically shaped by Marxism.

Thus a tripartite division emerged among Kurdish nationalists: secular-revolutionary nationalists, traditional (elite) nationalists, and religious-conservative or "Islamist" nationalists. Juxtaposed on these were secular and religious-conservative "loyalists." For the sake of a better word, this refers to people who shunned Kurdish nationalism for one reason or another, whether or not they would like to see more recognition of their ethnic identity. These were seen as "pro-state" or "pro-Turkish" by the nationalists. This profile is still visible today, with vague and porous borders and changing contents.

Loyalists joined Turkey-wide social movements and Turkish mainstream parties in the center-right and center-left. Traditional nationalists were organized under illegal parties such as the Turkish KDP (Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan). Secular revolutionaries became organized under legal and underground movements such as TİP (Workers Party of Turkey) and DDKO (Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths). Their secular and leftist orientation provided them with both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, it enabled them to build alliances with Turkish leftist movements and political parties and to portray the image of a political force that favors social transformation, development, and justice. On the other hand, their secular and revolutionary outlook limited their ability to bond with and mobilize religious-conservative Kurdish constituencies (Watts 2007). Thus secular Kurdish nationalists have to walk a tightrope: while promoting social transformation, they also have to display their respect for religion and tradition.

The PKK can be seen as the violent manifestation of the secular, leftist-revolutionary version of Kurdish nationalism. Like other secular Kurdish-nationalist actors, the PKK and the DTP have to downplay their secular revolutionary goals in order to maintain their support base. Similarly, the use of terror is a double-edged sword. While impressing some by demonstrating coercive power to challenge the state and to silence dissident Kurds, it also turns away people who want peace and stability.<sup>30</sup>

*The AKP's Rise and Opportunities for Peaceful Resolution*

Against this background, the AKP's popularity among Kurds represents the retreat of secular Kurdish nationalism vis-à-vis two forces: religious-conservative Kurdish nationalism and a type of Muslim-Turkish or "Muslim-Turkey" nationalism that the AKP promotes. While the AKP proclaims its respect for Kurdish rights, for example, it also proclaims the principle of "one nation, one state, and one flag." As such, it represents a more globalist (less defensive and less inward-oriented) and less diversity-phobic Turkish nationalism.<sup>31</sup> But the AKP has to resolve many potential contradictions of interest and ideas that exist between a "Turkey nationalism" and the ability to recognize Kurdish rights before its constituencies can embrace this new version of nationalism. Yet the nature of the nationalism that the AKP promotes is still in the making. Its content is uncertain and contested, and the party's leaders frequently resort to "defensive" Turkish nationalist symbols and rhetoric.<sup>32</sup> It is still unclear whether or not the party can successfully combine a notion of Turkey-wide patriotism with a "less defensive" Kurdish nationalism and demands for Kurdish rights. Nevertheless, the AKP's strong support among both the majority and minority societies provides a significant potential for peaceful resolution.

What are the chances that the AKP can utilize this potential? Is the AKP's ascendancy (and that of its version of Turkish and Kurdish nationalism) a temporary or long-lasting one? The potential for peaceful resolution is constrained by the two security dilemmas discussed above. Insofar as nationalism, rather than the security dilemmas, is the root cause of this conflict, we would expect the AKP to address the Kurdish conflict with different means than those used by other Turkish parties. Insofar as the security dilemmas play a more major causal role, we should expect the AKP to act in ways similar to other parties in regard to issues that are demonstrably related to the security dilemmas. Recent developments point to the continuing importance of the security dilemmas.

*The AKP, Iraq, and the PKK*

After the elections, Erdoğan declared his party to be the true representative of Turkish Kurds, with a strong mandate to address the Kurdish question. The party also got his candidate elected to the presidency. Thus, everything

else being the same, the postelection AKP had more ability and was more likely to resist military operations in northern Iraq.

Yet, in the aftermath of the elections, the AKP and the military seemed to be in agreement rather than at odds over actions against the PKK. In December 2007 the Turkish air forces attacked PKK targets in northern Iraq. In February 2008 the military launched a major military operation against PKK bases in northern Iraq, which lasted eight days and involved about ten thousand troops. Thus, as soon as the AKP obtained a stronger popular mandate, it employed military power against the PKK in Iraq.

The security dilemmas posed by the strengthening of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq in general and by the PKK presence in Iraq in particular affected the government as much as it affected previous governments. In addition, the AKP might have felt that it had to target the PKK in order to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of the secular-nationalist state elites, many of whom believed the AKP to be secretly antisecular. Finally, the AKP also tried to marginalize the DTP. In November 2007, when prosecutors asked the Constitutional Court to ban the DTP for separatism and links with the PKK, the AKP silently endorsed the case.

More significantly for the subject at hand, the military operations occurred in the aftermath of Erdoğan's visit to the United States in November 5, 2007, and with active U.S. compliance and intelligence support.<sup>33</sup> This was a new turn in Turkish-U.S. and Turkish-Iraqi relations. Since 2004 Turkey had unsuccessfully tried to convince the United States and the Iraqi Kurds either to allow a Turkish intervention or to force the PKK out of Iraq themselves. In addition to punishing Turkey for its aforementioned intransigence before the war, the United States feared that an operation would destabilize what it considered to be the most stable and pro-U.S. region in Iraq.

More importantly, the United States was trying to balance a seeming clash of Turkish and Iraqi-Kurdish interests. It was unclear whether the target of a Turkish intervention would be Kurdish separatists per se, Kurdish interests in Iraq as a whole, or both. Since the 1990s, when Iraqi Kurds began to develop their de facto self-government with U.S. support, Turkey had made it clear that it would oppose a Kurdish state, which it feared would become a magnet of pan-Kurdish nationalism. Turkey also opposes developments that it perceives to be stepping stones toward Kurdish statehood, especially the

Kurdish demands to absorb oil-rich Kirkuk. This would make a Kurdish state economically viable and the territorial integrity of Iraq less sustainable.

For their part, Iraqi Kurds were wary of helping Turkey, fearing that they would be the next target. They also feared PKK reprisals and did not want to be seen as fighting "fellow Kurds." Furthermore, they might have felt that without the PKK threat Turkey would have no reason to compromise with them. In other words, the presence of the PKK in Iraq was a valuable, yet very risky, bargaining chip for Iraqi Kurds who wanted to negotiate with Turkey and with other regional states for the recognition of their autonomy.

Two ambiguities in the positions of the two sides make them irreconcilable. In the case of Turkey's stance it is unclear whether Turkey opposes Kurdish autonomy or statehood per se or the possibility that such a state would become anti-Turkish and expansionist (i.e., supportive of pan-Kurdish nationalism). The first position makes Turkish and Iraqi-Kurdish interests mutually exclusive, putting Turkey and Iraqi Kurds on a collision course. The second position allows mutual compromise and makes a positive-sum outcome possible (Somer 2005).

In fact, an Iraqi Kurdish administration or state that opposes Kurdish separatism in the region (in the same way that Turkey opposes ethnic Turkish separatism in neighboring countries) may prove to be a stabilizing rather than destabilizing force. It may pacify rather than fuel Kurdish nationalist ambitions in the region by eliminating a major grievance driving these ambitions: the claim that Kurds are the only major ethnic group in the region without a state. Due to their geostrategic dependence on Turkey and historical ties, Iraqi Kurds are eager to pursue peace and economic integration with their major northern neighbor as long as their own autonomy is safeguarded.<sup>34</sup>

The critical question is how Iraqi Kurds can credibly renounce pan-Kurdism in the future. In this regard, the ambiguity in the Iraqi-Kurdish position has been their relation to Kurdish separatism in Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Regional leader Massoud Barzani frequently made statements giving the impression that his ambitions were not limited to Kurdish interests in Iraq. There was a lack of trust between Turkey and Iraqi-Kurdish leaders. U.S. assurances help to bridge this distrust. Most importantly, however, credibility can be established by concrete actions, including policies vis-à-vis the

PKK and Kirkuk. Joint economic projects such as pipelines to carry Iraqi natural gas to Turkey and Europe would also nurture mutual trust.

All in all, peaceful reconciliation of Turkish and Iraqi-Kurdish interests requires that the parties reach an understanding. Iraqi Kurds should actively and credibly renounce Kurdish separatism in Turkey; Turkey should credibly declare that it accepts Iraqi Kurdish autonomy (Kurdish Regional Government) and supports Iraqi Kurds' economic development; and the United States should commit to opposing Kurdish separatism and irredentism.

Erdoğan's visit to the United States in November 2007 appears to have involved some kind of an agreement to this effect. The Turkish government made clear that the military operations after the visit that had U.S. intelligence support exclusively targeted the PKK. Iraqi Kurdish leaders subdued their public criticisms of the Turkish operation. Following the withdrawal of the Turkish troops, the Iraqi president and Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani paid a landmark visit to Ankara. Barzani renounced violence in pursuing Kurdish interests and emphasized the importance of good relations with neighboring countries, apparently with U.S. prodding.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the Turkish military, which had been critical of the government's "soft" stand toward the PKK in particular and Kurdish separatism in general, ceased to express such criticisms.

The actual elimination of the territorial security dilemma, however, depends on the future and stability of Iraq. Will Iraq become a stabilized country, with Iraqi Kurds being an autonomous yet integral part of it? Will the Kirkuk question be resolved without destabilizing the region (International Crisis Group 2007)? What will be the policies of President Barack Obama's administration toward Iraq, Kurds, and Turkey? What will the U.S. demands on Turkey be in regard to containing Iran? Will Turkey be able to meet these demands, and how will this affect Turkish-U.S. relations?

### *The AKP, Secularism, and the Kurdish Question*

Beginning in 2007, Turkish politics and public life became increasingly polarized over the question of secularism. In March 2008 prosecutors charged the AKP with being a "center of antiseccular activities" and asked the Constitutional Court to shut it down. The charges were not unprecedented: between 1946 and 2001 eight other allegedly antiseccular parties were banned.

But this was the first time that a party ruling in a single-party government faced such charges.

Moreover, the case was unprecedented because domestic "secular" public opinion and the external world were divided over the identity of the AKP and overall much more supportive of it than of previous "Islamist" governments. In fact, the AKP had been hailed by many Turkish and foreign observers as a welcome example of the "moderation" or democratization of political Islam.<sup>36</sup> The party enjoyed significant external support from the United States and the EU and domestic support from secular-liberal intellectuals and business interests. Such support contributed a great deal to the party's ascendance. In light of this background, what is causing the opposition to the AKP and the polarization over secularism? And how is this affecting the prospects for the democratic resolution of the Kurdish question?

Three factors feed the divisions over secularism. First, the powerful military and judiciary are trained to view themselves as the guardians of the strictly secular-republican principles that underlie the legal and political system and view the AKP's intentions as suspect. These principles were laid down during the 1920s and 1930s by secular-modernizing elites. First Atatürk and then his followers decreed them with a view to consolidating the secular republic by sidelining religious-conservative opposition. The problem is that the military and judiciary never conceded to democratic amendment of the *formal content* of secularism, in the sense of relaxing some of its stricter boundaries in accordance with the changing times, even after the consolidation of the republican regime. Rather, the content changed informally, through the practices of conservative governments and the military regime of 1980–83.

The republican regime had potential for democratizing because its primary goal was to create a modern nation-state on a par with contemporary Western powers. Most of these powers adopted democratic regimes after World War II. Accordingly, the founding Republican People's Party that had previously decreed authoritarian secularism also decreed a transition to multiparty democracy under the leadership of President İnönü. It voluntarily allowed opposition in 1946 and a change of government in 1950. Multiparty democracy, which has been interrupted by the military for relatively brief periods four times since then, has allowed the representation of Islamic-conservative interests within center-right and Islamist parties. Islamist

parties were frequently sanctioned by the secular establishment. But this happened after they contested elections and participated in local and national governments.

The interventions of the military and judiciary in the political system produced two consequences. First, it can be argued that such interventions stifled the strengthening of civil society and politics, which could give rise to powerful civilian secular-democratic actors. For example, the 1980–83 military rule brutally cracked down on all political opposition, but especially on secular-leftist political opposition. Paradoxically, the ensuing gap in the political space was later filled by both Islamists and militant Kurdish nationalists. Second, the interventions generated a power struggle between the military-judiciary and Islamists/religious conservatives, which they both began to perceive as a zero-sum struggle. Paradoxically, this occurred even though Islamic conservatives increasingly penetrated state institutions and ideology and affected government policies.

The military-judiciary deeply distrusted the Islamists, however, even when sanctioning conservative policies such as compulsory religion classes in high schools in the 1980s. The Islamists tried to bypass secularist restrictions by attacking the military-judiciary's ideological authority and by trying to penetrate the bureaucracy's personnel and practices. Given this backdrop, no matter how moderate they are, the AKP government's actions are perceived as undermining the military-judiciary and, by association, secularism. In turn, the military-judiciary perceives its privileged status as ensuring secular modernization. This environment hampers the renegotiation of secularist restrictions by civilian-democratic actors even if these actors uphold the essence of the principle of secularism.

The second factor feeding the divisions over secularism is the electoral, ideological, and organizational fragmentation and weakness of secularist political parties (Somer 2007b). Given the AKP's quest for acceptance, its electoral victory worked to its disadvantage. First, the election outcome strengthened the moralists vis-à-vis the pragmatists within the AKP, encouraging them to embark on more conservative policies. This helps to explain why Erdoğan changed the Constitution, in an attempt to allow women with headscarves on college campuses, without seeking sufficient consensus with opposition parties. The subsequent political crisis culminated in the legal proceedings against the party. Second, the AKP's control of both parliament



and the presidency and its ability to make changes in the Constitution increased the threat perceived by the secularist actors.

The weakness of the democratic secularist actors should be understood in a broad ideological, organizational, and discursive sense. In particular, the main opposition party (CHP) has failed to communicate effectively with voters and to minimize corruption within its ranks. Furthermore, it has not produced viable social and political projects that can simultaneously promote secularism, democracy, and continuing economic development and modernization. It also has failed to develop discursive strategies to defend secularism from the point of view of democracy and human rights. For example, the CHP could not offer alternative policies that would protect the freedoms of both secular women and religious women with headscarves when the AKP defended the rights of the latter in the name of democracy and religious freedom. Thus the CHP gave the impression that it held the principle of secularism above the principles of democracy and of human rights, such as the right to education. This weakness of secular-democratic checks and balances against the AKP's conservative agenda creates a false dichotomy between democracy and secularism. The supporters of the AKP claim to defend democracy despite secularism, and its critics claim to defend secularism despite democracy.

Finally, the ambiguous nature of the AKP's impact on secularism feeds the mutual suspicions. Aside from short-lived attempts such as a move to criminalize adultery, the party did not attempt to change any secular laws. Thus secular concerns result from the government's administrative policies in areas such as education, public recruitment, and local services and indirectly from the way the government's identity affects social perceptions of the mainstream social and political values. Sensing a shift of power from secular to religious political and economic actors, many people may be emphasizing religious symbols for opportunistic reasons. With more recognition of their values and lifestyles by the new political center, Islamic conservative groups, especially religious communities such as Islamic brotherhoods, increase their public visibility and activism. Simultaneously, secular segments of the society and the secular media pay more attention to the increasing visibility of religion, which is most noticeably symbolized by the Islamic headscarf. This increases their fears of religious pressures. They are drawn to a defensive and authoritarian version of secularism, which displays itself in pro-secular and

antigovernment mass demonstrations. Defensive secularist reactions in turn radicalize the AKP supporters, who view them as antagonistic toward their conservative values.

These divisions reveal the tensions between the freedom of religion, a major component of the principle of secularism, and freedom from religious pressures. These tensions affect especially but not exclusively women, because social-religious pressures often pertain to gender segregation. Insofar as it is hard to pinpoint the direct and indirect effects of the government on secularism in the social realm objectively, it becomes hard to avoid the growth of mutual threat perceptions.

How do the divisions over secularism affect the Kurdish conflict? They divide the social and political actors who could otherwise be expected to cooperate for the resolution of the conflict within liberal democracy. Without the secularism division (and the territorial security dilemma), secular and religious conservative parties could form a grand coalition to democratize the laws on ethnic-national diversity and to implement more inclusive strategies toward the DTP and less coercive policies toward the PKK. This could marginalize the PKK and begin to resolve the Kurdish conflict within liberal democracy.

In fact, the coalition government before the AKP was a limited example of such cooperation. It consisted of center-left nationalist, liberal-conservative, and far-right nationalist parties. Among other things, it took actions such as abolishing the death penalty and amending the Constitution. These actions saved the captured PKK leader Öcalan from execution and later made it possible for the AKP to legislate limited Kurdish rights. But by 2007 such cooperation between the AKP and the CHP had become almost unthinkable because of their rift over secularism.

During the 1980s and 1990s Turkish social democrats were the foremost defenders of the "democratic resolution" of the Kurdish conflict. After the AKP came to power, however, the CHP chose to shed its already weakened links to social democracy and focused on a platform of secular nationalism.

Simultaneously, the CHP's uncompromising stand in regard to secularism drove the AKP toward the second opposition party in parliament: the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The two parties joined forces to legalize headscarves on college campuses. This undermined the AKP's ability to employ more liberal policies vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue because of the MHP's hard-line Turkish nationalist stand. A similar dilemma afflicted the AKP's

relations with the military. Given its existing quarrel with the military over secularism, the AKP could not afford to open a new front with the military over the Kurdish question. The secularism division also weakened the government's relations with secular business associations such as the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD), which could otherwise actively support government policies to resolve the Kurdish conflict through democracy and EU integration.

Finally, some actors who could cooperate in the democratic promotion of secularism are divided over the Kurdish conflict. Without this conflict and thus the PKK's control of the DTP, pro-secular actors such as the CHP and the DTP could cooperate in order to balance the AKP's conservative policies with secular-democratic alternatives.

Can the AKP resolve the Kurdish conflict on its own rather than through cooperation with other actors? What would happen, for example, if the AKP successfully survived the legal charges against itself and won a decisive victory over its rivals in the upcoming local elections throughout Turkey, including the east?<sup>37</sup> Unless checked and balanced by strong secular-democratic actors (that is, without competition and cooperation with actors such as social-democratic and liberal parties), the AKP would be likely to overemphasize Islamic values and solidarity in its policies vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue. Such policies would undermine the AKP's relations with both secularist institutions and the EU, where significant portions of the public are highly skeptical of Muslims and Islam.

Moreover, it is unlikely that the Kurdish conflict can be resolved successfully without the active involvement of explicitly Kurdish actors who represent major disgruntled segments of ethnic Kurds (Somer 2008). While the AKP has many Kurdish members, they subsume their Kurdish identity under the AKP's Islamic-conservative political identity. Finally, the AKP's support among ethnic Kurds, which subsided because of the military operation in Iraq, may further erode if it fails to formulate and implement feasible policies to address the cultural and political aspects of the conflict.<sup>38</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have argued against the overuse of nationalism as a self-propelled, causal analytical category. Instead the two security (prisoner's)

dilemmas discussed deserve more attention. They feed incompatible nationalist actions and undermine peaceful resolution.

Thus a well-intentioned public-political campaign opposing a vaguely defined notion of "nationalism" would not by itself be a solution. From Muslim Iran and Turkey to Christian Greece, the nation-states in the region have developed "banal" nationalisms that uphold cultural-linguistic and religious homogeneity and often blend religion and language to mold a national identity. This suggests that the type of dominant nationalisms that emerged in these countries cannot be explained by self-propelled nationalisms. Nor can it be explained by cultural factors such as the legacy of the Islamic notion of the *ummah* (*millet*), which historically lumped together different ethnicities under the same category.

In one specific sense of nationalism, however, Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms per se impede the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question in a causal sense. Ernest Gellner (1983, p. 1) famously defined nationalism primarily as a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent, and nationalist sentiment as the anger aroused by the violation of this principle. If the nationalist principle is held to be absolute, if the political unit that nationalists seek is a territorial, centralized nation-state, and if people who uphold nationalism adhere to it as an absolute value that may not be compromised against other values and constraints, then Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms become absolutely incompatible. Turks and Kurds share among other things a common territory that they consider to be their homeland. Thus one has to lose in order for the other to achieve its goal of a territorial nation-state. Because there already is a nation-state in Turkey today, Kurdish nationalism becomes a destabilizing force. If this was the only definition of nationalism, then the only way to resolve the Kurdish conflict would be through the (unlikely) transition to a postnational stage.

Turkish and Kurdish nationalists could coexist in a less conflicting relationship, however, if they uphold nationalism's political principle not as an absolute but as an ideal that can be weighed against other principles such as democracy, economic well-being, peace, and human rights; if they believe that the political principle of nationalism can be satisfied by institutions other than a centralized nation-state, such as autonomy (for minority nationalism) and a decentralized state (for the majority nationalism); and if they

can prioritize nationalist and competing political, cultural, and religious values, seeking a compromise between the two.

Realizing the difficulties of social and territorial separation, for example, Kurdish nationalists could seek first a more democratic regime and then goals such as cultural and administrative autonomy, by using peaceful means. The majority society in general and Turkish nationalists in particular could agree to the accommodation of such goals, for instance, by becoming more amenable to the recognition of cultural diversity, autonomy, and rights. Early discussion of inflammatory issues such as amnesty for PKK leaders might derail the social and political processes of reconciliation. Hence it might be wise for both sides to postpone such difficult questions until other issues that are more amenable to resolution (such as lowering the electoral threshold, amnesty for ordinary PKK members, and bilingual education in Kurdish areas) are addressed and thus create a more peaceful and less polarized political situation. Countries such as Britain and Bulgaria have successfully accommodated their ethnic-national minorities through such policies within democracy, but it would be hard to argue that they transcended nationalism, especially its banal manifestations (Billig 1995; Özkırımlı 2008).

The consolidation of European standards of pluralistic democracy and secularism provides opportunities for such accommodation. Mutual fears, distrust, and conceptual gaps that exist between Turkish and Kurdish actors beset this conflict. Majority-Turkish actors fear social and political disintegration; Kurdish-minority actors fear oppression and assimilation. Even the "moderates" of the two types of actors have different understandings of seemingly mutual goals such as democratization and "equality" (Somer 2008). The freedoms and checks and balances embedded in consolidated, pluralistic democracy provide the best means to overcome these fears and gaps over time, through peaceful representation, negotiation, and deliberation.

Certain current events clearly threaten democracy. When this essay was being written in 2008, the two parties with the most support in the eastern provinces were both facing legal charges that could cause them to be banned by the Constitutional Court. Such a possibility would create a major deficit of representation and legitimacy.<sup>39</sup> This would strengthen radical Kurdish nationalism and Islamism in the region. It could also give rise to a new period of violence and undermine democracy and social peace. I hope that the legal

and political actors involved in such cases use their agency and capability in pursuit of peace and democracy.

Without the resolution of the security dilemmas discussed in this chapter, however, choices that make sense to well-intending actors may also produce unintended consequences. For example, simple provision of Kurdish cultural-linguistic rights or the promotion of Islamic solidarity between ethnic Turks and Kurds, as opposed to secular state nationalism, would not suffice to resolve the Kurdish question. The Islamic Republic of Iran also has a significant ethnic Kurdish minority along its Turkish, Iraqi, and Azerbaijani borders. It has been more tolerant of Kurdish expressions and long permitted the use of Kurdish in the media and education, compared to the secular Republic of Turkey, which has only recently granted such rights in limited forms (Entessar 2007). Yet Iran's relatively more lenient policies toward Kurdish culture did not eliminate the distrust between Kurdish nationalists and the Iranian state. Both Turkey and Iran face entrenched conflicts with Kurdish nationalists and allegedly secessionist Kurdish movements. Unless the underlying security dilemmas are resolved, simple promotion of cultural rights and religious solidarity diminishes neither Kurdish nationalism nor majority state intransigence.

More than eight decades ago the inability to achieve simultaneous resolution of the security dilemmas over territory and secularism significantly shaped the evolution of Turkish modernization. Secular Turkish modernization since then has built a secular, multiparty democracy in a predominantly Muslim society that is a candidate for EU membership. But it also transformed the Kurdish question into the Kurdish conflict. Furthermore, secular democracy is not yet consolidated because of the conflict between the pro-secular and Islamic-conservative elites and the middle classes over what secularism should entail.

In the present period the resolution of the two security dilemmas will once again shape the evolution of Turkish modernization and the Kurdish conflict. Can Turkey and Iraqi Kurds become cooperating partners rather than conflicting enemies? Can pro-secular and Islamic-conservative elites agree on values that would consolidate both secularism and democracy? Can they overcome their divisions over secularism so that they can cooperate on addressing the Kurdish conflict democratically?

Ominously, the resolution of the territorial conflict hinges on a number of external factors, such as the U.S. policies toward Iran and the developments in Iraq. Historically, conflicts over secularism in the Western world required long-term and often violent battles. There is still no precedent for consolidated secular democracy among predominantly Muslim societies.

Auspiciously, compared to its formative period, Turkey is now a mature democracy with a semideveloped economy and enjoys significant external support. Thus even seemingly zero-sum debates over territory and secularism have to be framed in terms of positive-sum goals such as democracy and human rights, continuing economic development, and possibly EU membership.

#### NOTES

1. I completed this essay in May 2008. Many important developments have taken place since then with respect to the Kurdish conflict. I have chosen not to discuss these developments except in a few places because my main goal is to develop a framework of analysis that highlights the long-term structural dynamics shaping the evolution of this conflict, in particular the two security (prisoner's) dilemmas discussed. The analysis and the critical comments in regard to extant research continue to apply to the present. They also help to predict the future evolution of this conflict and produce policy implications. Another advantage of not including the recent developments is to show that the analysis was able to predict them, such as the escalation of the conflict with the PKK and increasing signs of Turkish-Kurdish social polarization.
2. For the concept of security dilemma employed here, see, among others, Dasgupta (1988) and Basu (2000).
3. Lichbach (2003, pp. 12–14). For “deep vs. standard stories,” see also Tilly (1999).
4. The term “minority” is used here in a numerical sense, not in a legal-political sense. Drawing on the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, whereby the Republic of Turkey was recognized internationally as a nation-state, Turkish law considers only designated non-Muslim groups as minorities. Many Kurds view the minority status as pejorative, and many Kurdish nationalists want recognition as a founding nation of Turkey as equal to Turks.
5. As a by-product of the conflict, however, there have been worrying signs of social polarization and possible violence among civilians. See, for instance, “Tepkide Ölçü Kaçıyor” (Reactions Go Overboard), *Radikal* (daily), October 28, 2007. These signs have been increasing since I completed this essay.

6. See Somer (2008) for elaboration and evidence.
7. For comparable cases, see, for instance, Seymour (2004).
8. Tezcan (2000), Özoğlu (2004), and map in Hanioglu (2008).
9. Ibid.
10. The other two factors that distinguish the Turkish and Scottish cases are that Turkish and Kurdish moderates lack sufficient autonomy from hardliners and the difficulty of identifying who the moderates are among Kurdish nationalists (Somer 2008).
11. More cooperative relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds may reduce Iran's influence in Iraq, while the resolution of the regional Kurdish question requires Iranian cooperation.
12. See Öztürk (2007). See also Heper (2007), who argues that the state policies should rather be seen as attempts to prevent “dissimilation.” Though it is true that the policies did not necessarily target the assimilation of private identities, however, they attempted to eradicate public signs of Kurdishness, such as place-names.
13. Olson (1989, p. 37) notes that during the war Atatürk built better relations with Kurdish chiefs and landowners than elite Kurdish nationalists could.
14. For an account of Kurdish history writing in different periods, see Bozarslan (2005). See also Ahmed and Gunter (2007).
15. For critical accounts from liberal and liberal-conservative perspectives, see Cermal (2003) and Akyol (2006). See also Oran (1990, pp. 122–32) and Heper (2007).
16. After 1922 Muslims from Greece were added to this influx as a result of an “exchange of populations” between the Turkish and Greek governments (Ari 1995).
17. To my surprise, I noticed that my own writing was at times inadvertently affected by this form.
18. See, for instance, Neşe Düzel's interview with Ahmet Çiğdem (Düzel 2008).
19. See, among others, Vali (2005, pp. 22–23). Özkırımlı (2008) also uses the term *bayali*, even though he highlights that Anderson does not imply that nations are any more “fake” than other social identities.
20. Neither nationalism is monolithic, however, and they contain less defensive beliefs underneath the dominant versions (Somer 2007a).
21. For a recent example, see Gürbüz (2007). See also Yeğen (2006).
22. The letter uses the phrase “blood and race,” which in that period was commonly used to denote ethnicity.
23. The border with Syria was recognized in 1922 by the Armistice of Mudanya.
24. More research is needed to establish how much Ankara was aware of the Kurdish Azadi movement and how seriously it was perceived as a threat, in comparison to other “threats.”

25. The British cited 455,000 ethnic Kurds and 66,000 ethnic Turks in a total population of 786,000; and Turks cited 263,830 ethnic Kurds and 146,960 ethnic Turks in a total population of 503,000 (*Lozan Barış Konferansı: Tutanaklar-Belgeler* 1993 [1923], pp. 343–72).
26. See especially table 5 in Somer (2008). Turkish censuses do not include questions on ethnicity, so provinces where the pro-Kurdish party got more than 10 percent of the votes are considered to have substantial ethnic Kurdish populations, as an estimate. Those provinces were Adıyaman, Ağrı, Ardahan, Batman, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Iğdır, Kars, Mardin, Muş, Şanlıurfa, Siirt, Şırnak, Tunceli, and Van.
27. Receiving about 4 percent of the national vote, the DTP candidates bypassed the 10 percent electoral threshold by running as independents.
28. In March 2003 the Turkish parliament prevented the government from allowing U.S. land forces to use Turkish territory for the invasion.
29. See, for instance, Çiçek (2008).
30. See, for instance, Tavernise and Arsu (2008).
31. For defensive Turkish nationalism and ethnic diversity, see Somer (2007a); for a discussion of the AKP's globalism, see Öniş (2007).
32. See Somer and Liaras (2010) for the relationship between AKP policies and the religious-conservative elite values regarding Kurds.
33. See, for instance, "Bush Offers Turks Added Aid to Contain Kurdish Rebels," *International Herald Tribune* (daily), November 5, 2007.
34. See, for instance, Devrim Sevımay's interview with Haşım Haşimi (Sevımay 2008).
35. Among others, see Kohen (2008).
36. For an overview, see Yavuz (2006).
37. After the completion of this essay, the AKP survived the legal charges but also lost some votes in the local elections in Kurdish areas.
38. See, for instance, the aforementioned interview with Haşım Haşimi (Sevımay 2008).
39. See, for instance, Bejan Matur's "Kürtler Kime Oy Versin?" (For Whom Should the Kurds Vote?) (Matur 2008).

## REFRAMING THE NATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

### *Kurdish Civil Society Activism in Europe*

VERA ECCARIUS-KELLY

TO CONSTRUCT A NATIONAL STATE, ITS MEMBERS HAVE TO SCULPT A unifying identity. Nationalists engage in the meticulous selection of complementary cultural features to advance their national project. Therefore nationalists frequently utilize symbolism, historical memory, and myth to enhance a web of social, political, and ethnic threads that make up a nation's fabric. Anthony D. Smith (1995, p. 19) posits that nationalists represent political archaeologists involved in a process of "rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community." Interestingly, nationalists need not live in or near the boundaries of their national state to act as capable archaeologists. Distance frequently intensifies the compulsion to reimagine, reinterpret, and construct.

Dispersed, banished, and exiled communities are often fiercely nationalistic and engage in archaeological excavations to unearth and decode their own histories. In particular, forcefully scattered Diaspora communities reproduce nationalistic and homeland-oriented aspirations by reacting to or inspiring events. Among the familiar examples of politically active communities in exile are the Jewish, Armenian, Greek, African, and Irish Diasporas (Sheffer 2005). In contrast, scholars have paid far less attention to Turkish-origin