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after 1980

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Das von Anwārī al Ḥusaynī entworfene Signet auf dem Umschlag symbolisiert eine Waage.

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Part 3: Cross-cultural Aspects of "Multiculturalism"

Remembering Culture(s) in Turkey
– A Brief Survey

Béatrice Hendrich[1]

"Multiculturalism" appears to be one of the main topics of recent literary products in Turkey. Authors like those presented in this volume dare to talk about the "non-Turkish" past of Turkey, or even about a "not-exclusively-Turkish" present. But what is the meaning of "multiculturalism" in the Ottoman–Turkish context? Is it right to label the society of the Ottoman Empire or the early Republic "multicultural"? Finally, what happens to (multi-) culture(s) in the process of remembering?

This article consists of two parts: Whereas part one gives a short description of the religio-cultural diversity of Anatolia in the historical sense, the second endeavors to analyze some key terms like *nation, minority,* and *culture.*

(Multi-)cultures in the Ottoman Empire

Referring to multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire usually means dealing with the particular socio-religious structure of the Ottoman state and its society. This structure was the result of several factors that continuously influenced, shaped, and changed Ottoman society: factors like the multitude of differing religious communities and ethnicities that existed even before the formation of the Empire, the Islamic state concept, and the effects of increasing political and commercial contact with foreign states and non-Ottoman citizens throughout Ottoman history. As an outcome of these intermingling factors,

1 Dr. Béatrice Hendrich, member of the Collaborative Research Center (SFB) Memory Cultures, Justus Liebig University of Gießen.

Ottoman society was highly segregated, at once both horizontally and verti-
cally. Social mobility or permeability between these societal segments in
Ottoman society was subject to historical fluctuations, but not unknown, as
illustrated by the example of the induction of poor Christian boys into the
Janissary ranks. The segments differed along the lines of religion, "ethnicity,"
and sex, while these factors were dominated by the classification of all sub-
jects into tax-paying *reaya*, serving and retired soldiers (*askeri*), and the ruler
and his household.

> In the broader perspective of Ottoman society, the basic distinc-
> tion, imposed by the fiat of the state, was between ruling and sub-
> ject classes. Within these categories appear the various branches
> of ruling class and, among the subject classes, the officially recog-
> nized confessional communities. In addition, there were certain
> organizational forms, smaller in scale, that found replication
> among rulers and subjects alike. (Findley 1980, 40)

To emphasize—and to construct—"ethnic" or "racial" differences and cul-
tures, and eventually nationalities and national particularities inside the
Ottoman Empire, is a very late idea, connected immediately to the emergence
of national movements in the Empire in the late-eighteenth century.

The historical multiculturality—as it is conceived today—was comprised of
communities and collectives of different qualities, like the particular religion,
language, and ethnical or tribal structure, or legal and social acceptance.[2] But
whereas religion and tribe were indeed important qualities for social and cul-
tural belonging, differing ethnicities and languages were to be found within
religious communities without causing dissolution of the latter. Legal and social
acceptance was of primary importance for the fate of each particular commu-
nity and its members. Tolerance changed drastically from the Ottoman Empire
to the Republic of Turkey, and recent percentages for linguistic and religious
communities have nothing in common with the demographic figures valid for
Asia Minor up until the nineteenth century.

The demography of Anatolia before the emergence
of the Ottoman Empire

Generally speaking, in the course of history, the Anatolian peninsula had been
hosting nearly all religions that ever existed in the Middle East, including their
confessional varieties.

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2 At this point, I should state that in this particular paper I will not be addressing the matter of
  gender- and sex-based social segregation, which is a fascinating topic in its own right.

Accounts on Jewish history in Anatolia often begin only with the arrival of the Sephardic Jews escaping the *reconquista* in Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, yet Anatolia was home to much older Jewish communities as early as the sixth century BC. The Jewish community of Sardis in Western Turkey may date back to this time, as the impressive Sardis synagogue was built in the third century AD.[3] The Jewish communities in the Diaspora (of the Eastern Mediterranean) used Greek as their spoken and written language, as did the communities in Asia Minor (Ameling 1996, 42). However, due to the Christianization of the region and increasing suppression of the Jews, a process of (Re)-Hebraizing began. Doctrines concerning history, Messianism, and the identity of Israel were established during this time. In addition and within the same context, central authority grew stronger; the patriarch gained power over Diaspora communities, and the first rabbi can be found in the inscriptions belonging to this period (Ameling 1996, 53). But, again, from the sixth century AD onward, Judeo-Greek, a version of Greek written in Hebrew characters, emerged as the language of the Romaniotes, that is, the Jews of Asia Minor and the Balkans. In the twelfth century, the Karait, an anti-rabbinical Jewish movement, began to flourish in the Byzantine Empire, where it experienced a peak in literary production and religious learning. Although the texts were written in Hebrew, they contain important examples of early Medieval Judeo-Greek, too (Lasker 2007, 791).

The Romaniots remained the dominating community among the Jewish communities in Asia Minor/Anatolia until the arrival of the Sephardic Jews.[4]

Obviously, Asia Minor was of great importance for the history of early and medieval Christianity. In 34 AD, the Christian community of Antakya was established, followed by the Christianization of other major cities, particularly in Western Anatolia (Smyrna, Ephesus, etc.). Subsequently, Asia Minor became the stage for numerous intra-Christian conflicts and Christian state power. Under Constantine I, official support and favoritism of the Christian community began (313 AD); eventually, in 380 AD, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. The suppression not only of non-Christian communities but also of Christian minorities and so-called heretics had already started under the reign of Constantine I. However, in addition to the "Roman" (from 1054 on, Eastern Orthodox) Church, Asia Minor was also a cradle for the Assyrian

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3 Though its original construction may predate the Jewish era, it was used as a synagogue from the third or fourth century onward (Ameling 1996, 31).

4 Besides these main communities, there existed in every period further (very) small Jewish communities like those of the Venetian Jews or other foreign merchandisers, or Jewish communities of other ethnicities like the Kurdish Jews. Currently, academic and polemic discussion concerning the "real descent" of Jews all over the world is fostered by genetic research, including the question of whether Ashkenazim are "Semitic" or "Turk-Slavs." One of the first to incite discussion regarding this matter was Paul Wexler (1993).

Church, founded in Urfa/Edessa ca. 50 AD, and the Armenian Apostolic Church, state and church at once, in 301 AD. So, when the Ottoman tribe expanded its rule and finally conquered Constantinople/Byzantium, Christian subjects were by no means members of one community but rather followers of different liturgies and speakers of diverse languages of various relations with the Near East, the Caucasus, and Europe.

The Islamization of Anatolia was a rather slow process. Despite the early Muslims' attempts to conquer Constantinople in the first century of the Muslim calendar (674–678), it was not until the rise of Sultan Mehmed II that a Muslim dynasty would come to rule over all of Anatolia (1453 AD). The Muslim rulers from different parts of Asia Minor before the Ottomans had been—like themselves—of Sunni denomination, e.g. the Kurdish Marvanids at Diyarbakır (990–1096), or the *Rum* Seljuks (1071–1310). However, possibly due to the political and military instability Anatolia experienced until Ottoman rule, Islamization of the population was not a controlled act by Sunni theologians and institutions; instead, it was carried out by wandering dervishes who taught "folk Islam" inspired by different influences like pre-Islamic rituals in Central Asia, mystical movements and thoughts (such as Sufism), and Christian heretics. Eventually, the influence of the Shiite Safavids in Iran added Shiite ideas like the belief in the coming *mahdi*, the Muslim Messiah, and the deity of the first Shiite Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, to this sometimes anarchic Anatolian Islam. Uprisings of those heterodox or messianic currents—due mostly to economical tensions—gave Muslim *and* Christian rulers a hard time, and did not come to an end until the seventeenth century AD.[5]

Above we have discussed *religious diversity* in Anatolia up until the fifteenth century AD, in conjunction with the matter of linguistic diversity. Here, the intriguing point is that language, ethnicity, and religion were almost never congruent in the way we would expect them to be from a modern viewpoint. Not only did the Jews speak Greek, but also the Sunni-Turk Seljuks spoke Persian. Meanwhile, the Kurds followed a variety of different religions. Only the Armenians possess a degree of historical congruence, as an ethnic group, using the Armenian language, and having their own Armenian church(es). However, even the Armenian Church would undergo its own Schism in the eleventh century and develop local identities and cultural orientations.

The Ottoman Empire – societal segregation

The expansion of Ottoman rule by no means put an end to the religious diver-

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5 These uprisings are usually subsumed under the heading of "Alevi" or "Kızılbaş," but these headings suggest a historically incorrect homogeneity of the uprisings.

6 The homepage of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America still gives an idea about this historical relationship (www.aeuna.org/index.htm).

sity of Anatolia. Of course, it was socially advantageous to be Muslim or to convert, as far as higher ranks in civil service were concerned. But all in all, the Ottoman rulers were interested in the functioning of state affairs, not in creating a "Muslim state." Their pragmatic approach also favored their relatively low level of interference in the organizations and traditions of their non-Muslim subjects. For that reason, the so-called *millet* system—allegedly the indisputable basis of religious order in the Empire—proved to be the construction of later authors.

> The Ottomans, it appears, did not develop rigidly uniform structures for their minorities. Rather, their pragmatism and laissez-faire attitudes allowed for the emergence of flexible arrangements, resulting in the development of diverse structures of self-government. These arrangements took into account the needs and interests of the state, as well as the particular circumstances of each of the minority communities. (Levy 1994, 42)

At the same time, however, this Ottoman pragmatism resulted in much sorrow and acts of injustice for the population (of any non-Muslim religious affiliation), particularly in the form of the Ottoman settlement policy called *sürgün* ("re-location"). Thus, for example, following the conquest of Constantinople, Karaite and Romaniot communities were deported from different regions and sent to the capital by force, in order to increase the latter's population density (Hacker 1982, 118–121).

In general, Ottoman religious policy differed over time and place, but the legally accepted—that is, accepted by Muslim law and tradition—Christian and Jewish community, "people of the Book," were again in an advantageous position in comparison to all other religious currents and communities, be they Muslim heretics, minorities (see Ocak 1999), or adherents of completely different religions, like the Yazidi. These religious minorities had no law to appeal to, so they could only survive in mental secrecy, like the Crypto-Jews (*Sabbatei* or *Dönme*) who outwardly converted to Islam but privately remained Shabbatean, or in physical secrecy, like the descendants of the Shiite-influenced Kızılbaş, who settled in remote mountain regions of the Empire.

Interestingly enough, the real hay-day of the above-mentioned *millet* system was the twilight of the Ottoman Empire, the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century. But by then, the "system" had gained a particular meaning and function: It had gained importance for the rise of nationalism in the Empire, and the emergence of particular "*millet* identities" was fostered by European states. In 1831, the Catholic-Armenian *millet* constituted itself, followed by the Protestant-Armenian in 1846. While the first was backed by France (Braude & Lewis 1982, 22), the second was the result of the endeavor of American Missionaries.[6] The rationale behind this move was to influence Ottoman politics by influencing the members of the particular *millet.*

The so-called Greek *millet*, whose correct name was *Rum Milleti*, "Community of the Romans," displayed an even greater internal variety than the Jewish community did. Its members were united only in their adherence to the orthodox belief, and their churches were many; furthermore, parallel to the development of nationalism, some ethnicities left the *Rum Milleti*, and new members joined. In just one century, the characteristics of this *millet* changed almost completely. With the foundation of the Greek State in 1830, the Autonomous Greek Church came into existence (recognized in 1850 by the Patriarch of Istanbul). In the same period, the Serbian Church became de facto autonomous, and in 1859 the Rumanian Church was founded (recognized in 1885). Finally, in 1870, the Bulgarian Exarchate was founded (Clogg 1982, 194). Due to the withdrawal of the Slavic communities and the loss of Arab Christians as a result of the loss of Arab territories, plus a brief influx of Greek labor migrants, in its last decades the *Rum Milleti* was dominated by "Greek" members (Clogg 1982, 195–196), including some Turkophone communities. Until the formal demise of the *Rum Milleti* in 1919 (Clogg 1982, 200), many Ottoman orthodox were not interested in Greek irredentism. It was politics and military force that turned the "*Rum*" into "Greek."

The late Ottoman Empire – Islam and nation

Under the impact of European nationalism and irredentism, of military defeat and economic decline, the rulers of the last Ottoman century tried a variety of state-stabilizing actions, of both conservative and progressive natures. They were accompanied in—or prompted to—their efforts by intellectuals of the time, like Namık Kemal and the Young Ottomans' Society (*Genç Osmanlılar Cemiyeti*).[7] Some political measures meant to stabilize state and society seem to have been contradictory, since they simultaneously fostered both a religious ("Muslim") and a national ("Ottoman" or "Turkish") identity, instead of unifying the whole population under the roof an Ottoman nationality, regardless of particular religious affiliations. The Constitution of 1876 was most welcomed by non-Muslim Ottomans as the beginning of legal equality (of male citizens), but the single paragraph stressed—while promising this equality—for the first time the dominance not only of Islam as the religion of the state, but also mastery of the Turkish language as a precondition for a post in the civil service (Article 18). At the end of the nineteenth century, the actual "Young Turks" movement began to emerge, carried out predominantly by students of the

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7 There is often confusion surrounding the particular names of groups in this regard, as the Young
   Ottomans were called "*Jeune Turcs*" abroad. This confusion of terms is even to be found in
   Turkish publications. The "real" *Jeune Turcs*, however, were the activists of the early twentieth
   century, the "*Jön Türk*."

Military Academy of Medicine, a modern establishment of education. One of the first great successes of this movement was the restoring of the Constitution of 1908, with a revision in 1909. Again, members of the religious minorities in the Empire and Europeans expressed their hope for a better future—that is to say, social peace through legal equality. But the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress had already established an ideological basis of Turkish-Muslim nationalism with a substantial share of (modern European) racism.[8]

The last decades of the Ottoman Empire were a devastating period for Anatolia:

> The final decade in the history of the Ottoman Empire witnessed a tremendous uprooting of a range of ethnic and religious communities in the Balkans and Asia Minor. These migrations, which were caused exclusively by political developments and by war, affected, at a very rough estimate, a minimum of three million people. (Zürcher 2003, 1)

The migrations that Zürcher mentions were caused by the regional wars between the Empire and the (newly emerging) national states at its border, World War I, the subsequent "War of Independence" that ended in the creation of the Turkish Republic, and a chain of early "ethnic cleansings" in the remaining parts of the (former) Empire. Just to cite some of these events: The Balkan War of 1912 resulted in 800,000 refugees and a high rate of casualties caused by diseases. 400,000 Muslims from the Balkans had to be resettled in Anatolia while 200,000 Greek-speaking Orthodox from the Eastern Aegean were expelled to Greece in 1913. The dissolution of the (Greek- and Turkish-speaking) Greek Orthodox community continued (mass escape from Izmir in 1922 after the Turkish victory, and compulsive population exchange in 1923), until eventually there remained only some hundred thousand members of the *Rum milleti* in Istanbul (the population of the city had been exempted from the exchange). The remaining community then had to experience the economic catastrophe of the Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) of 1942, and the politically supported pogroms of 1955 against Greeks and other minorities.

> The result was that the large majority of Istanbul Greeks decided to emigrate to Greece or the United States and at the end of the Twentieth Century the community had shrunk to about 2,000 souls, or about one percent of its former size. (Zürcher 2003, 6)

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8 See Hanioğlu's groundbreaking work, "Preparation for a Revolution" (2001).

Culture, nation, minority

In order to understand the semantic and political difficulties of (the term as well as the concept of) *multiculturalism*, we should first examine the primary term *culture*. Culture, as a derivate of the Latin *cultura*, meaning "farming" or "cultivation," connotes civilization and *bildung*, the opposite of "wild nature," a refined way of thinking, ruling, and behavior, or something we might term "an appreciated kind of cultural production." For the evolutionists (like Edward Tylor) of the nineteenth century, culture was the *conditio humana*. Development and refinement of culture were bound to education and scientific endeavor, while the seed of culture existed in every person or people.

The most famous sibling of culture, however, is the nation. European nationalism is based to a considerable degree upon the idea of a timeless national culture. Of course, European culture was considered superior to other cultures. Johann Gottfried von Herder in turn gave birth to the *culture nation*. A nation was defined by distinctive language, religion, art, and economic systems. But geographical parameters could also help to define a nation. In this case, other nations had to have *other cultures*. Also, here we see the reason why we unconsciously speak of "different cultures" when what we actually refer to are different nations and their citizens.

In cultural anthropology of the twentieth century, culture is again a *conditio humana*, but understood as a dynamic system of signs and symbolic forms that enables humans to perceive the world, to communicate, to give meaning to the world (cf. works of Clifford Geertz). However, this definition could also lead to a culturalist, eventually static and essentialist understanding of isolated cultures with distinct insurmountable frontiers between them. This has constituted and still constitutes a major topic of discussion in ethnological and anthropological studies.

Culture, nation, and religion

Now, I will return to the political sphere and the "development of culture" in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. In the case of Turkey, the concepts of nation and culture are directly connected with Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924). Interestingly enough, culture entered the Turkish political discussion not as *kültür*, which is the dominating term at present, but as *hars*, a direct translation of *cultura*.

"According to Gökalp and Tekin Alp [1883-1961] culture consists of the sentiments and attitudes adopted from earliest childhood onwards from one's parents and immediate surroundings" (Zürcher 2000). *Hars* is, in Gökalp's concept, counterbalanced with *medeniyet*, civilization, "the high culture which is consciously learned at a later age. It is international and can be changed at will" (Zürcher 2000; see also Ayhan Aktar's paper in this volume on pp. 29–62). Nation, or *millet*, is in Gökalp's understanding based on a common *hars*, the

latter consisting of common language and education (see Gökalp 1923, 1–6). Gökalp and his ideas were followed by several authors, such as Tekin Alp, Yusuf Akçura, and Ömer Seyfettin, but Gökalp's sociological understanding of nation and culture took on a biologistic, racist drive in the publications of Akçura and Seyfettin.

It should be underlined here that Gökalp used the word *millet* in the sense of nation. But was a *millet* not a religious community? The terminological history of *millet* reveals the tensions and contradictions of this term. As mentioned above, *millet* was once one of several terms used to refer to any one of the major religious communities in the Ottoman Empire. From the nineteenth century on, however, it became a synonym for an ethnicity or nation inside the empire, as new, previously unheard of "*millet*'s fitting this definition came into existence: Take for example the Catholic-Armenian *millet*, backed by France and constituted in 1831, or the Protestant-Armenians, who came together, supported by American missionaries, in 1846. European languages and political translation played their part in blurring the boundaries between religious community and nation: In 1863, Ottoman Armenians adopted a government code that aimed to resolve religious and cultural issues within the Armenian community. It was called *Ermeni Millet Nizamnamesi*, "Bylaws of the Armenian *Millet*," but it was translated into European languages as "National Constitution" and was thought to be a document concerning political and social rights of the Ottoman Armenians (Hendrich 2003, 52–53). The so-called population exchange of 1924, i.e., the forced expulsion of Muslims from Greece and orthodox Christians from Anatolia, represents another example of such terminological and conceptual confusion. The heading of the Turkish version uses the words "Turkish and Rum populations," the French version is "*des populations grecques et turques*," whereas Article 1 runs "Turkish citizens of Greek-Orthodox religion in Turkish territory and Greek citizens of Muslim religion in Greek territory" (Hendrich 2003, 183–185).

Despite the laicism policy of the Republic of Turkey, the non-(Sunni)-Muslim communities that remained were continuously confronted with hostile acts in the form of new discriminating laws as well as individual discrimination. The "Citizen, speak Turkish!" campaign of the 1930s allegedly had the goal of *unifying* the young nation. The effect, however, was that citizens with a "notable accent" no longer dared to open their mouths and speak in public places. It can be argued that this movement was already racist, if we take the respective publications, public speeches, and cartoons into consideration.[9] Roughly speaking, throughout modern Turkish history, from the Young Ottomans until the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the later decades of the twentieth century, a "Turk" was at the same time a (Sunni) Muslim (see also Ayhan Aktar's paper

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9 For some of these stereotypes as seen in anti-Semitic cartoons, see Bali 2004, passim.

in this volume, pp. 29–62).

But non-Muslim communities were not the only "problem" for the efforts of Turkification. Also, Muslim brethren whose mother tongue was not Turkish were a threat to the homogeneity of the national culture (and thereby the stability of the state). The largest community of this kind in Turkey is the Kurds.

Millet, *azınlık*, and minority

Above, I have introduced and discussed the term *millet* and the semantic change of this term that once meant a (mostly non-Muslim) religious community in the Ottoman Empire, but eventually served and still serves as an equivalent for nation.[10] Interestingly enough, when the semantic of *millet* changed to mean "nation," another term took its place: *ekalliyet* (or *akalliyet*), later *azınlık*.[11] This terminological change hints at a conceptual change in the relationship between the ruling or hegemonic class and "the rest." Whereas in the Empire, the ruling class was simply defined by its status, Turkish nationalism had to deal with—as every other nationalism—the question of numerical majority and minority, because (constructed) majority is the basis for national identity, we-group identity, and the justification to rule. But in the very first years of the National Assembly in Ankara, the term *ekalliyet* itself as well as the "alleged" existence of any minority group inside the new boundaries were usually rejected as an alien concept introduced into political debates by foreign powers in order to weaken the young nation. The idea of "racial (*ırken/ırki*) minorities" in particular was strongly rejected, as seen, for example, in the following statement by İsmail Suphi, then-Deputy of the National Assembly:

> Our National Pact has made mention of the rights of the *millet* which is unified in race, religion, and ideal—the Turkish *millet.* The religious minorities are accepted. But no racial minorities have been mentioned there. Because those consider their historical and economical rights unified in every aspect under the name "Muslim." (Ünver 1985, 867. [My translation])

With the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923, "minority" became a legal term in Turkey, meaning non-Muslim communities. In Articles 37–45 of the Treaty, non-Muslim citizens of Turkey were granted religious and institutional freedom in rather general and broad terms. It is noteworthy, however, that until today, the Turkish reading of the text restricts these privileges to the Orthodox, the

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10 A second word, *ulus*, was invented to replace the Ottoman term *millet*, but did not really succeed.
11 *Ekalliyet* is the Ottoman equivalent of minority, while *azınlık* is the new Turkish term for the same.

Armenian, and the Jewish communities, while excluding any other (e.g. Christian) communities—not to mention the problematic matter of actually *implementing* the guarantees.

However, as indicated above, there existed further groups of the kind we tend to call "minorities" today, minorities not by religion but by language (and "ethnicity"). The largest group of this kind today is that of the Kurds, although "Kurdishness" again is a political construct used both from inside by Kurdish activists to mark we-ness as well as by anti-Turkish politicians to mark other-ness. Should we intend to challenge this Kurdishness, we could take a closer look at the Kurdish minority and find several different Kurdish languages and dialects[12] and also see that Kurds are not united by religion. As it were though, "Kurds" and their inclusion in the new society were important topics during the sessions of the first National Assembly. During the Mosul Crisis in 1922–23, Kurds had to be Turks by whatever rationale in order to maintain hold on the province of Mosul. Hence the following statement by Hüseyin Rauf, Prime Minister of the National Assembly at the time:

> The bigger part of Mosul is one of our provinces inhabited by the most heroic sons of Turkey's people, the Turks and the Kurds, who are united by religion, sentiment, fortune, and misfortune, and who will feel free only after the unification with us. (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi* 3.1.23, Session I 167 C 1, 147)

Müfid Efendi, National Assembly Deputy of Kırşehir, produced more proof for the uniformity of Turks and Kurds:

> Let me put it this way: If we remove the character *waw* from the word Turk and read the remaining characters backwards, than we have the word Kurd, and if we read Kurd backwards, we get the word Turk. That's why Turk means Kurd, and Kurd means Turk. Circassian means Turk. Laz means Turk. We do not know differences. We have to look at the word itself. [...] If we talk about minorities, we mean religious minorities. (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi* 3.11.22, Session I 132 C 3, 364 f)[13]

In 1925, the use of ethnic names like Circassian, Kurd, or Laz was prohibited by special decree.

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12 Not to mention the problematic issue of distinguishing dialects from languages and the delicate question of whether Zaza is Kurdish at all and if Zazas are Kurds or if there are any real Zazas, real Kurds, etc.

13 For more details on this discussion in the parliament, see Hendrich 2003, 181–190.

To put it in a nutshell: In Turkey, there exist different kinds of minorities, the legally accepted religious ones, and the (non-existing) ethnic or linguistic (or non-Sunni-Muslim!) minorities. Only the former may be called *azınlık* whereas the latter have no legal minority status. Minority status as a *privileged* status, a gate to further funding or political autonomy, has not yet met public consciousness in Turkey. On the contrary, the existence (and recognition) of any minority is still expected to weaken national unity.

This discrepancy in semantics causes further problems within the realm of international relations, e.g., in the negotiation between Turkey and the European Union (EU). Although the negotiations regarding cultural and religious freedom in reality only constitute a minor subset of the whole huge bundle of topics to be discussed, this particular topic arouses great interest in the public. It is not that the negotiators are unable to recognize the different semantics of the term minority in Turkey as opposed to in Europe, but that the differences repeatedly lead to fruitless discussions and delays. The Alevi community's understanding of "minority" may be given as another example of the term's ambiguity. In its progress report for 2005, the EU classified the Alevi and the Kurdish communities as minorities. This classification aroused vehement protest not only by the state but also by the Alevis in Turkey themselves. Whereas the EU-codified understanding of a minority encompasses all collectives that see themselves as socially, politically, culturally or economically disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* the majority, Alevi spokespersons understood the term as a discriminatory insult. Hence the words of İzettin Doğan, head of a major Alevi association in Turkey, the Cem Vakfı:

> It is not right to count the Alevis among the minorities. Alevis are not a minority, they are part of the founding elements of this country, and today, there are more than 25 million [Alevis in Turkey]. We are not in favor of this minority-majority discussion.[14]

Cultural Diversity, national identity, societal peace, and "re-membering"

Multiculturalism was supposed to be the answer to several questions raised by the former concept of culture: Due to the processes of globalization and migration, the "traditional" frontiers between nations and cultures seemed to disappear. People of different cultures happened to inhabit the same town or neighborhood. The superiority paradigm of European culture had to be replaced by an acceptable mode of handling different cultures. People of different cultural backgrounds had to be granted their own cultural rights, the right to exert their own religion and pass their cultural heritage on to the next generation. However,

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14 http://www.alevihaber.org/v2/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=142 (accessed August 11, 2006).

as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, today multiculturalism is subject to criticism from different perspectives. From an ethnological point of view, its (side-) effects were not so different from the results of a one-nation-one-culture paradigm. Once again, individuals are reduced to objects of a particular culture, as multiculturalism adheres and continues othering (Sökefeld 2004, 131), and instead of granting rights, forces the individual into a prison of a static set of rituals and worldview that transforms into a system of compulsory culture.

A term similar to that of multiculturalism is "cultural diversity." Ayhan Kaya explains to his Turkish readers the political background of the term minority as used by the EU by saying:

> The EU-project has sometimes the quality of assurance for European unity against the aspirations of ethno-nationalists. For this reason, the hegemonic discourse in the EU is not the minority discourse but the discourse of cultural diversity. (Kaya 2006, 58)

Cultural diversity is supposed to be a solution to the problems caused by nationalism or essentialist culturalism. The UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity from 2001 stresses the need for a certain political framework:

> For the first time, cultural diversity was acknowledged [in the Universal Declaration] as "the common heritage of humanity", the defense of which was deemed to be an ethical and practical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. The concept of 'diversity' reaffirms that plurality is the reservoir needed for freedom, that cultural pluralism therefore constitutes a political response to the actual fact of cultural diversity and that such pluralism is inseparable from a democratic framework. Thus, freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equality of access for all cultures to artistic expressions, scientific and technological knowledge, and the possibility for them to be present in the means of expression and dissemination constitute essential guarantees of cultural diversity. Finally, cultural policies, which are the true driving force in cultural diversity, should foster the production and dissemination of diversified cultural goods and services. (Stenou 2004, 20)

The notion of cultural memory appears in Gökalp's concept as well as in recent documents of the UN and its organizations. A community or collective that is able to prove the existence of a particular tangible or intangible cultural heritage may obtain further material support from UNESCO. In return, UNESCO's support proves the existence and value of this heritage. This particular kind of circular argument still creates a decisive moment for UNESCO's rai-

son d'être and practical work. Concerning cultural memory and multicultural-
ism, we face a problem similar to that of national cultural memory: The mem-
ory politics of multiculturalism are about present politics, not past memories,
and the safeguarding of alleged cultural roots leads to intriguing results like the
compulsory "Turkish mother tongue" classes for Kurdish children (whose par-
ents migrated from Turkey) in the Diaspora.

Culture, multiculturalism, nation, and cultural memory are major topics and
terms at all levels of discourse in Turkey. Despite the academic endeavors to
clarify and update the terms, the public discourse uses them for its own pur-
poses and empowers them because we make sense of our world by naming
and classifying its constituents. Cultural production is not immune to the attrac-
tions of culturalism and essentialism. But art has the chance to overcome stat-
ic classifications, and it always has. Art that confines itself to the boundaries of
a nation or an ideology is poor art, if art at all. Memory and remembering are
constitutive elements of artistic production, but it should not be forgotten that
memory is located in the present.

As the volume at hand shows, "history" is a major element of recent literary
production in Turkey. Besides books that sing the nationalistic song of out-
standing Turkish history, Turkifying every single cultural development and
even the history of mankind, many other books and stories stress the cultural
diversity of Ottoman society, the painful experiences of the minorities at the
end of the Empire, and include Kurdish or Armenian figures in a story set in
the present. We may imagine several reasons for this trend: The function of
artists as a societal avant-garde may be one of these reasons. For example,
more than ninety years after the Armenian genocide (the "expulsion"), politi-
cians still consider the topic (an open) "taboo." However, several authors have
found quite different ways to put this (hi-)story on the agenda and to open the
door for political discussion in the future. It might also be a kind of nostalgic
longing for a past that looks so much more attractive to artists than the mix of
global-national-uniform culture that currently dominates public forms of
expression in today's Turkey. The "balance" between the hegemonic class and
the minority seems to be reinforced by these nostalgic products:

> The only possible way to speak about Armenian identity seems to
> be from the subject position that the liberal multicultralist dis-
> course has opened up to different cultures, representing them
> only within a picture where they stand to illustrate the richness or
> the color of Turkey's ethnic mosaic. That is to say, the revival of
> ethnic cultures in Turkey over the last decades fetishizes "the cul-
> tural heritage of Turkey." (Bilal 2006, 78)

Re-membering the past is an act carried out in the present, a search for
pieces, parts of a puzzle that might be an answer to recent questions, if only

we are able to embed these pieces into our pre-existing perception of the past and appraisal of the present. To tell the story of the multi-cultural past of the Empire and the destruction of its society means in effect to tell the story of the *construction* of a multicultural society (by means of nationalist ideology) and the both devastating and intended *results* of that construction.

So, read carefully, for these books can give the reader warning concerning current constructions of "differing cultures" in Turkish society, not because cultures have to clash, but because the essentialist construction of different cultures might actually be preparation for the next "unification."

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