‘Between the Ottoman collapse and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey 1918-1923: civil war in Anatolia?’

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The idea of civil war does not sit well with the image of Turkey promoted by its political elite. In 2015, when questioned whether the country was running the risk of civil war, then prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu replied that a sound nation was the best insurance against that risk: his nation was not in a state of chaos; but stable and had shown itself to want peace.[1] The French revolution had helped established the nation as the source of unity in society. Once it was indivisible, those who threatened the nation with civil war could be accused of prejudicing its very basis, and efforts at establishing national unity then became ways of suppressing internal divisions that could bring civil war.[2] The question here is not whether Turkey is in a state of civil war – it is not - but whether there was such a conflict, at its very foundation between 1918 and 1923.

When we examine the historiography, the nation will again appear as the counter-concept to civil war. For the struggle was one in which the national will appeared to prevail over external constraints, rather than a conflict given much of its animus by internal division. The most important achievement of Mustafa Kemal ‘Atatürk’ and his followers was to have the 1920 Sèvres Treaty replaced with the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, a change which reversed the partition of Anatolia. Their independence struggle was generally known as the *Milli Mücadele* (national struggle); later *Kurtuluş Savaşı* (War of Liberation) came to be used. A set of conflicts with their

[1]Interview in Düsseldorf, May 3 2015; http://haberler.com – Davutoğlu – Türkiye’de -ic -Savaş-Sanaryosu – 7267455-haberler.

[2] E. González Calleja, *Las Guerres Civíles: Perspectivas de Analysis desde las Sciencias Sociales*, Madrid, 2013, 18.

roots in World War gave rise to a successful state-building project with a strong sense of identity and purpose. The *Milli Mücadele* narrative stressed the contribution of national struggle to this project; other forms of conflict were overshadowed by this theme.

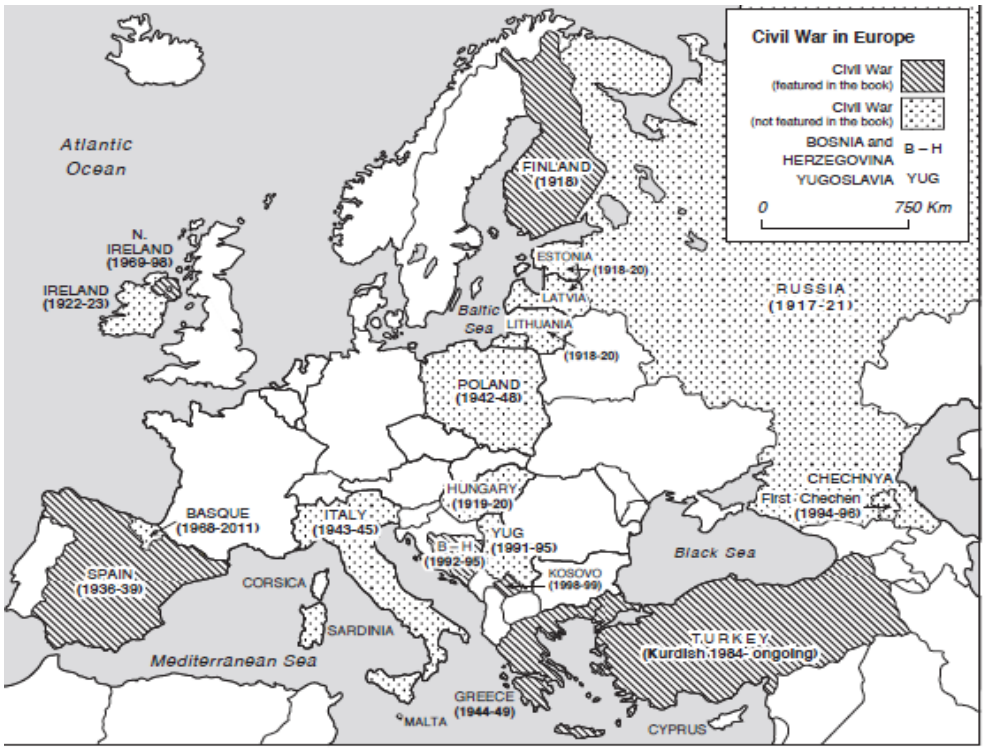
Being on Europe's edge Turkey can easily be ignored by civil war scholars. There was no *civitas* within which a classic civil war could take place. The last decades of the Ottoman Empire saw the transformation of a culturally diverse population – with strong intermediary institutions such as churches and religious brotherhoods – into separate nations, a process which reflected the strength of religious and ethnic divisions in the face of weak civic ties.[3] The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 and the Turkish independence struggle saw violence that was international, ethnic, genocidal, religious, and paramilitary at the same time. Yet, the complexity of what happened raises issues of causation, definition and periodization scholars of other civil wars will recognize. And two generic concepts of civil war can be applied to Turkey. Armenia, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Ireland, and Poland also lost part of what they claimed to be their traditional territory as they established their states in and around 1918. Far from guaranteeing a united response, it raised the specter of civil war.

1.1. Civil War on the European Periphery

In twentieth-century Europe civil war was largely a phenomenon of the periphery. Whether those which followed the Russian revolution, Spain in 1936, or the later cases of Greece and Yugoslavia, none occurred in its core industrialized north-west. Table One shades in those countries that experienced an 'internal war' up to 2012, a generic term

[3] See N. Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Co-existence and its Destruction in late Ottoman Anatolia* (Oxford, 2012).

encompassing conflicts not necessarily classic civil wars. Of note is the shaded line stretching from Finland in the north-west, through the Baltics, Central Europe and the Balkans and ending in Turkey. This was an area where the outbreak of internal conflict after 1917 was closely bound up with major changes in the European state system. The Great War had resulted in a legitimacy crisis for Europe's Imperial elites. Four old states were restored (Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, and Poland), seven came into being (Albania, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, the Irish Free State, and Latvia). The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes - "Yugoslavia" - falls between these two categories. Some states experienced civil war almost as soon as they became independent, albeit in very different political and territorial forms.



Europe's Internal Wars 1917 – 2012.

One reason for this was their location. Many conflicts occurred after 1917 in 'the large and indefinite border zone' called 'the Europe in between', which included the Baltic Sea area, Central Europe, and the Balkans, and was traditionally dominated by the European

land empires.[4] These regions had no strong cultural inter-connections, but their civil conflicts were generally affected by the example of Bolshevik Russia, the collapse of empires, and the new radicalized politics of national self-determination.[5] Geography was crucial: specifically, their proximity to European imperial centers (Berlin, Istanbul, St Petersburg or Vienna) that collapsed as a consequence of World War I.

A second reason concerns nationalism as a successor ideology. The new nation states had to deal, not only with disaffected minorities, but with nationalist conflicts over the new state itself. Typically, each side 'claimed that it represented the true interests of the nation while its opponents were merely the agents of a foreign power'.[6] And external military intervention had made these claims plausible. In no case did adherents to the ancient regime stay in power. The war had discredited Empire and led to the abandonments of reformist nationalist positions. Yet radical nationalists (in Finland, Hungary, and the Baltic States all socialist) would not succeed either.

This points to the third factor. Historically, according to Stanley Payne, civil wars primarily took three major forms: succession conflicts, revolutionary wars, and secessionist struggles. Succession crises have long been common after leadership changes, regime change and imperial collapse. Common in traditional monarchies, beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, succession crises began to develop important ideological and social dimensions.[7] Such conflicts emerged relatively soon after the Empires collapsed in World War One. In the three Baltic States, Finland, Hungary, and Ireland rival claimants to state power tried to impose their visions on the new states. These violent conflicts were not simply over who should succeed the former

[4] V. Saarikoski, 'Between East and West. Finland and Hungary during the Cold War', in Olli Vehvilainen and Attila Pok (eds*.) Hungary and Finland in the Twentieth Century*,Helsinki, 2002, 119.
[5] R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London, 2017).
[6] J. Coakley, 'Political Succession and regime change in new states in Interwar Europe: Ireland, Finland, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic States' *European Journal of Political Research*, 14 (1987) 194.
[7] S .Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905-1949*, Cambridge, 2011, 1-2.

(British, Hapsburg, or Tsarist) Imperial rulers; partition and revolution complicated things.

How does the Turkish case fit into this broader pan-European pattern? Turkey witnessed the collapse of an Imperial Centre in Istanbul. A violent transition to the Nation state also took place. And the Ottoman defeat occasioned a crisis of legitimacy in which competing political projects tried to reshape the new order.[8] Nevertheless, in *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* Polish poet Cezlsaw Milosz commented on the difficulty those on the periphery have in connecting their experiences to those of a Europe that has taken 'progressive' conflicts, such as the French revolution as the paradigm.[9] Notably, the Turkish War of Independence took place at the heart of an Empire, was fought against the Sultan and the western powers simultaneously, and involved a process of territorial contraction, which went back to the Italian invasion of the Ottoman province of Libya and the Dodecanese Islands in 1911 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. Because its territorial frontiers were shaped by wars with a host of enemies, the best comparisons will be with countries that experienced multiple dimensions of conflict at the same time.

1.2. From the Ottoman collapse to the formation of the Republic.

In 1918 Turkey had a disadvantaged position in the international arena and the form taken by this disadvantage was military defeat and occupation. The Mudros armistice of 30 October 1918 marked the further dismemberment of the Empire after a century of losses. Britain gained Mosul, France and Italy acquired territory in Turkey's Mediterranean regions, while Istanbul fell under Allied control on 16 March 1919. The

[8] H. Kayali, 'The struggle for independence', in Reşat Kasaba (ed.) *Turkey in the Modern World: Vol 4 of The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Cambridge, 2008, 113.
[9] C. Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, New York, 1986, 3.

armistice opened up the way to further humiliation: Greece was given Smyrna, and saw the possibility of pursuing its *"Megali Idea"* that dreamt of re-possessing Istanbul. Greek troops landed at Smyrna in May 1919.

The signing of the Sèvres Treaty by the Sultan and his government on August 10, 1920, made the situation more existential. It foresaw the division of Anatolia into zones of British, French and Italian influence, made the Dardanelles subject to international control, granted large parts of western Thrace to Greece, and allowed for the formation of an Armenian state (alongside an autonomous Kurdish zone) in the east. The choice facing the Turkish political elite had been between a strategy based on Istanbul and one based on Anatolia. The former meant operating within the existing Ottoman institutions and involved an attempt to salvage as much as possible of independence by diplomatic maneuvering with the Allied powers. The Anatolian strategy meant building up popular resistance outside the capital and asserting national independence by military force.[10]

Because it meant partition, Sèvres reinforced the wisdom of the Anatolian strategy, as well as the legitimacy of the counter-government being established by Atatürk in Ankara. Nevertheless, with Anatolia in a state of chaos, there was no guarantee that Atatürk or anyone else would come to dominate the situation. The first World War had seen massive violence, some genocidal, against Christian minorities millions of whom remained in Anatolia in 1918. In particular - Greeks in the Black Sea region and Armenians in the east, who had suffered during the reign of the Committee of Union and Progress (1913-1918) - had good reason to oppose any renewed Turkish nationalism under Atatürk, which they correctly saw as a continuation of the CUP itself.

[10] D.A. Rustow, 'Atatürk as an institution-builder' in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State* (eds.) A Kazancigil and E. Özbüdün, London, 1981, 64.

Central Anatolia remained a war zone, with various Circassian and Kurdish bandit chieftains challenging his authority wherever it was weak, such as in the area inland from Smyrna, the shores of Izmit, the mountains around Kutahya and near Bolu, and even the western approaches to Ankara itself.[11]

One reason for Atatürk's success was political. For Michel Foucault 'the successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing the rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them'.[12] The process of seizing the rules went back to the Sivas Congress of July 23 1919, when Atatürk positioned himself as the head of what was then a decentralized resistance. The Congress was composed of 38 representatives of local branches of *the Anadolu Ve Rumeli Müdfaa-I Hukuk Cemiyeti* (Committees for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia), coming from all corners of Anatolia, (with delegates from Aydin, Istanbul, Hakkari, and Samsun for example). The Committee would also supply the delegates for the Erzurum Congress which met between 23 July and 7 August 1919. These Congresses soon led to the establishment of the *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, the Turkish parliament on 23 April 1920. The delegates of the original People's Rights committees simply became the People's Party in the parliament (also controlled by Atatürk). This absorption made it appear as if the Turkish nation, and its sole representatives in the Ankara parliament were the legitimate successor to the Ottomans.

A second reason for Atatürk's success was military. The occupation of distinct zones by the western powers in 1918 and 1919 meant that the Istanbul government had lost more of its authority in the provinces where the nationalist resistance first

[11] S. McKeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923* , London, 2016, p.446.
[12] M. Foucault, 'Nietsche, Geneology, History' in D. F. Bouchard (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Language Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* , Ithaca, 1977, 86.

emerged.[13] The initially spontaneous nationalist forces, the *Kuvayi Milliye* were eventually placed under centralized command. Important military victories took place, notably against the Greek forces at Sakarya (late August, early September 1921) and during the second battle of Inönü between 23 March and 1 April 1921. Atatürk's main aims, securing the territorial integrity and full independence of any Turkish state were then achieved by the Lausanne Treaty of 24 July 1923. Generally, the later a state has become part of the modern European state system, the more likely it is to have been formed as a consequence of wars between the older European states, or from negotiations ending those wars.[14] Yet the Turks were the only defeated power in 1918 to succeed in reversing the terms of the Paris Peace Conference. This reversal supported Atatürk's belief that in international politics dominance and sovereignty are won with force, power and coercion.[15]

A third reason was the vigor of Republicanism as a successor ideology. Atatürk used the term *inkilap tarihimiz* (our transformation history) for those years.[16] The Ottoman defeat had provided the perfect opportunity for the centralizing policies officers like him had always wished for. These policies had their roots in Ottoman reformist thinking but defeat in war and occupation clarified their importance for the 'Kemalists'.[17] The Amasya Protocol of June 22, 1919, had called on people to disobey the Sultan. Subsequently, the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, the National Pact/*Mislak-i-Milli*, the establishing of the Ankara parliament, and the 1921 constitution helped elaborate these policies. The process culminated in the declaration

[13] H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie: De l'Empire a nos jours*, Paris 2015, 332.
[14] C. Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton New Jersey, 1975), 46.
[15] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*, Istanbul 2020, 153.
[16] *Nutuk,* 166.
[17] M. *Yeğen, Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, Istanbul, 2009, 72.

of a Republic on 29 October 1923 and the abolition of the Caliphate on 3 March the following year.[18]

Atatürk would have three major successes to boast of: the transformation of a defeated Empire into a nation-state, a victorious war of independence, and an educational programme committed to a secular understanding of progress.[19] Yet it does not follow that there was no civil war. Atatürk later referred to the provocative role the Istanbul government played in directing the people to arm themselves and to kill each other.[20] Doğu Perinçek argues that Atatürk knew very well that every liberation struggle is a civil war. The struggle against British and French imperialism eventually became a struggle against the Istanbul government. At its heart was a conflict between those who had no option but to protect the territorial integrity of the country the easy way - (under British protection) - against those who lost trust in the larger states desire and ability to protect the integrity of the country. They took the hard way.[21] Journalist Merdan Yanardağ also suggests that the independence struggle was a civil war. The geography of opposition to the Sultan, and then to Sèvres, suggests that those (non 'comprador)' classes, such as the deprived Anatolian peasants, who had little stake in foreign capital were at the heart of the nationalist resistance.[22]

Initially, the Sivas and Erzurum Congresses had declared as their objective the liberation of the Sultan from captivity and the protection of the Caliphate. Yet the struggle for legitimacy with the Palace was irrepressible. The domestic revolts that Atatürk called uprisings were considered by Sultan Vahdettin acts in support of legal and religious authority. Both the Sultan and his Grand Vizier, Damat Ferit, tried to

[18] *Nutuk,* 166.
[19] Ibid, 57.
[20] *Nutuk*, 60.
[21] D. Perinçek, 'Her kurtuluşsavaş iç savaştır', vatanpartisi.org.tr
[22] M. Yanardağ, *Turk Siyasal Yaşaminda Kadro Haraketi*, Istanbul, 1988, 21-22.

mobilize Islamic forces against the nationalists, by presenting them as 'Bolsheviks', 'Godless Unionists' and residues of the 'Masonic' Committee of Union and Progress.[23] Atatürk used religion too: organizing religious ceremonies before the Ankara parliament met for the first time. The conflict over policy became an existential one once the Ottoman Porte was obliged to accept the Sèvres Treaty.

One chapter of Sina Akşin's history of modern Turkey is called the 'Establishment of the Grand National Assembly, Civil War and the Treaty of Sèvres'. A whole volume of his trilogy on the independence struggle is called 'Civil War and Death at Sèvres'. He calls the struggle between the Kemalists and the Palace 'an outright civil war', a bloody conflict between brothers and a revolutionary-counter revolutionary struggle: revolutionary because one side was fighting to defend the democratic-nationalist revolution, the other 'medievalist absolutism and counter revolution'.[24] Turkish society was based on the social authority of religious leaders (*Şeyhs*) and tribal chieftains (*Ağas*). Since these feudal forces were exploited by him in the struggle against Atatürk, the Emperor was a symbol of the type of authority they exercised. From the Sivas Congress onwards, the struggle was not conducted in spite of the policies of the regime in Istanbul but in opposition to it.[25]

Armenia, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, and Poland also had to build states based on diminished territories. And in Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Poland partition was one reason why their politics were radicalized after the First World War. Yet because Turkey succeeded in reversing Sèvres, its national struggle remains commemorated as a heroic but also redeeming moment in the country's history. The wars are also remembered as *Istiklâl Harbi*, *Bağımsızlık Savaşı*

[23] A. Mango, *Atatürk*, London, 1999, 276.
[24] Akşin, *Turkey: From Empire to Revolutionary Republic,* London, 2007, 155
[25] Akşin, *Iç Savaş ve Sevr'de Ölüm*, Istanbul, 2010, 345, 352, 354.

or *Kurtuluş Savaşı*: all denote a War of Independence.[26] Atatürk then institutionalized this version of events as the official story of the Republic's origins. The best source is the five-day speech he begun in the Turkish parliament on 15 of October 1927. This *Nutuk* still forms the basis of what students are taught about the period in schools. It is taken here to encapsulate the *Milli Mücadele* (national struggle) narrative.

1.3. The Milli Mücadele Narrative.

After major events all states need to reassert their identity. For big states this may not be a problem. Smaller countries face the specific task of locating foundational conflicts with external origins in a national context.[27] Conflict which came 'from the outside in' were incorporated into the *national* political traditions by being regarded as wars of independence or of liberation. The *Nutuk* begins with Atatürk's arrival on the Black Sea coast at Samsun on May 19, 1919, a date conventionally taken to be the beginning of the national struggle.

Significantly, the speech does not use *iç savaş* (civil war). While revolutions and wars of independence can bolster identity, civil war generally implies the breakdown or partial collapse of political and social institutions. The *Nutuk* draws a strong contrast between those forces pushing Turkey forward and those tying it to a discreditable past. It uses *olaylar* (incidents), *ayaklanmalar* (uprisings) *iç isyanlar* (internal rebellions) and sometimes *haydutlar* (bandits) for those who rose against Atatürk. Even today the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) has on its website an article (by Cevdet Kücük) on the National Struggle which uses *isyanlar* and

[26] C.V. Findley, *Turkey: Islam, Nationalism and Modernity: A History*, New Haven and London, 2010, 184.
[27] R. Alapuro, 'Coping with the Civil War of 1918 in Twentieth Century Finland', in K. Christie and R. Cribb (eds.) *Historical Injustice and Democratic Transition in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe: Ghosts at the Table of Democracy*, London and New York, 2002). 181.

ayaklanmalar for the opposition.[28] This was the language used by the Ottoman rulers the previous century in order to describe rebellions and nationalist revolts. In contrast, contemporaries used the term *ıhtılal* or revolution for the Kemalist changes, but most preferred *inkilap* or 'transformation', one of the six pillars of 'Kemalism'.[29]

The national struggle narrative then became joined to the goal of 'reaching contemporary standards of civilization'. This combination was a way of universalizing the history of the state's origins and suggesting that the Republic and its modernization drive had deep roots in the past. The *Nutuk* condemned both the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the Empire and the pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic visions of some of his allies. The viability of the nation-state was, for Atatürk, connected both to its greater homogeneity, and to its ability to modernize at a faster pace.[30] Hence in 1923 (for him at least) a cultural war started, with the front in it to be books.[31] Mesut Yeğen (2015) discusses four initiatives during the one-party era (1923-1950): the *Türk Ocağı*/Turkish Hearths, the *Halkevleri*/People's Homes, the *Türk Tarihi Kurumu*/the Turkish Historical Society, and the *Köy Enstitütleri*/Village Homes.[32] Such projects aimed to build up a collective national identity for the new state within borders that were now internationally accepted. One collective identity rooted in Islam was to be replaced with one based on ethnicity or indeed nationality.

Nationalism is above all a theory how a state should be established. Its novelty is the assumption that the most legitimate and stable states should be founded based on a self-authenticating people.[33] And the *Nutuk* is a good example of this theory in

[28] Islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/milli-mücadele
[29] Vaughn Findley, *Turkey: Islam, Nationalism and Modernity,* 184.
[30] *Nutuk*, 99.
[31] Özdil, *Mustafa Kemal*, Istanbul, 2018. 291.
[32] M. *Yeğen, Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, Istanbul, 2009, 171-209.
[33] B. Parekh, 'The ethnocentricity of the nationalist discourse', *Nations and Nationalism*, 1/1 (1995), 25-52.

action. Its' influence on the older English-language historiography is undeniable. For example, Andrew Mango's section on the independence struggle in his biography of Atatürk is called 'The Will of the People'.[34] One symbol of the people taking control was the replacement of Istanbul as the capital. People's disparate experiences of defeat, occupation and resistance found a common symbolic center in Ankara, free of imperial associations and interior to Anatolia.

Yet just because a country is occupied, it does not follow that 'the people' will respond as one. The *Nutuk* emphasizes the external enemies the nationalists faced after 1918 but simplifies the complex lines of conflict that accompanied the Ottoman collapse. Many remained loyal to the Sultan, the Republic was not always destined to win, and the political values of the population were up for grabs. Rejecting a straightforward nationalist narrative means seeing the period not as a black and white struggle between occupiers and resisters, but as a complex conflict with fluid and complicated lines of division.[35] Ryan Gingeras' history of the South Marmara region argues that the period 1912-1923 saw elements of both civil war and of revolution, as rival elites sought to impose their own visions on the post-war Ottoman state.[36]

The application of 'civil war' to the national struggle would call into question the essential nature of the ethno-national differences dividing Turks from others: making it harder to describe 'us' being liberated from 'them' in 1923. That the Turkish for national *milli* derives from the Arabic *milla* (religious community) suggests that religion would always complicate the issue of what constitutes a 'national'

[34] Mango, *Atatürk* London, 1999.
[35] R. Gingeras, 'Implications behind Erdoğan's 'second war of independence', *New Age Opinion*, 19 October 2021.
[36] R. Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the end of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923*, Oxford, 2009, 7, 169.

struggle. Between 1919 and 1923 much of the resistance was borne by the Anatolian peasantry for whom Islam was a sacred belief system. Hasan Kayali comments on the deep involvement of the *ulema* in the struggle.[37] Among the fundamental principles of the Sivas Congress were opposition to *Rumluk* and *Ermenilik* representation, and a commitment to the Islamic Caliphate and the Ottoman Sultanate.[38] When the Erzurum Congress met later that year, it declared its opposition to privileges given to Christian minorities that would upset the social balance of Anatolia.

In short, the traditionally dominant status of Islam in Anatolia influenced the nationalist resistance, as it had done the Empire's conflicts with Christian minorities during the reign of the Committee of Union and Progress between 1913 and 1918. Indeed, the War of Independence was only the last of a series of wars that resulted in an Islamicised Anatolia being carved out as the territorial heartland of the new Turkish state.[39] And there were strong ideological continuities between the Kemalist and Unionist periods, in terms of their commitment to Turkishness and the influence of Ziya Gökalp, the nationalist thinker on both movements. This continuity casts into doubt the existence of a discrete four-year national struggle.

When a civil war takes a straightforwardly binary form - North versus South in the United States in 1861-1865 for example – it will be possible to construct a straightforward narrative about what happened. In contrast, it will be difficult for elites to impose a coherent narrative of conflict on places with low levels of national integration, high levels of heterogeneity and multiple identity categories with the potential to become political salient.[40] Yet the *Nutuk* did so: it reduced a politically

[37] Ibid, 129.
[38] M. Tuncay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Tek Parti Yontemi'nin Kurulmasi 1923-1931,* Istanbul, 1999, 21.
[39] H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie Contemporaine* 3rd ed., Paris, 2016, 24.
[40] K. Kuo and H. Mylonas, 'Nation-building and the Role of Identity in Civil War, *Ethnopolitics* 2019 DOI: 10.1080/17449057 2019, 2.

relevant heterogeneity, and became the source of a foundational myth securing the legitimation of Atatürk's political authority.[41] In order to render the main line of division a Turkish/non-Turkish one, different aspects of conflict were packaged into the 'national' narrative of how the Republic came into being. Yet since this packaging involved a lot of simplification, we need a conception of conflict more faithful to the complexity of the period.

1.4. Two Conceptions of Civil War

This section discusses two conceptions broadly used in the comparative literature. In one 'civil war' functions as a layered concept with different conflicts existing side by side: when these types of conflict come together in a given time the result is called civil war. In contrast, political theorists, from Machiavelli to Clausewitz, noted that since civil war destroyed the internal order the state was supposed to protect, it had a special relationship to politics.[42] Payne calls civil war a form of armed conflict within a single political unit, but this conflict 'must involve an extended contest of arms to win state power'.[43] Others also suggest that if the state's monopoly of force is not contested, we should speak of a civil war situation.[44] Harry Eckstein defines internal war as 'any resort to violence within a political order to change its constitution, government or policies'.[45] I first explore this second approach.

At the heart of the modern succession conflict is the struggle for state power. In Turkey this eventually meant denying the legitimacy of the Palace, Atatürk having concluded that if the Turkish state was to have sound foundations a brand new form of

[41] Ibid.
[42] Gonzalez Calleja, *Las Guerres Civíles*, 14.
[43] Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, 91.
[44] M. Gersovitz and N. Kriger, .'What is a Civil War? A Critical Review of Its Definition and (Econometric) Consequences', *The World Bank Research Observer*, vol. 28, no. 2 (August 2013), 161.
[45] H. Eckstein, 'On the Etiology of Internal War', *History and Theory,* vol. 4, no.2 (1965), 133.

state would have to be established.[46] For Akşin, within the broader set of conflicts, and as part of a revolutionary struggle to replace the Sultan and the Caliphate, there was a civil war which lasted, from the autumn of 1919 onwards, a full year or more.[47] Revolutionary because the Kemalist movement was not just a liberation struggle, but one opposed to the Sultan.[48] Since the Palace eventually ceased backing the revolts, and Damat Ferid resigned it soon ended. Sèvres was a turning-point: crystallizing how much was at stake in the popular mind and making opposition to Ankara treasonous. While the Sultan could be forgiven, as leader of a vanquished belligerent, for trusting in the western powers, the Greek invasion was a dramatic sign that the future of Turkish rule in Anatolia was now in mortal danger. The nationalists blamed the Sultan and Damat Ferit for the initial success of the Greek invasionary forces: the civil war in the north-west had given the Greeks a chance to move in further south.

The course of events fits another pattern in 'civil war onsets' where, as a rule, a clear statement of incompatibility precedes the beginning of violence. This was Damat Ferit's issuing of a *fetwa* against Atatürk and his movement on 11 May 1920. The assassination of the leaders of the nationalist forces was encouraged, and shortly afterwards riots and uprisings broke out in north-western Anatolia.[49] The problem for Atatürk was the immense prestige of the Sultanate, the Grand Viziership and the SeyhülIslam among the population.[50] The fatwa had been issued by the Empire's highest religious authority, Seyhülislam Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi, and accused Atatürk of deceiving the loyal subjects of the Sultan with lies and rebelling against the Caliphate. According to Yilmaz Özdil, 10,000 copies were issued: some distributed by British or

[46] *Nutuk*, 100.
[47] *From Empire to Revolutionary Republic*, 154-160.
[48] K. K. Karpat, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Sistemin Evrimi*, 1876-1980, Ankara, Istanbul, 2007, 21.
[49] Ibid, 275.
[50] Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey,* Oxford 1961, 247.

Greek planes and British armored cars.[51] On 5 May a counter-fatwa was issued, and on 6 May all communications with the Sultan were to cease. This *Anadolu fetvasi* was issued, on behalf of patriotic imams, by the Ankara *mufti* Börekçizade Rifat, apparently after consultation with a religious committee of 21 persons. It stated that the Caliphate was effectively implementing English law. A fetwa issued under the duress of occupation was not valid.[52] Since Atatürk and his friends had also been, *in abstentia*, sentenced to death, the fatwas were a declaration of war.

The third reason for the existence of civil war is its scale. Yunus Kobal, a researcher at Haceteppe University, lists no less than forty-four events in a series of internal revolts in Anatolia between 11 May 1919 and 21 November 1923. Opposition to Atatürk was motivated by a variety of factors, including struggles for leadership and ethnic differences; all took place in a deep vacuum of authority dating back to World War 1.[53] Some of the opposition was organized by the government: the Sultan referred to some of the rebels as 'the Loyalist Army' and also launched the Army of the Caliphate (*Hilafet Ordusu*) a force which had around 4,000 men. Other opposition was more spontaneous. The location was mainly in north-west Anatolia: with major clashes and revolts around Anzavur, Duzce, Bolu and Adapazari. The locations were chosen to hem Ankara in; for a time, Atatürk and his followers slept with the sound of gunfire surrounding them. The *Hilafet Ordusu* was demobilized on June 25, 1920.

Why then has civil war not figured in the historiography? Firstly, its timespan was short compared to the four year 'national struggle' that begins with Atatürk's arrival on the Black Sea coast on May 19, 1919, and ends with the Lausanne Treaty of 24 July 1923. One of Akşin's (two) periodization's begins with the formation of the

[51] Özdil, *Mustafa Kemal*, Istanbul, 2018, 115-116.
[52] Ibid, 116.
[53] Y. Kobal, 'Milli mücadelede Iç Ayaklanmalar', ait,hacettepe.edu.tr/akademik/arşiv/ayak.htm

Damat Ferit government on 5 April 5, 1920, and ends with his resignation from the government on 17 October 1920, the day after the *Delibaşa Mehmet* rebellion was suppressed by nationalist forces.[54] Yet it was Sèvres that tilted the balance in Atatürk's favor, since the regime in Istanbul had accepted the territorial loss that came with it.[55]

The second limitation to the idea of a civil war over the Ottoman succession concerns location; the fronts the nationalist forces faced were multiple and mobile rather than singular and stationery. While most accounts of the 'loyalist' revolts stress the importance of Central Anatolia, Ataturk also had to deal with Greek invasionary forces in the south-west, the Armenians in the east, Greek paramilitary forces in the Black Sea region and the French presence in the south-east. Indeed, there was a kaleidoscope of shifting fronts. The *Nutuk* recalled that in 1919 the internal revolts had quickly spread to every part of the country: listing 33 localities.[56] Although most were in west-central Anatolia there was no one front.

A related factor was the diversity of the opposition. Mango stresses its low organizational basis and disparate nature.[57] Elaine Smith refers to a series of 'reactionary movements and royalist revolts' that Damat Ferit Pasha was behind. Apparently, some prisons were opened to order to provide recruits for 'The Army of the Caliphate' and that criminals, vagrants and the unemployed made their way into this army.[58] According to Mango, the diversity and spontaneity of the uprisings weakened them:

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[54] Akşin, *Turkey: From Empire to Revolutionary Republic,* London, 2007,154-60. Also S. Akşin *Kisa Türkiye Tarihi* , Istanbul, 2007.
[55] Lewis*, The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 247.
[56] *Nutuk,* 60, 85, 104.
[57] *Atatürk*, 281
[58] E. Smith, *Turkey: Origins of the Kemalist Movement and the Government of the Grand National Assembly (1919-1923),* Washington D.C., 1959, 34-36.

Supporters of the old order were numerous among Circassian immigrants, local notables, conservative clerics, and Kurdish tribes, but they could not win total control of these groups. As a result, Mustafa Kemal's government could use Circassian irregulars defeat Circassians loyal to the sultan, notables against their local rivals, clerics who feared foreign rule against those who feared Turkish nationalists and Kurdish tribal leaders against each other. Having seen off its domestic enemies, the GNA government proceeded to its main task of dealing with its foreign adversaries.[59]

With regular forces Atatürk could disperse these opponents with ease. However, because of limited manpower, equipment, and ammunition it remained a very slow process. The defeats of the rebels in Marmara, Düzce-Bolu, Yozgat and Konya signaled the military weakness of the regime in Istanbul.[60]

In short, the application of a succession model of civil war to Anatolia raises problems of periodization, geography and causation. Analytically, on top of the conflicts with Greece and the Allies, Anatolia was experiencing three forms of civil war between 1919 and 1923: a succession crisis, several ethnic and secessionist conflicts and the Kemalist revolutionary struggle. Sociologically however these were experienced as one set of inter-connected conflicts. Hence, a 'layered' conception of civil war better captures the reality of what people lived through. Atatürk himself, while clearly documenting the domestic challenges in the *Nutuk*, never used *iç savaş* (civil war) in either sense. The Ottoman Empire's defeat had left his nation in a state of *kargaşa* (chaos, disorder or tumult). The challenges he faced came together in a compressed time but differed in their point of origin and purpose.

[59] A. Mango, 'Atatürk' in Kasaba, *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 157-158.
[60] S. Akşin, *Istanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele-Vol 3: Iç Savaş ve Sevr'de Ölüm*, 356.

Indeed, the three types of internal violence found in the *Uppsala Conflict Data Project* came together: one involving a clear incompatibility between the government and the Kemalist opposition, the second involving horizontal violence among armed groups and a third involving one-sided violence against minorities. The incompatibility extended to the name Turkey adopted by the nationalists: the previous *Memalik -I Osmaniye* suggested that Anatolia had belonged to the dynasty like a piece of private property. In terms of horizontal violence Kenneth Kirkwood and Arnold Toynbee entitled their chapter on the War of Independence 'the Graeco-Turkish War'.[61] There was also one-sided violence. In the *Nutuk* Atatürk suggested that the emergency law *Takrir-I Sukun Kanunu* and the Independence Courts were still needed in 1924, despite the suppression of the Kurdish *Koçgiri* rebellion in the Sivas province in 1921. Eight or nine regiments of the army were dispatched to quell further revolts and succeeded in suppressing them.[62]

Some contemporary historians see civil war not as one thing, but a conflict produced by the coming together of elements of imperial collapse, revolutionary struggle and ethnic/secessionist conflicts.[63] The layered conception acknowledges the roots of the violence in the Ottoman collapse. And because people experienced different types of conflict simultaneously it is also more faithful to experience. Finally, since there were multiple points of entry into Anatolia, different interventions added new layers of conflict, which then transformed the original divisions between the Palace and the nationalists. Sèvres is the classic example. While Atatürk accused his opponents of treason, and was first involved in a civil war with the Istanbul government, what was

[61] A.J. Toynbee and K. P. Kirkwood, *Turkey* , London,1926, ch.vi.
[62] *Nutuk*, 176.
[63] See D. Diner, *Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge* (Madison, 2008); *R. Gerwarth, The Vanquished*; E. Traverso. *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War 1914-1945* (London and New York, 2017).

at issue from Sèvres on were more the territorial extent of Turkey, and the identity of its population; a purer phase of national struggle had set in.

Nonetheless, historian Mesut Uyar suggests that the national struggle always had two fronts: a conventional war of independence and 'a multi-dimensional civil war'. Multi-dimensional because of the complexity of ethnic conflict. The Ottoman collapse had seen bloodletting among Armenians, Circassians, Greeks, Kurds and Turks, and previous decades had also seen a steady expropriation of wealth from Christian communities forced to leave Anatolia. The fear that parts of the Empire would, under various peace treaties, be ceded to such minorities was one strong motivation of the nationalist resistance. If minorities could return, much of the confiscated property might have to be returned. And their return could also tilt the demographic balance in the direction of those who wanted autonomy or independence from the Turks.[64] The violent process of distinguishing Turks from others climaxed in the mutual population transfer between Greece and Turkey in 1923.

For Uyar it is regrettable that the official narrative used *isynalar* which simplified matters and avoided comparisons with other complex conflicts, such as the Russian civil war.[65] In terms of loss of life and material damage the civil war could have been equally destructive as the independence war. This is especially the case given the continuities between the independence struggle and the reign of the Committee of Union of Progress. For example, much of the membership of the ARMHC had first been affiliated to the Committee. For Hamit Bozarslan, the absence of a genuinely popular mobilization at the end of the Great War made the Kemalist

[64] Kayalı, 'The Independence Struggle', 119.
[65] M. Uyar, Kurtuluş Savaşi gerçek bir savaş miydi? *Independent Turkçe* (July 2020), indyturk.com/node/204791/türkiyeden – sesler/kurtulus savaş.

resistance dependent on such pre-existing Unionist networks and local notables.[66] Either way, the War of Independence furthered the cultural homogenization of Anatolia, a process that by 1919 was decades old.[67]

The layered conception also has something to say about peace. One study of armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa posed the question of whether the proper unit of analysis should be the individual country or 'the regional war complex'.[68] Wars such as Mozambique's (1976-1992) were initially provoked by outside intervention, escalated in the context of a regional war in Southern Africa and subsided in the context of the end of the Cold War. One advantage of seeing such conflicts in a broader regional setting is that the different countries involved tended to return to peace at the same time.[69] And the insight that is relevant to Anatolia is that durable peace may require disrupting, or indeed severing, the transnational links between the states and the ethnic groups that made these wars multi-dimensional in the first place.[70] This could mean that establishing peace in one country requires initiating peace in a whole region. Or it could be taken to mean that peace requires isolation as much as the separation of different groups. Both conclusions are relevant to Ataturk's 1931 dictum 'Peace at Home, Peace in the World'. Anatolia's layered peace was settled by the Armistice of Mudanya on October 11, 1922 (to which Greece acceded three days later), the Lausanne Treaty (ratified by Turkey on 24 August 1923), and the population exchange with Greece the same year.

1.5. Other layered conflicts

[66] H. Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie,*, 340-343.
[67] U. Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* Oxford, 2011.
[68] Gersovitz and N. Kriger, .'What is a Civil War? 185.
[69] 185.
[70] Ibid.

The layered conception is also useful for other cases. In 'the Europe in Between' multiple actors, east and west influenced the way post- imperial politics played out. The Ukrainian experience between 1917 and 1920 is often overlooked, simply because the new Republic was absorbed into the Soviet Union. It had been declared as an independent Republic on 25 January, 1918. With its banditry, large-scale paramilitary formations, state collapse, international interventions and massive ethnic violence Ukraine suits the layered approach very well. The collapse of the Tsarist Empire had created a power vacuum and a range of domestic actors attempted to fill it. None did so and the Ukrainian Peoples Republic ceased to exist in 1920, having also lost territory in the west to Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania.

The Poles also had to fight several wars with their neighbors in the process of becoming independent between 1918 and 1921: Germans in the west; Lithuanians in the north, Ukrainians and Belarussians in the east and Czechs to the south.[71] These conflicts were bitter because these countries were making territorial claims and seemed to be defending the rights of their 'co-ethnics' along Poland's borderlands. They involved both conventional and irregular warfare producing an enormous number of casualties. Hence the analogy with Turkey, which had to deal with external interference and internal nationalist revolts at the same time.

Finland also shows that as new layers of conflict are added to an internal conflict, the issues dividing a society can be transformed (much as Sèvres transformed the Turkish struggle). The Finns experienced a civil war in 1918 shortly after they declared independence on 6 December 1917. Both the bourgeois and socialist parties were committed to achieving independence from Russia, which had ruled Finland

[71] R. Gerwarth, 'Violence in Europe, 1917-1923', *History Ireland* special issue on *The Split*, 2021, 59-63; J. Boehler, *Civil War in Central Europe* (Oxford, 2020).

since 1809. Yet the October 1917 revolution transformed the situation radically. For the bourgeois parties, the Bolshevik success posed the question of whether the existence of a Finnish socialist majority in the *Eduskunta*/parliament, and a radicalized labor movement would result in eventual absorption into the Soviet Union. The left/right division had become an existential one. The Social Democrats agonized over whether national freedom and social justice could be reconciled in the new state. What started as a political struggle for power had turned into 'an abortive revolution' on their part. Because of their vulnerability to Bolshevik Russia in 1918 the White victory over the reds in the civil war was also labeled a War of Independence.

The Irish case shows how the external factor can change the context in which civil war emerges and thus transform its nature. The War of Independence (1919-1921) was fought over the extent of independence from Britain and whether an Irish state would rule over the whole island. Ulster Unionists, who were concentrated in the north-east opposed both aims. Radical nationalism went back to the formation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1858, but found its decisive counterforce in imperial Britain, which partitioned the island in 1920 and imposed dominion status on the new state in 1921-22. It was crucial that the nationalist and unionist forces had already largely been separated by partition in 1920. The resulting civil war in 1922/23 over dominion status took place 'within' the newly created state, i.e. between moderate and radical nationalists in the 26-counties. It gave Ulster Unionists the chance to consolidate their authority in Northern Ireland and meant that nationalism and unionism did not face each other in an all-Ireland conflict. When the anti-treaty side were defeated in the 'southern' civil war in April 1923 the border between north and south was actually cemented.

Defenders of Ireland's partition claim it averted a civil war between nationalists and unionists on the island as a whole and created two successor regimes better able to provide stability. It thus de-escalated conflict. An example of intervention transforming conflict in the opposite sense - through a process of escalation - was Hungary, which had seen the Hungarian Soviet Republic replace the moderate First Hungarian Republic in March 1919. This seemed initially a conflict over of succession (involving a social revolution), following the Habsburg defeat in 1918. However, the revolutionary challenge soon became dwarfed by the reality of partition. Bela Kun's Soviet Republic inherited territory that was less than three quarters of pre-1914 Habsburg Hungary, and as Foreign Minister he tried to regain lost territory militarily. This attempt and his revolution failed; Soviet Hungary lasted only 133 days. The crisis pulled in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Romania and the new state of Czechoslovakia. Romania occupied Budapest in the summer of 1919. After the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, which imposed further territorial losses, Hungary drifted in an authoritarian direction in the 1920s and 1930s.

Conclusion.

The layered approach to the phenomenon of civil war in this period satisfies the questions of periodization, location and causation better than the succession conflict model. Yet the purpose of contrasting the two has not been to argue for a definitive re-categorization of the Turkish War of Independence, but to illuminate the complexity behind it. This complexity was no less evident in the other European conflicts at the end of World War 1.

These conflicts also had their roots in that war but involved attempts at state formation that themselves ignited further conflicts. When new layers of conflict

were added onto the original conflicts, they tended to do so in a way that transformed their character. In Turkey too, as Republicanism began to define the Kemalist opposition to the Empire, the conflict itself was redefined into being a revolutionary struggle. This is a good example of how the outcome – the establishment of the Republic in 1923 - can determine the definition of a conflict retroactively.[72]

Another reason for preferring the layered conception is that, on the European borderlands changes in international politics had a dramatic impact on conflicts 'within' a territory. With intervention coming from each entry-point into Anatolia, this was especially true for Turkey. The Treaty of Friendship and Fraternity, signed with Moscow in March 1921, had allowed Ankara to mobilize the vast majority of its forces against the Greek army in the west. Originally, the nationalist forces had to counter the threat posed by the Armenians who had established their own Republic in the Caucuses. The Sovietization of Armenia on 2 December, 1920, and the treaty with Moscow which followed removed this threat. The nationalists could now redefine their main enemy as the Greek forces.[73]

Since this Greco-Turkish war eventually culminated in the population exchange in 1923, the multiple redefinitions of who was inside and outside the Turkish nation, which went back to the Balkan Wars, were as significant for the future of Anatolia as the conflict between Ankara and the Sultan. The fusion of civil war with nationalist struggle was not unique to Turkey. Referring to the conventional distinction made between the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and the civil war which followed (1922-23), film director Niall Jordan commented that 'in many ways, the war of independence was not too far from civil war or not too far from a war about

[72] Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, pp.33-36.
[73] Bozarslan, *Histoire de Turquie contemporaine*, 24.

different conceptions of what it was to be Irish'.[74] Likewise, during the twists and turns of the Ottoman succession, questions of national identity were always present, regardless of distinctions we can make between different forms of conflict. And since the question of how to define the values of the Turkish political community remains important today, perhaps it is no surprise that, one hundred years later the period continues to be viewed through the prism of a national struggle.

[74] *South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 27/10/1996.