

Redefining the Nation: Nâzım Hikmet and nationalist discourse in  
contemporary Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the hegemonic and colonising nationalist discourse of the Turkish state in dealing with one of its 'others', communism, which is presented through the changes in the articulation of a symbol of that 'other', namely, Nâzım Hikmet, in the official discourse about him. In doing so, it aims to make a contribution to the discussion of nationalism in light of the social constructivist approach which stresses the malleability of national identity and the dynamic social struggles over the definition of any given national identity, through an example from Turkey. In this sense, I would not argue that the case study of Nâzım Hikmet is unique since other instances of strategic changes from antagonism, to incorporation, and to colonisation can be traced in the relationship of the Turkish state and its various 'others'.

The case study of Nâzım Hikmet will be situated in the general context of the ambiguities of the official Turkish nationalist discourse. In order to serve this aim, the role of language, religion and race in the Kemalist nationalism in different periods will be analysed. A study of the malleable relationship of the Turkish left with Kemalism, the construction of national literary canons, as well as a study of the life and works of Nâzım Hikmet and their representation in the state discourse on him will be provided.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 A critical approach to the official Turkish nationalist discourse	2
1.2. Theoretical Framework	5
1.2.1 Literature on nationalism	6
1.2.2 A social constructivist approach to nationalism and national identity	19
1.3 Overview of the case study	29
1.4 Outline of the thesis	35
<b>2. ‘Who Is A Turk?’: Changing Requirements of Turkish National Identity</b>	<b>42</b>
2.1. Introduction	42
2.2. The place of religion in the Kemalist definition of Turkish national identity	47
2.2.1 Place of religion during the liberation war	50
2.2.2 The Treaty of Lausanne and Turco-Greek Population Exchange	53
2.2.3 Wealth Tax ( <i>Varlık Vergisi</i> )	56
2.2.4 ‘All Muslims inhabitants of Turkey are actually Turkish’	61
2.2.5. Influence of religion in the state practices vis-à-vis the Kurdish population	62
2.3. Language	70
2.3.1 Language requirements from the non-Muslim population	70
2.3.2 Language as a way of assimilation of the Kurdish population	73
2.4 Race in Turkish nationalism	78
2.5 Conclusion	85

<b>3. The Turkish Left and Kemalism</b>	<b>89</b>
3.1. Introduction	89
3.1.1. Nationalism and Socialism: An antagonistic or beneficial symbiosis?	91
3.1.2. An overview of socialism and nationalism in Turkey	94
3.2. Origins of leftist movements under ‘relative tolerance’: 1908-1925	101
3.2.1. Origins of leftist movements in the Ottoman Empire	101
3.2.2 The left during the liberation war	103
3.3. The Repression of the left: 1925-1960	108
3.3.1 Turkish Communist Party	113
3.3.2 Other short-lived leftist parties	117
3.3.3. The <i>Kadro</i> Movement	118
3.4. The flourishing and division in the Turkish left: 1960-1980	123
3.4.1 The Turkish Labour Party	125
3.4.1.1 Kemalism and <i>TİP</i>	128
3.4.2 <i>YÖN/DEVİRİM</i>	131
3.4.2.1 Kemalism and <i>YÖN/DEVİRİM</i>	135
3.4.3 The National Democratic Revolution Movement and Youth Organisations	136
3.4.3.1 Kemalism and the <i>MDD</i>	139
3.4.4 The <i>CHP</i> and Social Democracy	141
3.5. Overview of the Turkish left after the 1980 coup	145
3.6 Conclusion	155
<b>4. Nationalism, Literature and the Literary Canon</b>	<b>158</b>
4.1. Introduction	158



4.2. The role of literature in the reproduction of the nation	162
4.3. What is a literary canon?	170
4.3.1. Canon formation	172
4.4. Conclusion	176
<b>5. The Two Influences on Nâzım Hikmet's Work:</b>	
<b>Patriotism and Communism</b>	179
5.1. Introduction	179
5.1.1 Positioning Nâzım Hikmet in early 20 <sup>th</sup> century Turkish literature	185
5.1.2 The language reform	189
5.1.3 Anti-imperialism	192
5.1.4 Folk tradition and modernity	193
5.1.5 The influence of Marxist methodology	197
5.2. Early writings	200
5.3. 'Demolishing the Idols' (1929) and other polemics	206
5.4. <i>Like Kerem and Ferhad and Shirin</i>	216
5.5. <i>Jokond ile Si-Ya-U</i> (Gioconda and Si-Ya-U)	220
5.6. Benerci Kendini Niçin Öldürdü? ( <i>Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?</i> )	221
5.7. <i>Taranta-Babu'ya Mektuplar</i> ( <i>Letters to Taranta-Babu</i> )	225
5.8. <i>German Fascism and Racism</i>	229
5.9. <i>Simavne Kadısı Oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı</i> ( <i>Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin</i> ) and its Epilogue <i>Milli Gurur</i> ( <i>National Pride</i> )	234
5.10. <i>Human Landscapes from My Country</i>	240
5.10.1 <i>Kurtuluş Savaşı Destanı</i> ( <i>The Epic of the Liberation War</i> )	244

5.11. Nâzım Hikmet's poetry in exile	252
5.12. Conclusion	256
<b>6. Nâzım Hikmet's Life as an Area of Clashing Representations</b>	<b>261</b>
6.1. Part I	266
6.1.1. The two representations summarised	266
6.1.2. The Turkish liberation war	272
6.1.3 Nâzım Hikmet's imprisonment and release	280
6.1.4. Nâzım Hikmet in the Soviet Union without Turkish citizenship	285
6.2. Part II	295
6.2.1. The shift from a communist propagandist to Turkish literary figure: The official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet	295
6.2.2. Study of the official state declarations on Nâzım Hikmet since 1993	302
6.2.3. 2002: The Year of Nâzım Hikmet	309
6.2.4. <i>A Gift to Nâzım on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday</i>	314
6.2.5. Records of the General Assembly between 1993 and 2009	319
6.2.6. Nâzım Hikmet's works in the national curricula	321
6.2.7. Nâzım Hikmet's re-naturalisation in 2009	326
6.3. Conclusion	330
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>340</b>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Council of Ministers has decided that the well-known communist, Nâzım Hikmet Ran, who... is performing the duty of spreading communism assigned to him by the Soviet government through the large propaganda campaign he started against the polity and leaders of Turkey in subsequent radio broadcasts, will be deprived of Turkish citizenship (Anon., *Cumhuriyet*: 1993, my translation).

A decision of the Council of Ministers has been signed that makes it possible for Nâzım Hikmet to be naturalised as a Turkish citizen...2002 was announced by UNESCO as the year of Nâzım Hikmet and celebrated all over the world. Given the fact that he [Nâzım Hikmet] is respected and looked up to in the literary circles around the world, it was necessary that the old decision had to be annulled (Çiçek quoted in Anon, *Radikal*: 2009, my translation).

Nâzım Hikmet as a prolific, well-known poet and a self-identified communist was subject to the antagonistic policies of the Turkish State due to the State's definition of communism as its other. The main discourse on Nâzım Hikmet has been one that defines him as a communist in the service of the USSR, as can be seen in the first quotation, the statement of the decision that deprived him of Turkish citizenship in 1951. However, as the second quotation, which was the declaration on the re-naturalisation of Nâzım in 2009, exemplifies, a new state discourse, which is currently in circulation, has been articulated, mainly since 1993, that recognises his place in the world literary scene. More importantly, it defines him as a Turkish poet, thus stripping him of his political identity as a communist.

This thesis is an analysis of the hegemonic and colonising nationalist discourse of the Turkish state in dealing with one of its 'others', communism, which is presented through the changes in the articulation of a symbol of that 'other', namely, Nâzım Hikmet, in the official discourse about him. In doing so, it aims to make a contribution to the discussion of nationalism in light of the social constructivist approach that rests upon the argument stressing the malleability of national identity and the dynamic social struggles over the definition of any given national identity, through an example from Turkey. In this sense, I would stress that the case study of Nâzım Hikmet is not unique since other instances of strategic changes from antagonism, to incorporation, and to colonisation can be traced in the relationship of the Turkish state and its various 'others'. The main object of this thesis is to analyse the official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet and how the changes in it reflect the relationship of the state with one particular 'other', communism.

### **1.1 A critical approach to the official Turkish nationalist discourse**

Firstly, the way this thesis perceives the official discourse of nationalism represented by Kemalism will be discussed. Kemalist nationalism was the driving force behind Turkish modernisation, which has over the years led to the formation of two main interpretations of the modernisation project implemented by the Turkish state: The Kemalist approach and the critical approach. The former regards the elite-driven, positivist, and secular Kemalist model of modernisation as progressive, unquestionable, appropriate, thus, a

successful strategy for Turkey<sup>1</sup>. This view carries a celebratory discourse of Kemalist modernisation as well as an often passionate reaction to any criticisms, combining the Kemalist project with Turkishness and modernisation. The latter is sceptical, indeed critical of such conflation and stresses the complexity of what constitutes 'Turkish modernity'. It stresses that the Kemalist project has not been unchallenged and recognizes the forms of resistance to Kemalism in Turkish society and treats them as potential sources of democratisation emerging from the people at large while it implicitly or explicitly argues that Kemalism faces a 'crisis of hegemony'<sup>2</sup>. Put boldly, the argument is that Kemalism has failed to establish its hegemony over the whole of Turkish society and that it is thus faced with resistance from several groups such as the Islamists, liberal-democrats and the Kurds – a major ethnic minority – since such groups have not internalised the reforms.

This thesis adopts the alternative approach that questions the elitist application of Kemalism and recognises the reactions to it, but tries to make a contribution to it by arguing that Kemalism should not be judged as either a success or a failure. The approach proposed here is to perceive Kemalism as an ongoing project of nation-building hand in hand with modernisation, in other words as a nationalist discourse set to create a hegemonic framework of social meaning. As will be explained later, this thesis is in line with studies that see nation-building as a process enhanced by its reproduction in various fields. Kemalism is argued to be a set of discourses which continuously produce and reproduce its vision of national identity and modernisation. What is more, Kemalism is a

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<sup>1</sup> This narrative was also adopted by one of the classic texts on history of Turkey; Bernard Lewis's (1961) *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Bozdoğan; Kasaba, 1997: 4). Feroz Ahmad's *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (2006) can be cited as another work that adopts celebratory discourse about the Kemalist Republic.

<sup>2</sup> Gramscian concept of 'crisis of hegemony' has been referred to for example, by Çelik (2000) and Koçak (2007) who in different contexts argued that Kemalism has failed to hegemonise the whole field of meaning.

discourse that is undergoing continual transformation and adaptation in response to the challenges that it encounters. In other words, the continual transformations and power relations between the social groups that reproduce Kemalism and alternative narratives of national identity and modernisation make Kemalism a non-closure. Thus, this study argues that it is a false attempt to judge the successes or failures of Kemalism but rather examines the changes in its strategies or discourses to deal with the challenges Kemalism faces in order to re-establish its hegemony over areas where it has failed to be the sole dominant discourse.

Among the literature on Turkish national identity, this thesis is positioned alongside the critical works that recognise the counter-narratives and challenges to the hegemonic efforts of the Kemalist nationalist discourse. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba's (1997) *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Nur Betül Çelik's article 'The constitution and dissolution of the Kemalist imaginary' in Stavrakakis et al. (2000), alongside Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber's edited book *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, Ayşe Kadioğlu's analysis in 'The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity' can be cited among the works that inspired the critical stance of this study. However, most of these works do not go further than pointing out the challenges and only imply that Kemalism has failed to establish its hegemony.

This thesis recognises the hegemonic efforts of the state to eradicate difference as well as reactions to such policies. However, I would argue here that the only strategy of the Turkish state has not been antagonism – indeed this is the case in the operation of all nationalist discourses. Here, it is argued that the Kemalist nation-building is a process

that is adopting different strategies in order to establish its hegemony vis-à-vis the challenges from its 'others'. Accordingly, the case study of this thesis aims to represent the dynamic relationship of the Turkish state and its 'other', communism, through an analysis of the changes in state discourse on one of the most fervent figures among Turkish communists, Nâzım Hikmet, from an antagonistic to a colonising one. The arguments of the dynamism of relationships between hegemonic and counter vailing forces, the fluidity of identities (especially of national identity) are mainly based on the premises of the social constructivist approach to studying nationalism which will be introduced in the following pages.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical standpoint and its terminology will be defined in the following pages after a discussion on the relevance of the theories of nationalism for the purposes of this thesis. The social constructivist argument – the main approach of this thesis – is premised on the proposition that nationalism can be seen as a discourse in which nations are reproduced daily and this approach has also been another starting point of this study. These theoretical postulations combined with the discursive approach adopted from Laclau and Mouffe arguing that identities do not and cannot achieve closure but remain incomplete, open and subject to challenge have been applied to the Turkish case. Thus, Turkish national identity is seen as a project of the state that is never fully closed and mainly shaped by its relations with its 'others'. In studying this relationship, the argument is that Turkish national identity adopts the *logic of equivalence* and is openly antagonistic



towards its 'other', or tries to eliminate the challenge by rendering it less influential, which may be referred to as the *logic of difference*<sup>3</sup>. In the case of this thesis, communism is the 'other' in question and the relation of the state with communism is studied through a symbolic figure, Nâzım Hikmet. A related argument has emerged in this study. It is the ambiguities, commonalities and the impossibility of closure of both discourses and identities that has made it possible for the state to adopt the *logic of difference*.

### 1.2.1 Literature on nationalism<sup>4</sup>.

The theoretical standpoint of this work is not shaped directly by the 'classical' theories of nationalism as classified by Day and Thompson (2004), which are commonly studied under the titles primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism. However, it needs to be added that the arguments developed here rest upon the contributions of the modernist approach. More accurately though, this thesis borrows its foundations mostly from recent studies of nationalism, that will be termed 'social constructivist' here<sup>5</sup>. Nationalism will be handled as a matter of identity and as a discourse that certainly rests upon the assumption that nations are modern constructs. Successive to this assumption, the argument that national identity is never fixed but indeed its definition is determined by power relations, contingencies and sometimes accidents is proposed in this thesis.

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<sup>3</sup> Explanation of the theoretical framework and the terminology will be given in the following pages.

<sup>4</sup> A through review of the theories of nationalism is not going to be provided here since none have been adopted directly in this study. A critical survey of the literature can be found in U. Özkırmılı's (2000) *Theories of Nationalism* and P. Spencer and H. Wollman's (2002) *Nationalism*.

<sup>5</sup> There is no clear agreement on the name of the category of these relatively recent contributions to the nationalism literature. Smith (2003) has cautiously talks of a ' "post-modern" approach', Hutchinson cites ' "postmodernist" framework' and less critically the term Postmodern has been used by Salehi (2001) whereas Day and Thompson (2004) refers to the same body of work as 'post-classical' and social constructionism. Özkırmılı (2005) also refers to a 'Social Constructionist Perspective'. Kornprobst (2005) prefers 'social constructivism'. Here, the term social constructivism is also the preferred one.

The 'classical' literature on nationalism is not adopted in this thesis mainly because most works are concerned with the origins of nations and nationalism and do not deal with national identity in the way this thesis attempts to do. Except for their contradictory answers, most of the 'classical' works on nations and nationalism commonly attempt to formulate an answer to the question; 'when is the nation'. We have to recognize, however, that the answers they formulate are far removed from being in agreement if not totally in disagreement. Moreover, it would be unfair not to recognize that 'the 'when' question inevitably leads to the 'what' question' (Ichijo; Uzelac, 2005: 3) which means that one may need to question the assertion that 'nations are modern'. However, it is argued here that focusing the scope of theories to the origins of nations and nationalism has a limited explanatory power.

Most scholars focus on a certain period of time and the factors that came about in that period which they argue to have caused the emergence of nationalism. This emergence is presented as an evolution and the conclusion is reached when nations and nationalism come into being. This style of explanation makes it easier for the readers to imagine nationalism as a kind of force acting only in the processes of state formation. Nationalism is associated with the efforts of groups aspiring to have their own states, and it is envisaged as having a peripheral role once the state is formed. Nonetheless nationalism does not lose its significance but indeed becomes the most basic and legitimate ideology of the state. Educational systems, foreign policy, the writing of history are all being shaped by nationalism, thus, we talk about 'national curriculum', 'national interest', and 'national heroes.' Therefore, we are in need of studies that analyze the current status of nationalism, meaning what role is still played by nationalism.

In the 'classical' theories, nations appear to be inevitable natural beings (for primordialists), historical products (for ethno-symbolists), or modern constructs (for modernists) that were doomed to emerge in the course of human existence. In line with the main arguments of the social constructivist approach (which will be explained in more detail in the following pages), this thesis treats nations not as real or inevitable entities that have 'gradually developed... as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity, or culture' as contested by Brubaker (1996: 19), but as non-fixed outcomes of continual renegotiations across time and space. The common fatalistic treatment of nations in the literature bares the risk of reifying our unit of analysis and contributing to the reproduction of the notion of nations as an eternal, unified, unchanging grouping of human beings (Day; Thompson, 2004: 16). The attempt here is to challenge this view and to provide an example of the contingent and fluctuating characters of a nation, in this case, the Turkish one.

Continuous challenges and changes in national identity, how nations define themselves vis-à-vis their 'others', which parameters such as language, race, religion or ideological affiliations will be included and excluded from the national identity are not usually the kind of information one can find in the 'classical' theories of nationalism.

In primordialist works, this is not surprising, since they do not adopt a critical approach to national identity. It is assumed to be a natural and given belonging that does not change significantly through the course of history. Nations are imagined to be floating in a nearly unchanged form, living their destiny. Such theories can be traced all the way back to German Romanticism and the Enlightenment. As Kedourie (1960) has explained, the philosophers of Enlightenment and German Romantics had formulated the basis of

the ideology of nationalism. Ideas such as self-determination, the priority of the whole – *Ego* – over the individual, of language being a definitive character of communities and the idea that the world is divided among communities speaking different languages by the will of God began to dominate.

Primordialism is – not surprisingly – the view of nationalists who share similar views on nations. The common themes of the primordialist approach can be cited as; ‘the antiquity of the nation’, ‘the golden age’, ‘superiority of the national culture’, ‘periods of recess’, and ‘the national hero, who comes and awakens the nation, ending this “accidental” period of decadence’ (Özkırımlı, 2000: 67-68). Even though it is true that primordialism still continues to be the point of view of nationalists today, in the literature of nationalism we see that this view has lost its predominant position and has been discredited by modernists and ethno-symbolists.

The modernist approach was formulated as a reaction to the arguments of primordialists and challenged the very basis of these theories. According to modernists, we can talk of nations and nationalism only in the modern era but there is no consensus among scholars on a specific date when nationalism emerged. Whereas, for example, most scholars treat the French Revolution as a starting point, some look further back in time. Liah Greenfeld (1992) for instance has traced nationalism back to sixteenth century England. A second point that modernists agree upon is that nationalism predates nations. Nationalism is born in the context of modernity, and nations are born in the context of nationalism. Nations, therefore, are not natural or given but they are constructs of the modern social and political arena.

Kedourie's definition of nationalism summarises the idea that nationalism is a modern ideology:

Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century... Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government (1960:1).

Various modernist scholars have pointed out what they have thought to be the most influential development in the birth of nationalism of the modern era. For some scholars such as Gellner and Anderson, nationalism was related to processes of cultural transformation. In Ernest Gellner's analysis, nationalism was a functional requirement and a necessity of the modern industrial society. In the industrial society where social mobility and high/literate culture transmitting context-free messages became the norm an individual had to be a nationalist in order to take his/her part in the social strata (1996: 368). Education that creates the necessary *high-culture* is argued to have played the biggest role in the formation of nationalism, which was only possible in the industrial societies.

On the other hand, John Breuilly emphasised the impact of political transformation. Breuilly argues that 'nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and that politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state' (1995: 1). From the stand point of this thesis, however, nationalism is not solely a political movement that emerges when there is an effort for state formation or secession, nor does it disappear once the state is formed. It gets diffused into the everyday life of nationals/citizens and into their conception of the world and their place in it. This

diffusion is certainly not automatic. The nationalist project – which may be considered to be political in the final analysis since its aim is to ensure the continuity of the nation and its state – takes a linguistic, cultural and social form.

Eric Hobsbawm's analysis is more relevant at this point since it can be argued to propose a synthesis that considers the 'constructed' character of the nation 'from above but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below' (1990: 10). One of his contributions to the literature together with Terence Ranger has been the analysis of how in the modern age 'invented traditions' and social-engineering forge nations (Hobsbawm; Ranger, 1983). Breuilly argues that 'few would study the work of intellectuals who elaborate nationalist doctrines and supporting myths if these had not been used in a politically significant way' (1996:148) However, without a previously invented history, myth, culture, et cetera, that are taken for granted by 'the nation', no intellectual would be successful in his/her 'politically significant' venture.

One of the most influential modernist theories of nationalism has been formulated by Benedict Anderson, who defines nations as imagined political communities; imagined as both limited and sovereign (1983: 6). They are *limited* because 'no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.' Additionally, its sovereignty comes from the age it was born, namely the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, when 'the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained and the hierarchical dynastic realms' were being destroyed (Ibid: 7). The political community, namely, the nation is imagined as we know it today, mainly due to what Anderson calls 'print-capitalism'. Three independent variables also had impetus in the vernacularisation of the print language; the efforts of Humanists in the changing character of Latin, the Reformation, and the start of the use of vernaculars as

‘instruments of administrative centralization by monarchs’ (Ibid: 40). It was through the interaction therefore, of the natural existence of linguistic diversity, capitalism, and printing that nations were imagined. To put it in Anderson’s words, ‘What in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity’ (Ibid :42).

Anderson’s theory is also relevant in the case of this thesis since he talks about the contribution of literary works to the way people imagine themselves as part of a nation. Literary works make it possible for people to imagine themselves as part of the nation in a ‘homogenous, empty time’ (Ibid: 24). The ‘meanwhile’ effect of reading the same newspaper or the novel and subconsciously being aware of the existence of nationals in other parts of the country, even if you never see them in person, is how a the nation is imagined. Anderson’s strong account is nevertheless limited since it does not take into consideration the possibility that not all groups imagine the community in the same way but indeed create alternative narratives about the same community or emphasise sub-groups in the nation or even imagine a different model of social organisation as it was pointed out by Chatterjee (2005) in his criticism of Anderson.

In summary, modernist scholars’ works are basically a historical explanation of how nations and nationalism came into being. Even though they claim that nations can only be found in modern times, they do not treat modernity as an event but as a process that involves many changes. Reformation and Enlightenment saw the seeds of the possibility of questioning the absolutism of the kings and the church. Legitimacy was no longer a

property of the king but of the people and the king now had to earn it (Kedourie, 1960). Education was no longer the monopoly of the clergy, either (Gellner, 1983). People began to be educated in their vernacular languages and thus, were being exposed to these new ideas about legitimacy (Anderson, 1983). Better roads and railway systems made communications and transport easier, which in turn meant that people would get to know about the rest of the country.

This thesis accepts the above summarised arguments about the novelty, or to put it more precisely, the modernity of nations and nationalism. Besides the contribution of modernist theories to the understanding of nations as modern constructs, they are not considered to be satisfactory tools to understand nationalism today. These theories mostly emphasise the influences of state formation, industrialisation or more generally, modernity in forging national identities in the context of the modern ideology of nationalism. Nevertheless, the challenges and the role of agency in the formulation of resistance to the homogenising effects of the nationalist discourse are lacking in their analysis. Here, a social constructivist approach, which treats nationalism as a hegemonic discourse but which also, recognises the role of resistances and alternative narratives and the power relations among various groups in society in the continuous formulation of national identity is adopted. Another limitation of the modernist view is to do with the fact that different modernist theories explain which modern development has had the biggest impact on the creation of nations and nationalism and, thus are mainly about the emergence of nations and nationalism. It is argued here that this approach is not sufficient to understand current nationalisms or how national identities are constantly in flux. Day and Thompson have mentioned that social constructivists are 'less interested in



developing the kinds of general historical-sociological theories of the rise and development of nationalism' and this thesis follows that path (2004:15).

Even with its limitations the modernist approach has made significant contributions to the understanding of national identity. In the modernist conception, national identities had to be credible and, thus based on already existing cultural rituals, beliefs and customs in order to serve the aim of being the glue of society. However, many new or 'invented traditions' also came about with the development of nationalism. Moreover, the 'already existing cultural rituals' gained new meanings. Parallel to modernist explanations about national identity, Calhoun has warned us to be cautious not to draw premature conclusions when we trace similarities between previous identities and traditions and those of nations.

First, noticing the continuity in ethnic traditions does not explain either which of these traditions last or which become the basis for nations or nationalist claims. Second, traditions are not simply inherited, they need to be reproduced... Third, the social and cultural significance of ethnic traditions is dramatically changed when they are written down, and sometimes when they are reproduced for television and movies... (1997: 50).

This issue about the effects of the past on the current identity of nations leads us to the third influential approach in the studies of nationalism: Ethno-symbolism. Ethno-symbolism has developed as a reaction to and a set of criticisms against modernism. The main criticism posed by modernist, social constructivists as well as this thesis to the Ethno-symbolist approach is that it falls into the trap of nationalist discourse as mentioned above by Calhoun. Smith – who is the main figure and inventor of the name

ethno-symbolism (Smith, 1999: 9) – argues mainly that an ethnic core of nations exist and sets the parameters of what is possible to be invented in the modern times. Even though nations (mostly) and nationalism are modern phenomena, it is argued that pre-modern *ethnies* form the bases of modern nations by adherents to this approach. Ethno-symbolists agree with the modernists and social constructivists, and depart from primordialists in that they accept the fact that nations are relatively new phenomena but criticise the impact of modernity in the formation of nations. Smith has argued that modernists actually have provided a definition of an ideal type of nation: the *modern nation* (Smith, 2005: 95, original emphasis). Smith argues that long term myths and memories of *ethnies* form the basis of nations, which are not created in the course of modernity *ex nihilo* (1983:191). Since the historical continuity of myths, memories, and customs have a lot to say about the nature of nations, the study of nationalism should cover *la longue durée* (Smith, 2001: 58). He makes a claim about the methodology of studying nationalism. This argument drives from the assumption that once *ethnies* are formed, they do not change drastically over centuries.

Ethno-symbolists argue that the study of nationalism should deal with the pre-modern ethnic basis of nations but this view ignores that myths are created, re-named, redefined and used by nationalist discourse, beginning from the early modern period up until today. As a criticism of Smith, it is argued here that nationalism rests upon the *imagination*, and that there are unbreakable bonds between the past, the present and even the future. Accordingly, nationalist interpretations of the past are being thought and cultural rituals and myths are being reproduced.

As Özkırımlı and Sofos have argued, Smith's position 'suffers from... 'retrospective ethnicization', that is, it ethnicizes the past, a past that is much more complex, contradictory and ambiguous than we are led to believe (2008: 9). The thorough analysis of elements of nationalist discourse in the Turkish and Greek cases provided by Özkırımlı and Sofos stand as a social constructivist reply to the ethno-symbolist arguments about continuity and *recurrence* (Smith, 2005: 100, original emphasis) of national identities. They have shown that what is argued to be 'unproblematic' historical realities are 'at best a constellation of processes which are the product of cultural and social strategies divorced from ethnic logics and considerations, often unrelated to each other, even accidental' (Özkırımlı; Sofos, 2008: 9).

Similar criticism from a modernist point of view has been spelled out by Breuilly, based on the English case. Breuilly compares his method with that of Smith, claiming that Smith gives priority to the question of 'when is *a* nation?' and considers 'the key ethno-symbolic processes which combine to form nations'. On the other hand, Breuilly asks whether this approach is helpful 'in the understanding of particular cases' and if not he concludes 'it is generally not helpful' (2005: 15)<sup>6</sup>. Breuilly argues that the continuous existence of names is not enough but these names should have been 'used for the same purposes and in the same ways from generation to generation' (Ibid: 19) and thus, demonstrated that in the English case, the term 'English' has been in use and in written since the c. AD 731 in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Ibid.). It had, however, acquired very different meanings over the centuries and even at times when it

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<sup>6</sup> Breuilly's methodology reminds us of Gellner's one in his reply to Smith as well, in their celebrated debate on the 'navels' of nations. Gellner stated that 'there are very very clear cases of modernism in a sense being true' (1996: 367). Then he cited the example of Estonia and concluded that 'it was created by the kind of modernist process which I then generalise for nationalism and nations in general. And if that kind of account is accepted for some, then the exceptions which are credited to other nations are redundant' (ibid.: 368).

had the same meaning as that of today, this was only at the elite level and unless 'Englishness' with an ethnic and political connotation has been shared by the masses, it is irrelevant to nationalism since 'nations [are] a mass phenomena' (Ichijo; Uzelac, 2005: 217).

Therefore, we could conclude that Smith is right in his claim about the influence of myths and memories. However, the belief or the imagination of the existence of links with the past rather than their actual existence is enough for the reproduction of a discourse of historical continuity.

Another important contribution of Smith to the literature on nations and nationalism is his list of 'fundamental features of national identity':

1. A common territory, or homeland
  2. common myths and historical memories
  3. a common, mass public culture
  4. common legal rights and duties for all members
  5. a common economy with territorial mobility for all members
- (1991:14).

Smith argues that each feature of a nation is determined by some kind of historical straitjacket where history shapes the present by providing proof about the existence of a nation's territory, language, stories or art in pre-modern times. However, nations are not objective historical realities but they are shaped by the discourse of nationalism, which is a modern phenomenon. The imagined community of a nation is registered as natural because 'it is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is thus, the product of discourse' (Wodak et al., 1999:

22). In line with the social constructivist approach, it is argued here that these features are reproduced by the discourse of nationalism. Thus, rather than treating the 'features of national identity' as objective tangible realities, we argue that we can talk about the various components of a nationalist discourse that contribute to our imagining of the nation as if it is a historical, unified entity. Here, the works that have been referred to as social constructivist will be briefly introduced as the main body of work that has helped to shape the approach of this thesis to nations and nationalism.

Social constructivism studies nationalism as a discourse and nation as narration. As pointed out above, nationalism as a discourse narrates the world image as a system of nations and national groupings, which are basic to our mental picture of the contemporary world, as well as to political practice. Nationalist discourse registers nations and classifies 'us' as part of a certain nation and 'them' as members of 'other' nations as if these are social and political facts. (Day; Thompson, 2004: 101).

On the other hand, this constructivist analysis is followed by the inclusion of the alternative narratives in the study of nation formation. Thus, nationalism is regarded as a hegemonic discourse but it is at the same time a contested one. The social constructivist approach can be characterised by its rejection of 'grand narratives' coupled with a greater emphasis on 'contextual knowledge' (Day; Thompson, 2004: 14). Thus, this view not only studies nationalism as a discourse but also tries to incorporate various meanings of nationalism in different contexts across cases and even in the study of the same case. That is to say, there is a greater emphasis on the importance and relevance of case studies and, additionally that when each case is analysed, alternative definitions of national identity or other discourses contesting the national identity are included. As Kornprobst has pointed

out, the social constructivist approach supports the view that ‘national identity varies across time and across different segments of the population. There is no monolithic discourse’ (2005: 405).

We can refer to the concise summary of Fariba Salehi for an insight into the ‘postmodern’ or social constructivist analysis of nationalism who has listed these following components:

- a. the nation-state and ‘national’ identity are essentially hegemonic, ambivalent and hybrid systems, whose formation, function and imagination should be analysed in the context of power relationships.
- b. national imagination is formed by the incorporation of ‘other’ spaces, times and characters. Thus, the ‘other’ is always part of the definition and conception of ‘us’. The dichotomization of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and their hierarchical state is a function and a discourse of power...
- c. a postmodern conception of the nation-state deconstructs the... assumption of an ontological inner core within ‘national boundaries’ (Salehi, 2001: 248).

### **1.2.2 A social constructivist approach to nationalism and national identity**

Based on the social constructivist premises, the way nationalist discourse is understood in this thesis and its manifestations in the Turkish case will be introduced, followed by other relevant arguments of this approach. Calhoun’s definition of nationalism as a discourse is borrowed here. He argues, ‘nationalism is... what Michel Foucault called a “discursive formation”, a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness’ (1997: 3). Discourse in this sense is a process of construction of meaning. Nationalist discourse has several basic

features. A list of these can be provided but this does not mean that all of these features are at work at the same time or that each one has a fixed definition. We can list them as:

1. the concept of the world being naturally divided into nations;
2. national identity being the supreme identity;
3. historical continuity;
4. homeland;
5. sovereignty;
6. indivisibility;
7. superiority and the distinctiveness of the national culture.

Needless to say this is not an exhaustive list. More importantly, it is not a checklist where peoples claiming to be nations have to see whether they meet all of these criteria. These are components of the discourse of nationalism that defines how people should imagine themselves. Thus, the discourse defines what is *ought* to be but not necessarily the reality. Indeed, from the social constructivist point of view, nationalist discourse can have varying versions and is constantly challenged by counter discourses. The listed features will be discussed with examples from the Turkish case in the following pages. This section is not aiming to present a picture of the political arena of the definition of national identity as simply a construct of official claims shaped by hegemonic nationalist discourse, but rather to draw a picture where indeed the changes in what constitutes an official claim and the simultaneous existence of different interpretations of the same feature are at play.

In the nationalist image of the world, it is natural to be members of nations. The world is naturally divided into nations and once we are born we belong to one of them. Kedourie

has shown how diversity began to be seen as God-given. The idea that God intended people to be diverse and 'our own particular qualities' should be cultivated and not mixed or merged with others were applied to politics by the time of the French Revolution and thus, nations were regarded as 'a natural division of the human race, endowed by God with its own character, which its citizens must, as a duty, preserve pure and inviolable' (Kedourie, 1960: 51).

In Turkey this element has been reproduced as part of the nationalist discourse leading to a pure negation of cosmopolitanism. The views of Ziya Gökalp's, the leading ideologue of Turkish nationalism, especially during the period between 1922 and 1938, mainly shaped the cultural policies of that time. He formulated that Turkishness was a combination of the Turkish nation and Western civilisation and thus, science and technology would be adopted from the West and the spirituality from the 'Turkish culture that exists in a non-degenerated form in the practices of the people' (Koçak, 2007: 376; Kadioğlu, 1998: 177). Cosmopolitans were defined as those who argued that all humanity was part of a single civilisation rather than various and distinct ones and civilisation was a combination of individuals not nations. In this picture cosmopolitanism was seen as a dangerous practice that did not respect particular nations (Koçak, 2007: 377).

This idea of the world being divided into nations is related to the concept of homeland. Each nation has to have its own piece of the world where it can claim historical ties. On the other hand, it is quite common that more than one nation have claims on a given territory. It is also possible that the definition of the homeland can change or, at least, the aspiration to claim sovereignty over some parts of these lands may be abandoned. The changes in what constitutes the Turkish homeland can be cited as examples of how



nationalist discourse is not static but takes on different meanings within the context of time and space. It is also important to note that there can be different official versions of the homeland or indeed any other feature. Moreover, other versions of nationalist discourses can articulate their own vision of the homeland, which could be in contradiction to the official one. Since it is believed that Turks originated from Central Asia and extended their territories during the Ottoman period, one possible homeland is as large as the land from 'the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China'<sup>7</sup>. During the liberation war (1919-1923), the homeland that was attempted to be saved was defined as *Misak-ı Milli*, which originally included Western Thrace (which is today within the borders of Greece), Mosul and Kirkuk (which are today within the borders of Iraq). However, the Republic of Turkey rests on only a small piece of Thrace and most of Asia Minor. Thus, Asia Minor had to be created and reproduced as the homeland, which was one of the aims of the Turkish History Thesis (Yıldız, 2001: 162).

Historical continuity and claims about homeland usually work hand-in-hand. The nation is argued to have occupied a certain territory for centuries. Claiming a historical basis not only makes the nation seem more natural but it is also claimed to give individuals a sense of belonging to a larger, eternal entity. Arguing that a historical ethnic group is the basis of the current nation is also part of the rhetoric of continuity as was mentioned in the previous discussion of Anthony Smith's work. Modern nations justify themselves with reference to ancient *ethnies* but the links between nations and *ethnies* may not be as direct as Smith has argued. Certainly, a Turkish ethnic core has been imagined as well. As we will see in the following chapter, Turkish nationalism created for itself a history and an

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<sup>7</sup> This rhetoric had been used by the President Turgut Özal in the aftermath of the formation of independent Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Özdoğan, 2002: 402).

ancient homeland in 1932 in the Turkish History Congress. Büşra Ersanlı (2003), in her exhaustive study of the Turkish History Congress showed how the links of the modern Turkish nation with past *ethnies* such as the Hittites and the ancient nomadic tribes of Central Asia were created with the scientific methods of anthropology and archaeology. Indeed, 'the term 'Turk' refers to different meanings and usages in various stages of history and in a range of geographical settings' (Aydın, 1998: 116). What makes which particular 'Turkishness' is going to be prevalent once again is open to contestation, pointing out once again the non-static character of any nationalist discourse. Conflicting claims of homeland and historical continuity, among others, give the nationalist discourses their fluid character from the point of view of social constructivism. Indeed, the study of how dynamic the definition of the 'Turk', even as defined only by the official discourse, will be studied in the following chapter.

Sovereignty of the nation and, usually its state, are two of the main components of the nationalist discourse. The nation is supposed to have sovereign rights over how the members of its own homeland are to be ruled. Again, the concept of sovereignty can be contested. Does sovereignty mean a separate nation-state for all nations or, could, obtaining rights to regulate the education of the given nation in a multi-national state be defined as sovereignty? Moreover, can any nation or state claim to be a sovereign in today's world where international trade and finance overrides borders and multinational companies or supranational organisations dictate rules about domestic laws and regulations?

Indivisibility or, in other words, the unity of a nation is another crucial element in the discourse of nationalism. Separatist movements are usually oppressed by nation-states

and even the mentioning of the mere existence of ethnic groups can be problematic. Almost no nation-state is formed by homogeneous ethnic groups but these groups are expected to assimilate into the higher national culture or practice their culture in a private sphere.

In Turkey, emphasis on unity is one of the strongest and most frequent elements. Since its foundation, the Turkish nation has been officially defined as a unity that incorporates non-Turkish groups. The motto of the state on this issue is 'How happy is one who says I am a Turk'. As will be discussed in the following chapter this view is regarded as an inclusive approach by Kemalists. In line with this perception, ethnic groups, especially the largest one, namely the Kurdish population, have been subject to assimilative and oppressive policies by the state. Kurds have been defined as a sub-group of Turks and those who have talked about the existence of Kurds have been treated as traitors who are threatening to the national unity. The rhetoric of unity also had an impact on how the state perceived the Turkish left. The Marxist approach to the analysis of Turkish society as one that is composed of various classes with clashing interests has also been regarded as challenging the unity of the nation. Kemalists have adopted a discourse that defines the Turkish nation as one which does not involve any divisions, no matter if they were ethnic or class-based. On the other hand, most of the Turkish leftists<sup>8</sup> identified themselves as patriots and they had no separatist claims. The Marxist solution to the problematic of class and ethnic differences was acknowledgement of this fact and tried to offer policies to overcome these differences for a more just and unified society. The definition of what would ensure unity was thus another source of contestation between the official discourse

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<sup>8</sup> I understand the word 'leftist' in its broader sense and use it to refer to any person or group of persons who supports positions on the left or is a member of any left political group, from social-democrats to communists and ultra-left.

and its 'other', the leftist narrative. The existence of such contestations and counter narratives to the hegemonic attempt of the Turkish state represents another case of the dynamism of the operation of nationalist discourses as they are faced with contradictions and conflicts.

In this thesis, the discourse of nationalism, whether left or right, hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, is studied as a contested terrain. Nationalism is about making this contested terrain seem natural, unquestionable and integral to human existence. Nation-states are shaped by this discourse and also aim to have its elements internalised by their citizens. Nationalism is also a project since the diffusion of the discourse is a constant necessity. 'The fundamental problem therefore, is to produce the people. More exactly, it is to make the people reproduce itself continually as national community' (Balibar, 1991: 93).

Nation-states are based on the idea that 'the political and national unit should be congruent with each other', as defined by Gellner (1983:1). All nation-states aspire to the ideal of one nation, one state. To reach this end, nationalism has to be unquestionable so that people can be mobilised around the ideas of the unity of the nation, which depends on the unity and territorial integrity of the state. A nation-state should assure its citizens that it can mobilise them around this identity when needed. Forging a common national identity is one of the concerns of nation-states.

National identity is at root a collective phenomenon... The idea of nationalism as at base a form of collective identity is sustained because the manifestations of nationalism such as cultural production, the nationalization of the state, nationalist mobilization, all depend on the existence of, or an attempt to constitute, a strong collective identity (Delanty; O'Mahony, 2002: 44).

Indeed 'the national identity is' actually 'always a project, the success of which depends upon being seen as an essence' as argued by Reicher and Hopkins (2001: 222).

Following the social constructivist premises, besides defining nationalism as a discourse, it is also argued here that the constructed character of nationalism can be recognised by studying national identity. Here the definition of identity developed by Stuart Hall is the departure point, which is:

the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivity's, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken' (1996: 5-6).

National identity is, like all other identities, never fixed and is always formed in relation to 'others'. When thinking in terms of identity, it is crucial to bare in mind two basic characteristics. Identities are multiple and overlapping as well as changable over time. 'The concept of identity never signifies anything static, unchanging, or substantial, but rather always an element situated in the flow of time, ever changing, something involved in a process' (Wodak, et al., 1999:11). Secondly, all identities are constructed in relation to 'others.' As Stuart Hall has put it '... [I]t is only through the relation to the other, to relation to what it is not... to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus, its 'identity' – can be constructed' (Hall, 1996: 4, emphasis in original). The meaning of identity used here is not only about being but it is more about becoming (Reicher; Hopkins, 2001: IX).

In studying national identity, the discursive approach of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe is also a useful tool in the sense that they have pointed out that all attempts at

establishing hegemony create counter-discourses. In the above discussion on the elements of nationalist discourse, alternative narratives and challenging discourses have also been mentioned. The discursive approach has been helpful in this thesis in pointing out that there are ongoing power relations between the hegemonic discourse of nationalism and the challenges to it. According to their approach, all social reality is articulated by discourse and, therefore, there is no reality outside of it. However, Laclau and Mouffe have introduced the concept of *exteriority*, which basically involves all the other discourses that are outside the one in question. The impossibility of suturing derives from the simultaneous existence and operation of these discourses. The basic assertion of discourse theory is that since all discourses are the result and part of power relations, all identity is relational. 'If contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality and the transformation of the elements into moments is never complete' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 106).

Laclau has talked about the possibility – that is a result of the recognition that 'agents' do not always readily have a 'defined location in social structure' – to realise that identity is not only about discovering but about construction and that construction is due to conflicts in all societies (1994: 2). This is a picture of society where individuals or groups of people, rather than being mere subjects in the system, form a society where change is possible through power relations not only among agents but also between them and the structure. In this sort of society, identities are in flux and are constantly being defined and challenged in relation to 'others' and changing circumstances. As Bhabha has put it, whatever falls in the political frontiers is,

always itself a process of hybridity, incorporating, new "people" in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning, and inevitably, in the

political process, unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation... What emerges as an effect of such “incomplete signification” is a turning of boundaries and limits into *in-between* spaces through which meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated (1990: 4).

National identity is a contested terrain as such, where power relations between the state and various groups in society are at work. In our discussion of identity we can call these as the self – the state and its constitutive ‘others’. The definition of ‘others’ of a given state could include self-evident opponents, such as ethnic groups, neighbouring states that may have territorial claims, and also groups that have an alternative definition of what the nation should mean or favour another political system. The Turkish state adopting nationalist discourse has been trying to hegemonize all areas of meaning but it also has created its counter-narratives. Then, the question is how these challenges are dealt with. In other words, the question being asked is: how would the Kemalist state position itself in relation to these external or internal ‘others’, in our case vis-à-vis communism via Nâzım Hikmet? The Turkish state has developed two alternative approaches; the *logic of equivalence* and the *logic of difference*. The *logic of equivalence* is a situation where ‘a maximum separation has been reached: no element in the system of equivalences enters into relations other than those of opposition to the elements of the other system’ (Laclau; Mouffe, 2001:130). The character of the relationship is antagonism and pure negation. This has been the main strategy of Turkey in its relation to communism and Nâzım Hikmet. He has been sued, sentenced to jail, forced in exile, been deprived of citizenship, besides having been branded a traitor. On the other hand, the alternative strategy is ‘the logic of difference... attempts to weaken and displace a sharp antagonistic polarity,

endeavouring to relegate that division to the margins of society' (Howard; Stavrakakis, 2000:11). In this study, this kind of approach in the official discourse of Nâzım Hikmet was traced from 1993 to 2009 when Nâzım was finally re-naturalised.

### **1.3 Overview of the case study**

The case study of this thesis is believed to illustrate change and ambiguity in the state discourse and the challenges posed its hegemony. The case of Nâzım Hikmet is representative not only of the otherness of communism (even more generally of the left) in Turkey but also of the non-static character of nationalist discourses. This case is chosen to show the change in the official discourse (for the Turkish state, the official discourse is Kemalist nationalism) and its relation with the 'other' through one of the main representative of a counter discourse (the counter discourse of communism has been reproduced by the works of the literary figure Nâzım Hikmet). From the point of view of the social constructivist analysis of nationalism, the definition of national identity is not considered to be static but a continuous product of power struggles between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. The case of the relationship between the Turkish state and Nâzım Hikmet stands as a good example of such a struggle. The main strategy of the Turkish State, in order to deal with the counter narrative formulated by Nâzım has been to hegemonise and eliminate its influence. However, this strategy, mainly since 1993, has been replaced by a colonising one, which does not necessarily eradicate all differences but tries to contain its influence by representing Nâzım as a national poet.



Nâzım Hikmet has been a popular topic of study; however, such an analysis of Nâzım as an articulator of the counter narratives of the Turkish left and of his place in the official discourse are the contributions of this thesis to the vast amount of existing literature on the poet. Most of the works on Nâzım are either biographies or literary criticisms of his work. There have been in total six MA and PhD dissertations written on him in Turkey, which similarly analyses his works<sup>9</sup>. In the English language, Saime Göksu and Edward Timms's (1999) *Romantic Communist: the Life and Works of Nazım Hikmet* can be cited as the only detailed study of the poet. Among these, the closest arguments to the current study have been made by Başak Ergil in her MA thesis, published by the Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation. Her study analyses the discourse on Nâzım in the Anglo-American literary system and argues that there are two main representations of Nâzım: A communist poet and a lyrical, romantic poet. The latter de-politicised image started to prevail in the late 1970s and became dominant especially by 2000 (Ergil, 2005:121). Although this study follows a partially similar trajectory, it is intended to probe deeper into the actions and discourse of the Turkish state in its relation to Nâzım Hikmet. The reasons for this 'choice', namely, the prevalence of a depoliticized and 'Turkish' representation of Nâzım in the official discourse is argued to be representing a shift in the state strategy to communism as an 'other'. This study situates the changing discourse of the state vis-à-vis Nâzım Hikmet in an appropriate social-historical context and considers in some detail its causation and implications.

In the following pages, the counter-narratives to the Kemalist imagery of the Turkish nation, formulated and reproduced by Nâzım Hikmet will be introduced. He was a communist Turkish poet. He was significant for the Turkish left as a role model and as a

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<sup>9</sup> This information has been gathered from [http://www.yok.gov.tr/tez/tez\\_tarama.htm](http://www.yok.gov.tr/tez/tez_tarama.htm)

communist intellectual when viewed from the standpoint of the state. He has been perceived by both actors as a symbol of communism in a country whose national identity has been defined as a negation of this ideology. Communism and almost all versions of leftist movements or ideologies have been one of the 'others' of the Turkish nation.

The articulation of communism as an 'other' had a two-pronged character. One challenge in the eyes of the Kemalists was its analysis of society as based on class divisions. As mentioned before, the Turkish nation was articulated as unified in the Kemalist discourse while Nâzım Hikmet's work largely diverged from this kind of perspective as he saw modern Turkish society as diverse and divided into classes and recognized popular struggles as constitutive of modern Turkey. He reproduced an alternative narrative of the Turkish population. Even though the Turkish left has not taken on a cosmopolitan character during the republican period and has been shaped by a sense of patriotism, they were perceived to advocate internationalism rather than nationalism and have been punished in various ways by the Kemalist state as will be seen in the chapter on the Turkish left. Nâzım Hikmet as a significant figure of the Turkish left was also subject to intimidating actions by the hegemonic state. On the other hand, he produced his alternative vision, which became widely available to the public. This fact made him even more of a target who needed to be silenced from the perspective of the state. From my point of view his literary products can be regarded as clear examples of the existence of counter narratives to official nationalist discourses.

The 1931 Republican Peoples Party Programme proclaimed the six main principles of the Party and the Kemalist Republic as, republicanism, populism, etatism, secularism, revolutionarism and nationalism. Nationalism has been one of the six cornerstones of

modern Turkey, according to the Kemalist project. Kemalist introspection (and the imperative of nation building), in combination with the mistrust of the Republic towards external involvement in Turkish politics (which stemmed from the liberation war) was readily translated in the *CHP* (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*- Republican Peoples Party) programme as opposed to internationalism. Internationalism was specifically mentioned to be a cause for 'national destruction' (Peker cited in Parla, 1995:108). Given the internationalist dimension of the communist movement, however, communism was considered to be alien to Turkish society and the challenges it faced and was cast as an 'other' in the Turkish nationalist discourse. This relates to the discussion of the second significant reason as to why communism was an 'other'. The socialist revolution had taken place in Russia, a historical enemy of the Turks. Internationalism was understood as rhetoric justifying service to Russian interests in the state discourse. As will be discussed later in more detail, this approach often acquired personal overtones as in the case of Nâzım Hikmet, who was perceived to be serving Russian strategic interests rather than those of his own country. This point of view reached its peak when he was claimed to be a traitor – when he fled to Russia – and was deprived of his citizenship in 1950.

Another challenging narrative reproduced by Nâzım Hikmet was his understanding of modernisation that was different from the Kemalist one. The approach to modernisation can be seen as another case representing the theoretical arguments of the social constructivist approach. There are contradictory and conflicting definitions and practices of Turkish modernisation and such conflicts could be seen in the treatment of the phenomenon in the Kemalist discourse and the narrative of Nâzım Hikmet. These two alternative interpretations of modernisation were some of the reasons the narratives of

Kemalism and that of Nâzım Hikmet were positioned at antagonistic poles. In her study of Nâzım's *Human Landscapes*, Aguiar (2007) has shown how the poet has included implicit criticisms of the Kemalist modernisation project in his epic work. The deficiencies of the top-down, elitist model in its effort to transform society are thoroughly exposed in the *Epic*, pointing out the fact that the same class, ethnic and gender divisions existed in modern Turkey as they did in the Ottoman Empire. Among the many characters of the *Landscapes*, peasants, workers, petit-bourgeois, Turkish and foreign bourgeoisie are depicted in the same train but in different carriages; or even if they are in the same carriage, they still live in different worlds<sup>10</sup>.

It can be claimed that Nâzım was not satisfied with the level of change Kemalism brought to Turkish society even though he was supportive of its progressive and anti-imperialist elements. Nâzım, as part of the Turkish leftist intelligentsia, had not totally rejected or fundamentally questioned Kemalism but rather saw it as a step forward from the feudal, imperialist system of the Ottoman period as well as an anti-imperialist movement. He was a modernist himself but had a critical approach to the Kemalist model of modernisation. He envisaged 'the modern as intervening and transformative in an international and revolutionary climate shaped by cataclysmic war and massive political and social upheaval' (Kolocotroni et al quoted in Aguiar, 2007: 110).

Furthermore, as will be discussed in the chapter focusing on his work, his vision of modernization had an emancipatory charge for the people. He was not only influenced by the local or folk culture, but also reproduced the people as the engine of development and change in his work. This was apparent in his version of the Sheikh Bedreddin Revolt as

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<sup>10</sup> The Diner Carriage scene is the most obvious place where these class divisions are apparent as we will see in later chapters.

expressed in *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* and mainly in *The Epic of National Militia*, which is one part of the *Landscapes*. *The Epic of National Militia/Liberation War* narrates the liberation war as the struggle of the people of Asia Minor. He has written the story from the standpoint of the invisible heroes rather than the military elite.

As Halman put it, Nâzım Hikmet has been one of the most influential communist intellectuals in Turkey (2006: xi). He was a literary figure, who produced works ranging from newspaper articles to scripts for films, and in doing so, was contributing greatly to the reproduction of alternative narratives about Turkish society and its modernization. Thus, his inclusion in or exclusion from the Turkish national identity or the shifting of the discourses and/or strategies from the *logic of equivalence* to the *logic of difference* is studied here as a case that exemplifies the changing definition of national identity.

One of the chapters of this thesis is going to be dedicated to the role of literary work in the making of national identity. It is going to be discussed in more detail later but the argument is that literature and language, which are intrinsically related, are core elements of national identity; however, literary works are also spaces of critical narratives. Thus, which literary works will be part of the national canon is a contested domain. Following this argument, the previous exclusion of Nâzım Hikmet from the national curriculum, the fact that his work was banned for many years and the current attempts to include his work as part of the collection of masterpieces of Turkish literature are indicators of the change in the definition of Turkish national identity. It has already been mentioned that the interest of this thesis is how Kemalist hegemonic discourse reacts to the challenges posed by communism and Nâzım Hikmet. In the course of this study, it has been noticed that the discourse has shifted from exclusion, justified with the representation of Nâzım as a

communist traitor, to inclusion of him as a patriotic Turkish poet who is also a master of the Turkish language. This change will be explored more extensively in the following chapters alongside the argument that even the inclusion of him is a hegemonic effort. His inclusion in the national literary canon and educational curricula as well as his designation as first and foremost a Turkish national literary figure, are discussed in some detail in the later chapters. These issues are discussed in order to point out that, state attempts to neutralize his appeal – who was a figure who expressed an alternative to the Kemalist path to modernization and an equally alternative definition of the nation as resting on the ordinary people – are the strategic objectives of Kemalist experimentation and administration. Internalization of ‘the other’ inside the definition of ‘the self’ is argued to be another strategy to hegemonize social meaning. Today, Nâzım is no longer a communist but a Turk.

Alongside these arguments and information, a related argument has emerged in the process. It is indeed the existence of both identities, communist and patriotic, and the influences of these in Nâzım’s life and works that has allowed the two possible discourses to be formulated and commensurate the shift in state strategy. Indeed Nâzım was Turkish and was inspired by the folk traditions of Turkey. It is the simultaneous existence of clashing identities and the resulting ambiguity that has been the source of conflicting representations of Nâzım Hikmet. This formulation also relates to the previous discussion on how social meaning or identity include hybridity and it is these ambiguities that make the definition of identities – in our case Turkish national identity and Nâzım Hikmet’s identity – a space of contestation rather than a closure.

#### 1.4 Outline of the thesis

Throughout the following chapters, the common theme can be argued to be the impossibility of closure of meaning due to the existence of ambiguities, in-between spaces and power relations among clashing discourses. The theoretical postulations summarised above formulate an understanding of national identity in flux as it is a constant product of hegemonic and counter narratives. This thesis is a study of Turkish national identity as such whose definition is subject to power relations between the hegemonic Kemalist state and the counter narratives reproduced by its 'others'. The nationalist discourse following a similar theoretical argument is studied here as another social construct which is not monolithic but volatile. This thesis aims to study the official version of Turkish nationalist discourse and its relationship with one of its 'others'. Communism is the 'other' that has been chosen to be analysed here.

The social constructivist approach is applied to this study and it is argued that changes in state strategy in its conflicts with communism can be traced and this dynamic relationship of the Kemalist state and communism is argued here to be represented with clarity in the case of the relationship of the state and Nâzım Hikmet. Nâzım Hikmet is thus studied here as the symbol of communism in Turkey and the discourse and actions of the state against him will be analysed to show the changing strategy of the state to deal with communism.

This thesis examines the degree to which and the ways in which the official discourse has adapted and undergone transformations in its approach to Nâzım Hikmet and to situate any such shifts in approach within the context of the political and social crises that

unsettled and disrupted the Kemalist project. In other words, it is proposed that such changes in the official discourse are not haphazard but should be seen as part of a broader attempt of Kemalism to reconcile itself with aspects of Turkish society (in this case the Turkish left and its culture, and the cultural inputs of a leftist intellectual) it once derided and chastised and, in a way, to appropriate and colonize them.

The case study of Nâzım Hikmet illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the state discourse, the left and Nâzım Hikmet himself. Thus, the first chapter aims to deconstruct the state discourse by asking the question with no definitive answer, 'Who is a Turk?'. The second chapter will study the Turkish left as an 'other' of Turkey through its history and more importantly through its relationship with the Kemalist discourse and then position Nâzım Hikmet in this relationship as a symbolic figure of the left.

Since this thesis does not aim to narrate the story of Nâzım as such but argues that this case is illustrative of the changes, the flux, and the contradictions in official nationalist discourses as shaped by its social constructivist approach to studying nationalism, this case study will first be situated in the general context of the ambiguities of the official Turkish nationalist discourse. One of the arguments presented has been that nationalist discourses are not static and thus the first chapter of this thesis will try to show the ambiguities of the official discourse in defining what Turkish national identity is or, in other words, the diverse and ever-changing definitions/understandings of 'Who is a Turk?' will be discussed. The role of language, religion and race in the Kemalist nationalism in different periods and in relation to different groups will be analysed with the argument claiming that who exactly is included in Turkishness has been a changing concept. The discourse of the Kemalists is that the state stands in the same distance from



all of its members regardless of their religion, ethnic or racial background. However, the practices vis-à-vis the non-Turkish and non-Muslim members of society have shown that Turkish language, belief in the Sunni version of Islam and, at times, racial ties and, as an overall requirement, loyalty, have emerged as the unnamed, implicit criteria of being Turkish, even if not of being a Turkish citizen.

The third chapter will try to depict the volatile relationship of the Turkish left with Kemalism. A chronological and critical summary of the leftist movements in Turkish political life will be provided in order to show how the relationship between the left and the Kemalist state has varied. The main official strategy in its dealing with its 'other', the left, has been antagonism and thus, the Kemalist state rejected and suppressed all forms of leftist movements. However, there have been times when the state has incorporated or tolerated the left and it will be argued that this change in strategy may have been possible due to the ambiguities, hybridity and the malleability of the discourses of both the Turkish left and Kemalism. The rehabilitation of the left has been possible because it has not fundamentally questioned Kemalism and Kemalism is now open to interpretation, making it possible to hegemonize the influence of its 'other' by colonisation of certain elements of its discourse. The study of the relationship of the left and the Kemalist state is crucial to show that both articulated discourses could be perceived to be parallel, especially in the cases of anti-imperialism and patriotism. The Turkish left has produced its own nationalism, 'patriotism', and is part of the hegemonic political struggle over the definition of the Turkish nation. There has been a struggle between the hegemonic Kemalist state and the Turkish left, among other actors, to define who a Turk is, what kind of society a Turkish one is and what is the best political system for this society. The

Turkish left, as will be seen more clearly in the chapter on this issue, has mostly presented itself as Kemalist and patriotic in order to incorporate itself into the body politic. However, their discourse involved elements challenging the mainstream imagination of the nation and the left has been treated as the 'other' challenging the state system with counter narratives.

Nazım Hikmet is relevant and significant in this relationship not only as an active member of communist activity in Turkey and an exemplar of the left's cultural productivity but also as an articulator of both leftist discourses and patriotic ones. He has been a productive figure contributing to the formation of counter narratives. The case of Nâzım in the years shaped by antagonism represented the antagonistic positioning of the Turkish state vis-à-vis its 'other' but the current change in the discourse about him also represents a change towards the threat of communism. The elements of the leftist discourse (among them is its self-definition as patriotic) which have also been reproduced in some of the works of Nâzım Hikmet, have made it possible that through his case and others, the Turkish left could be colonised.

In this thesis, it is argued that the current discourse on Nâzım Hikmet through its representation of him as a patriotic Turkish poet, places him in the Turkish canon. It is thus seen as necessary to introduce a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, known as the national literary canon. The social constructivist approach is also applied in the study of the national canon and asks the question 'what is the national canon?' The fourth chapter will be dedicated to the discussion of the ambiguous question of what a national canon is, and how it helps to shape national identity. It will be seen that just like the definition of national identity, the choice of the national canon is also a contested

terrain. The canon discussion provides yet another example of the arenas of ambiguity in the definition of national identity shaped by the relationship of various actors and their hegemonising attempts.

The fifth chapter will be based on Nâzım Hikmet's works. It will be argued that his work involves elements that make his representation both as a communist and as a patriotic Turkish poet possible. His narrative, on the one hand, criticises the Kemalist modernisation project but, on the other, praises its anti-imperialist and progressive elements. He was inspired by the local, which gave the ground for him to be represented as a patriot. On the other hand, he produced works that dealt with the problems of humanity internationally, such as imperialism in China in his *Giocanda and Si-Ya-U* and in India in *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?*, the devastation caused by war in Ethiopia in his *Letter to Taranta Babu* and in Japan in *Japanese Fisherman*<sup>11</sup>. The complexity of Nâzım's productions and the undeniable influence of both communism and patriotism in the narrative produced by Nâzım himself, have been essentially dissected and selectively reproduced in the official discourse, thus, neutralizing its critical dimension and effectively subsuming his discourse in the dominant one.

The sixth chapter, which focuses on the representations of Nâzım Hikmet, will consist of two parts. In the first part, the two discourses about him (or the two clashing representations of him) will be summarised with their reference points in his life. The second part is an analysis of the official discourse on Nâzım between the years 1993 and 2009. The main concern of this study is the change in the official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet; therefore, there will be a very limited place for the analysis of the discourse of

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<sup>11</sup> Details of these and other works will be given in the chapter focusing on Nâzım Hikmet's work.

other actors active in the discussion around Nâzım, whether they are supportive or reactionary.

The concluding chapter will attempt to bring the threads of this discussion together and discuss the findings of the research and attempt to evaluate the changing official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet as a new attempt at hegemony on the part of the Kemalist state.

## **2. 'WHO IS A TURK?': CHANGING REQUIREMENTS OF TURKISH NATIONAL IDENTITY**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The development of Turkish nationalism is part and parcel of the modernisation project, which was mainly influenced by European modernisation and modernity, including the emergence of national states, where nations are the legitimate sources of sovereignty of statehood rather than the imperial throne. The idea of making the state compatible with the nation or, in other words, the 'one state-one nation' ideal was one of the aims of the early Republic. This ideal, however, forced the elite to face the challenge of offering an alternative to traditionally strong religious identities as well as to other ethnic identities. In the case of Turkey since it was constructed as a nation state, the glue for the people had to be a single Turkish nationality instead of religious or other ethnic or national allegiances.

'The Turkish population' in the Kemalist formulation was 'the population living in Thrace and Asia Minor' and in Mustafa Kemal's own words 'The Turkish people forming the Turkish Republic are called the Turkish Nation. How happy is one who says I am a Turk.' Such a definition of the nation that encompasses all the peoples of both Thrace and Anatolia was seen by the Kemalist elite as a formula that would avoid the risk of secession of both non-Muslims and non-Turkish Muslims of the country (Karal, 1997).

Equating all the people of the Turkish nation who would live peacefully under one state was seen as a practical solution to eliminate differences.

Kemalist nationalism has thus been defined by the state as a voluntary membership where religion, race and language have not been definitive. Kemalist intellectuals argue that Turkish nationalism is territorial. It is voluntary and open to 'all citizens of the Turkish Republic living in its territory and, as long as they consider themselves Turkish, are welcome regardless of their language, religion or race' (Ateş, 1995: 40, my translation). According to this understanding, religion, language or race should not define national identity and non-Muslim, non-Sunni and non-Turkish citizens should be able to 'enjoy' Turkishness as well as Muslims.

Turkish national identity was, however, in practice usually defined by religion, language and even race due to the challenges the state faced in its modernisation project. Based on the social constructivist approach, this thesis takes the practices of the state and its reflection among the people into account, arguing that the state either resorted to authoritarianism to impose its ideals, or pragmatically articulated religious discourse for popular support. In some cases, especially with reference to race and in its dealings with the Kurdish population, the invention of history was also utilised. Public use of Turkish language has also been a major requirement of the state in defining who Turkish nationals are. These strategies were resorted to as responses to the counter narratives against the Kemalist modernisation and those reproducing such narratives were considered and treated as 'others', such as Kurds and non-Muslims (which will be studied in this chapter), as well as the case study of this thesis, Nâzım Hikmet.

There have been many examples of state practices, especially in the earlier years of the republic, that shows religion, language and race have played a central role in defining Turkish national identity in state discourse and practices. Before examining the examples, a quick look at the *CHP* (The Republican People's Party – the founding state party which was also the single ruling party from 1923 to 1950) programmes can show us that the definition of 'a Turk' has had linguistic and cultural criteria. Between 1924 and 1929, the rhetoric of the party was 'unity in language, culture and ideals'. Then from 1929 to the mid-1940s, we can see that unity in terms of blood was added, which made race come to the fore of the state discourse (Yıldız, 2004: 16-7; Bora, 1995: 34; Parla, 1995: 32).

Some of the most obvious examples that represent how these three criteria have been definitive of national identity will be talked about in the following pages. In doing so, the changes in the level of expectations and the different meanings of national identity in different times and contexts will be the main concern. The Turkish case is argued here to be a good example of the fact that construction of national identity is an open-ended process. It has been set out in the previous chapter that national identity is a continuous function of power relations and the definition of the self is always influenced by 'others'. We can see how various understandings or definitions of 'who a Turk is' have come to the fore in the state rhetoric. This chapter aims to represent the Turkish case in the broader context of the theoretical arguments set out in the previous chapter not only by trying to show the relationship of the hegemonic centre, that is the Kemalist state with the counter forces – its 'others' – but also by giving several examples in the official practices that emanate from this power struggle making the rhetoric and practice of the state inconsistent, changing and malleable. The aim of this chapter is to represent the official

Turkish nationalist discourse as a non-closure, adopting the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence* vis-à-vis its 'others', which will be done by looking at some examples that represent the malleable relationship of the Kemalist state with its non-Muslim and non-Turkish (especially the Kurdish population) 'others' and the ambiguities in the official discourse and practices. It is argued, here, that strong religious ties and various ethnic (represented here by language) loyalties have challenged the Kemalist self-identified civic discourse. Race has also been part of the official definition of national identity due to the international context (the rise of fascism in the 1930s) and the attempts to provide the newly forged nationals an identity based on membership to an eternal and successful race. The state strategy has either been antagonistic and aimed to marginalise these loyalties or it has aimed to incorporate them pragmatically into the national identity, in other words, colonise their discourses, to render them less influential.

In this chapter, we can see a similar pattern of relationship to our case study. This chapter aims to represent the existence of various 'others' of the Kemalist state apart from our unit of analysis, which is the Turkish left represented by the case of Nâzım Hikmet. Moreover, similarity in terms of the existence of ambiguities and change in the discourse and practice vis-à-vis the 'others' studied in this chapter and Nâzım Hikmet, and also similarities in the implementation of the same state strategies – identified in this theses as the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence* – in these dynamic relationships will be identified and studied in this chapter. The argument of this chapter is that the definition of 'who a Turk is' is not a simple task. Indeed, the answer to this question is shaped by the power relations between the hegemonic state and its 'others' and both set of actors adopt malleable discourses that make their relationship not only that of mere antagonism but



opens up the possibility of rapprochement, incorporation and colonisation of certain discourses. This argument is carried out in the study of the relationship of the Kemalist state and the Turkish left in the following chapter and also in the case of Nâzım Hikmet. Thus, this chapter introduces this argument and offers the general context where the case study of this thesis is situated.

‘Who is a Turk?’ is a crucial question that links this chapter to the case of Nâzım Hikmet. We can also formulate the question as: Can a communist be a Turk? Strong Islamic identity, non-Muslims, Kurds and other groups whose mother tongue is not Turkish, and Nâzım – as a symbolic figure of communism – appear as ‘others’ or as groups reproducing alternative narratives of identity (national, ethnic or political). Another link can be identified among the expectations of Kemalist nationalism from its ‘others’. Besides all the fluidity of definition and criteria, loyalty to the state and nation can be argued to be a constant expectation. Practicing of religion or use of language, for example, has not been problematic as long as it has been limited to the private sphere. Demonstration of loyalty to the state and its ideals, especially of unity, secularism and modernisation in the public space was the main requirement. In this line, Nâzım Hikmet’s main challenge to the state was perceived to be his loyalty to another ideology rather than Turkish nationalism. He was the advocate of communism that was perceived in Turkey to be in the service of Russia or, at best, an internationalist ideology, both of which were condemned by the nationalist discourse.

In the following pages, these arguments about the changing criteria of Kemalist nationalism will be demonstrated by studying various examples, mainly from the experiences of non-Muslim and non-Turkish Muslim citizens of Turkey. The place of

race in the Turkish national identity will also be studied. The place of non-Muslims and non-Turkish Muslims in Turkey will show us that religion and language and sometimes race have been central in defining who a Turk is. When talking about the influence of religion, we will be looking at the ways the non-Muslim minorities, as well as Kurds as a Muslim population, have been treated. The same groups have been affected by requirements of the state in relation to the use of language as well. The last part will focus on how race has surfaced in state discourses and practices to define national identity.

It should also be mentioned that the fact that there is a section on religion, language and race does not mean they are treated as equals. Language here is analysed as an expression of ethnicity. The cases where language has been a requirement should be seen as ways that the state expects its citizens to be or to become part of Turkish ethnicity. This expectation of ethnic belonging could have been represented in different ways and has in fact been referred to by the state discourse. There have been references to a 'Turkish way of life' in certain laws or speeches but this criterion is much vaguer to deal with here. Looking at the practices where people were made to learn and use Turkish is a more concrete example.

## **2.2. The place of religion in the Kemalist definition of Turkish national identity**

Before going into the details of the cases, it is necessary to understand why religion being a core element of Turkish nationalism is problematic. It is so at least because if religion is central to the Turkish national identity then this would challenge the argument that being

Turkish does not require one to be Muslim but only a willingness to be Turkish and live in Turkey. Moreover, whether religion is a defining component of national identity in Turkey can be considered problematic when the formation of the Republic is taken into account.

The Turkish nation was constructed as a negation of the Ottoman Empire. The new Turkish Republic was a nation-state with the aim of building a homogeneous Turkish nation, as opposed to the empire that was home to numerous religious, linguistic and ethnic communities. After the successful war against the Western imperial powers for Mustafa Kemal and his fellow Turks, a new war had to be fought against what was seen as the main cause of underdevelopment in Turkey, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire, religion played the main defining role both in terms of the identification of people and the way that the state system of taxation, army, schooling among other institutions were organised. The nation-state had the task of challenging and changing all of these. All the reforms introduced in that period, including the change in dress codes, the change of the alphabet from Arabic to Latin (1928), and the ban on *tarikats* (1925) can be argued to be forged against the impact of the Ottoman Empire on the lives of Turkish nationals. In this sense, the non-Muslims and the Kurdish population were seen as remnants of the Ottoman system. Islamists represented a challenge to the secular state with their religious and alternative ethnic allegiances. The social organisation of the non-Muslims and the Kurdish population<sup>12</sup> was still shaped by the Ottoman *millet* system. From the Kemalist point of view, they represented examples of a pre-modern social structure. Accordingly, these groups were considered to be

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<sup>12</sup> See Mesut Yeğen's 'Müstakbel Türkten Sözde Vatandaş' (2006) for a wider discussion of the state perception of the Kurdish population as a source of pre-modern discourses and way of life.

reproducing counter-narratives to both Turkish nationalism and modernisation, which made the place of these groups the 'others' within the modern Turkish Republic.

It has to be added that secularisation was identified by Kemalism as a fundamental and necessary tool to ensure the loyalty of the Turks to their nation, instead of religious identities, which were certainly still strong. The republican, secular elite tried to limit religion to the private life. One of the most emphasised characteristics of the Turkish Republic is its being secular. Such emphasis on secularism is again a rhetorical attempt to define the contours between the Ottoman Empire – which represents a passé system and backwardness – and the Turkish Republic – a modern state suitable for the contemporary world. According to Kili, secularisation included more than the marginalisation of religion in civic affairs. It was meant to give freedom of belief and equality before the law (2001: 265). Secondly, secularisation in Turkey has served the purpose of nation-building. It has made the transition from the Ottoman system, where religion and God were the supreme authority, to a nation-state, where the sovereignty of the nation is secured by the republican institutions. 'In Atatürk's notion of nationalism, the freedom of individuals and peoples are inseparable and unquestionable components of social and political life' (Ibid: 214, my translation). This meant that individuals are free as long as they are part of a nation; therefore, they are required to pay allegiance to the nation.

However, how could the state deny the centuries of old traditions, commitments and the legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system, where religion is the main determinant in society-state relations? Here appeared the dilemma of the Turkish nationalist project. In practice the Turkish State did not or could not deny the influence of religion on national identity.

In defining who a Turk is in practice, religion played a huge role. The challenge of the

existing religious identities – not only of Muslims but also of non-Muslims – had their impact on state policies and religion became a criterion for national identity. In the final analysis, Sunni Muslims appeared as the privileged Turks in comparison to non-Muslims and Muslims of other sects.

The role religion played in the context of the liberation war, Lausanne Treaty, Turco-Greek population exchange, and the Wealth Tax, together with how religion was used as a pretext to assimilate all Muslims as Turks, will be summarised in the following pages.

### **2.2.1 Place of religion during the liberation war**

During the liberation war, the main discourse of mobilisation was based on the Muslim identity instead of Turkishness. When the terms, 'Turk' or the 'Turkish nation', were employed, this meant all the Muslims of the territory that was fought for. One of Mustafa Kemal's speeches talking about a common fight of Muslims formed not only of Turks but of Laz, Circassians and Kurds is a recurrent reference point in the literature that argues for civic nationalism, to make the point that Mustafa Kemal's perception of the Turkish nation was inclusive. He tried to mobilise all Muslim inhabitants for the same aim – the element of a common aim of a nation will become another component of the early Turkish Republic.

There have been several occasions where *Misak-i Milli* was defined and it was claimed in all cases that it included all Islamic elements. Mustafa Kemal in October 1919, February 1920 and in May 1920 have made it clear that the liberation war was the struggle of all

Muslims and cited the groups as Turks, Laz, Circassians and Kurds. This was a sign for Feroz Ahmad that the terms 'nation', 'national', and 'nationalism' were used during the war in the sense of patriotism and were more incorporating than discriminative' (Ahmad, 2007: 99-100). Nuri Bilgin, as well, cites the same speech and interprets this as the sign of a discourse that 'respects different identities' and the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' during the war, even though he argues that Mustafa Kemal refrained from using nationalist rhetoric and made references to the Islamic identity (Bilgin, 1998:153).

The rhetoric in this period was not nationalist, as there were no references to such identities as a nation, or more specifically as Turkish (Yıldız, 2004: 98). We cannot talk about nationalism among the people in this period. They took part in the war to protect their own town or region when it was occupied (Oran, 1990: 67-70). Thus, the nationalist elite could not refer to the people at large as a nation, since such identification was not prevalent yet. To mobilise such a group of people, Mustafa Kemal chose to use what was most important for them, which was their religion. Religion was the prevalent factor in the political discourse.

It is clear that the core discourse of the war was not nationalism; however, does this mean that Kemalist nationalism was open to diversity or that religion was a defining criterion of nationalism and that diversity was just a war strategy? Islam played the role of common denominator among the peoples of Anatolia, especially during the war. This strategy helped to avoid confrontation with religious people and mobilise them for the war as well as gain the support of different ethnic groups.

Mustafa Kemal had the Mufti of Ankara on his side and the Mufti began to announce *fetvas* calling for support for the independence movement (Oran, 1990: 65). In these

*fetvas* the war was legitimised as a religious duty. The ‘importance’ given to Islam was symbolised by the fact that all the members of the first national assembly formed in 1920 were Muslims (Ibid: 127). The social reality of the *Ümmet* had not been questioned and, as a consequence, people had given support to a group that they believed would serve Islam. Relations with the *hodja*, which served as a means to appeal to the public in general, were closer. It made it easier to persuade people to actually fight a war, as it was presented as the battle of Muslims against Christians (Ibid: 126-127).

Mustafa Kemal also developed close ties with heads of religious orders such as the *Bektaşî* and *Mevlevî*, which would be later banned in the Republic. The main aim was to secure as much support as possible from the people. Religion – alongside the common hostility towards Armenians – was used once again to persuade Kurds to join the war on the side of *Kuvay-i Milliye*. Oran argues that it was the democratic and pluralist character of Mustafa Kemal that led him to keep contact with different groups; however, the fact that these alliances – except the one with the *eşraf* – were broken soon after the war indicates that it was merely a war strategy (Ibid: 116- 122).

If Islam was a pragmatic tool this cannot lead to the conclusion that Turkish nationalism was inclusive and pluralist. The main political strategy during the independence war can be said to be pragmatism. Nationalism was not central to the discourses of the time. It cannot be argued that references made by Mustafa Kemal to the existence of different ethnic groups (especially the Kurds) and calling them to act together as Muslim brothers signified respect and consolidation of ethnic pluralism. As Mesut Yeğen argues, references made to Kurds can be seen as sign of the realisation of the Kurdish existence as an ethnic group in the territory of the *Misak-i Milli*, which would have autonomous

regional authority in the state that would be formed after the war (2006: 50-52). However, this understanding of a separate Kurdish identity was to disappear by the time of the 1924 constitution. Again, it can be argued that the fact that the period when Kurdishness was mentioned as a distinct identity and even as a Muslim group was a pragmatic choice to win their support by reference to the common identity of Islam. It is not clear if during the independence war, the prevalent discourse or the call for mobilisation was based on national identity. Even if there was a nationalist discourse, the kind of nationalism that it advocated would have religion as a core element.

### **2.2.2 The Treaty of Lausanne and Turco-Greek Population Exchange**

The main difference between the period of war and its aftermath in relation to the Muslims is that, during the war, they were seen as different ethnic groups acting together but after the end of the war, these groups were all rearticulated as Turkish. By 1924, Muslim inhabitants of Turkey were hailed as Turkish regardless of their ethnic origins of Laz, Circassian or Kurdish, which had been recognised during the war. And the non-Muslims during the war were considered to be traitors and allies of the occupying forces (except maybe for the Jews) and after the war they were seen as a problem to be dealt with. The state was going to find ways to make the country '99% Muslim'.

Analysis of state practices vis-à-vis Muslim and non-Muslim populations shows us that in practice, there is a difference between being a Turkish citizen and Turkish. Religion has been the defining factor deciding who is in and who is out in some practices, which will



be talked about shortly. Turkishness and Islamic identity have both been complementary and even interchangeable so that Turkish nationalism could claim Turkish national identity to be an umbrella identity for the non-Turkish Muslims of Turkey (Bora, 1995: 36). In this picture, non-Sunni Muslims are actually considered to be actually Turkish but if they consider themselves differently than they should be assimilated. In the way the state dealt with its non-Muslim citizens, religion mainly defined the relationship.

As seen during the liberation war, religion was used to mobilise Muslims as one unit and the non-Muslims were seen as allies of the Western powers. In fact, after the war, while the new state was being formed, the non-Muslim population decreased dramatically. Before World War I, 20% percent of the population of what is Turkey today was composed of non-Muslims and after the war this number decreased to 2.5% (Aktar, 2000: 24).

The founding agreement of the Turkish Republic – The Treaty of Lausanne – included the rights of and regulations regarding the non-Muslims of Turkey. One important decision of this treaty was the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which was another important cornerstone in the creation of a Muslim Turkey, where religion was once again the defining factor instead of nationhood, ethnicity or language. According to Yıldız, this was both a practical necessity and a result of the attempt to form a Muslim ethnic minority (2004:133).

Against the popular belief that Turks from Greece and Greeks from Turkey were exchanged, it was actually the Muslims and Greek-Orthodox peoples who were the subject of the exchange. Between the years 1922 and 1924 approximately 1,200,000 Rum – Anatolian Greek Orthodox population – left Asia Minor and 400,000 Muslims living in

Greece were settled in Turkey (Aktar, 2000: 17). In fact, the confusion among the people at large does not stem altogether from the lack of knowledge on the details of the agreement but from the mentality that the Orthodox peoples are Greek and Muslims are Turkish. There is a tendency to equate religion and ethnicity as well as the deeper message that there cannot really be Christian Turks. It is a sort of contradiction in terms. The rights of the remaining non-Muslims of Turkey were also defined by the Lausanne Treaty. The legacy of the Ottoman *Millet* system was clearly prevalent in this document. The subjects of rights of the Lausanne Treaty were not defined in national terms but as Muslims and non-Muslims. This is important as a special case where religion is prevalent. Another issue related to the treaty is that state practices violated the agreements of the treaty and discriminated against non-Muslims<sup>13</sup>. This attitude is not surprising considering the fact that the main negotiator on minorities during the Lausanne talks, Dr. Rıza Nur claimed ‘our most important task and fair thing to do is not leaving anybody of a different race, religion or anybody who speaks a different language in our homeland’ (Aktar, 2000: 111). This attitude continued after the signing of the treaty as well, and non-Muslims were seen as people who could help compromise Turkey’s sovereignty. Within this mindset, Western countries would try to intervene in the internal affairs of Turkey, using the rights of non-Muslim population as justification (ibid: 42). Non-Muslims were not internalised as Turks or even as loyal Turkish citizens. They were treated as ‘others’ who might ally with other countries against Turkey.

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of this discriminatory practices will be seen under the section of language especially in reference to the minority schooling.

### 2.2.3 The Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*)

The Wealth Tax was one of the cases where the mentality that saw non-Muslims as 'others' set the parameters of state practices. Non-Muslims were perceived as part of a wealthy, privileged population who were in alliance with foreign enemies but living among 'us'.

The law passed on 11.11.1942 declared a one-time taxation on property and income. Given the economic devastation during the war, the introduction of a new tax might be seen as a necessity for any state. Looking at the actual articles of the law would show that there was no ethnic or religious discrimination. All wealthy people were supposed to pay a tax on their properties. The wealth tax itself was not problematic; however, the way the tax was collected in practice was clearly discriminatory against non-Muslims (Akar, 1999: 73). Once more a discrepancy between the laws and practice could be noticed in the treatment of non-Muslims.

Signs that Muslims and non-Muslims would be treated differently were apparent already when the Ministry of Finance started to collect information on the income and property of the minorities claiming that they were earning extra profits by taking advantage of the war-time situation. The data were grouped as the property of Muslims, non-Muslims, *Dönme* (people who have converted to Islam) and aliens (Akar, 1999: 62). This data would help in the collection of the Wealth Tax.

The case of the Wealth Tax is important as another practice where the Turkish nation was being defined in line with religion and, also as a situation that was full of ambiguities and inconsistencies. The ambiguities that can give us insight into the ones in the definition of

the Turkish nation may be seen in this case. The first inconsistency as mentioned was the one between the law and its implementation. The written law did not make any references to the collection of the tax according to religious identity. Nevertheless, non-Muslims were made to pay incomparably higher amounts. Another issue was that Muslims were defined as Turks and non-Muslims have been treated as second-class citizens during the collection and in the aftermath of the taxation period.

We can see the definition of non-Muslims as non-Turkish in the rhetoric of the then Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu. Saraçoğlu declared that the purpose of the introduced taxation was 'to hand over the Turkish market to Turks and erase the supremacy of the foreigners in our market' (Aktar, 2000: 148). The discourse defined non-Muslims as foreigners, 'others', or non-Turkish. As Aktar argues, defining 'us' as 'ethnic Turks' was a characteristic of the one party period (2000: 137). In contradiction to the territorial definition of the nation, it appears that in practice living in Turkey was not enough to be a Turk. One had to be a Muslim as well. During the Wealth Tax years, the non-Muslims were not considered Turkish and not even as equal Turkish citizens. They were openly being punished for their religious beliefs and for being wealthier than Muslim Turks.

The tax was so high and unfairly implemented that the poorest of the non-Muslims were taxed and Muslims with the same level of income were not. The amount to be paid was decided by a group of so-called experts, headed by city mayors. There was no financial guidance so the decisions were based on the personal opinions of the members of these groups. They could decide how much to charge and their decision was final. The method the taxation was in itself certainly not going to be fair and professional.

Moreover, if one could not pay the decided amount in fifteen days, one's property would be confiscated and the amount to be paid would also rise for each week unpaid. If the amount was still not paid after one month, they would be sent to Aşkale camp to do hard labour (Akar, 1999: 70-1). They would be given an income so that they could pay their debts; however, the level of their incomes was completely insufficient. In some cases, it would have been necessary to work for 1600 years to be able to pay the tax (Akar, 1999: 112). As the method of the taxation was unfair so were the amounts. Non-Muslims were taxed more than the Muslims. For example, they were supposed to pay half of the income they made during the war while Muslims would pay only 1/8<sup>th</sup> (ibid, 81). In line with such unfairness, some of the people were unable to pay the tax and were sent to the labour camps. Even though the camps were not going to help people actually pay their debts and there was sometimes a tough environment, it can be said that the number of people who were sent to the camp was quite low in comparison to the people who could not pay the tax in time. Akar argues these camps only played a psychological role to scare non-Muslims to pay by using the example of the Nazi labour camps. Even so, the Muslim vs. non-Muslim distinction again played its role and there was no Muslim person who was forced to go to a labour camp (Ibid., 1999:108-110).

On 15.3.1944, a new law came into force removing the taxation, leaving its mark on the history of the Turkish Republic as a case where unfairness and discrimination against its non-Muslim minorities was as clear as daylight. Leaving aside the moral judgement, if we were to analyse it in its own right, it was a successful attempt in taking trade from the monopoly of non-Muslims and handing it over to 'Turks', as Saraçoğlu had wished. Turks could be players in the Turkish market now as they were able to buy the

confiscated property of the non-Muslims very cheaply and competition was weakened. The properties of one who could not pay the tax were confiscated and sold for much less than their real worth. This method made sure most properties were owned by Muslims rather than non-Muslims, which would not have been possible without the *Wealth Tax* practices. Furthermore, as non-Muslims lost their wealth, they could not be strong investors in the Turkish market any more, leaving the space for new Turkish/Muslim traders.

The newspapers of the time used the discourse that saw non-Muslims as 'others' and were full of articles that celebrated the passing of properties and companies into Muslim hands. 98% of the buildings that belonged to minorities were now owned either by the state or Muslim Turks. The papers argued that such property had been 'nationalised'. In fact, their previous owners were also Turkish citizens, so they had already been 'national' (Akar, 1999: 147).

A similar understanding was also stated by Ahmad when looking back at the early Republic today. Ahmad argues that Turkey was so successful in its modernisation project that

even in the mid-1920s after the population exchange, Turks were still not able to work as plumbers or shoemakers because even such technical jobs were under the monopoly of the non-Muslims. However, in a few years the 'new Turk' could become bankers or train conductors, any employment that a modern state necessitated could be performed by Turks (2007:112).

As we have seen, Ahmad was right in that the monopoly of the non-Muslims was lifted from the economy, not by peaceful and fair means but by discriminative, deliberate efforts of the state that is supposed to treat all its citizens as equals regardless of religion,

language or race. Moreover, all inhabitants of Turkey were supposed to be not only equal citizens but also Turks, according to Kemalist nationalism. The monopoly of non-Muslims should not have been problematic in the first place, since they were Turks as well. A more realistic analysis of Kemalist nationalism was put forward by Aktar. He argues that 'on the one hand, to expand the sphere of 'us', everyone in the country was defined as Turk but, on the other when structural reasons impeded this aim, non-Muslims were classified as 'others' (Aktar, 2000:102).

Such practices clearly show how Turkish national identity was discriminating against non-Muslims. Religion and language were definitive components of what defined a Turk. In fact, this was clear from the 1924 Constitution, which stated 'that the inhabitants of Turkey are Turkish by rights of citizenship, regardless of religion and race' (Yeğen, 69 2006:) which actually meant that ones who were not of the same religion and race of Turks were only Turkish citizens. 'Political membership of the state and ethnic membership of the nation were not the same' (Çağaptay, 2006: 14). The legacy of the Ottoman Empire was still in existence, not only in actuality, as non-Muslims minorities living in Turkey but also in the minds of the ruling elite of the Republic.

The non-Muslims were seen as privileged groups of the Ottoman era with their European supporters who were imposing their imperialist measures on the empire through 'capitulations' as privileges in trade and taxation. Muslims were regarded as the suppressed group whereas non-Muslims, despite being the minority numerically, were better off in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the non-Muslim population who still lived in the territory of what became the Turkish Republic was seen as a potential threat, traitors that lived with us but were in co-operation with the imperialist West (Akçam, 1992: 20). The

non-Muslim population was declared an 'other' within by the behaviour of the state towards the minority, even though the laws on paper were designed according to the Lausanne Treaty to protect certain rights of the non-Muslim population. Non-Muslims were thought to reproduce a counter narrative to that of the Kemalist state by trying to cling to their rights and way of life that had for decades been shaped by the Ottoman *Millet* system. They not only challenged the homogenising attempts of the nation-state in order to create a pure 'Turkish' nation but also challenged the modernisation project by keeping remnants of the *Millet* system alive. In this sense, non-Muslims, as articulators of counter narratives were treated unequally, as 'other's (similar to the Kurdish population, the Turkish left and certainly Nâzım Hikmet), especially during the early years of the Republic leading to a decrease on their population over the years.

#### **2.2.4 'All Muslims inhabitants of Turkey are actually Turkish'**

So far, one dimension of the place of religion in defining national identity has been demonstrated; that is, the practices towards non-Muslims. This showed us that non-Muslims may have been citizens but not Turkish. On the other hand, as Islam had been a fundamental characteristic of national identity, Muslims living in Turkey, but of different ethnic backgrounds, were considered Turkish.

The Kemalist State of the 1920s welcomed non-Turkish Muslims such as immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans. Moreover, local Muslims, Kurds, Arabs, Laz, and Georgians would assimilate quickly since they had a common history with the Turks (Çağaptay, 2006: 16).



Such understanding was clearly stated by influential politicians like Recep Peker. In 1931, Peker declared that ‘we see people who have been made to think of themselves as Kurdish, Circassian and even Laz and Pomak, as one of us’. Such Muslim populations are considered to be Turkish and have been historically misled, especially by foreign powers (Aktar, 2000:63). The state discourse was that Muslims were Turkish but if they considered themselves ethnically different, they needed to be assimilated. Assimilation was pursued through various methods such as forced migration and resettlement, education and the banning of languages other than Turkish.

#### **2.2.5. Influence of religion in the state practices vis-à-vis the Kurdish population**

The most important case of assimilative politics has been towards the Kurdish population, who are mostly seen as fellow Muslims who are indeed Turkish, but if they resist, they are regarded and treated as second-class citizens, like the non-Muslim ‘others’. The Kurdish population has been one of the most significant and vivid ‘others’ of the Turkish national identity. They have represented an undeniable challenge to the homogeneity of the nation as a large ethnic group with a distinctive language and way of life who had historically occupied a semi-independent authority over a large part of the territory of Turkey. The Kurdish population not only challenged the desired homogeneity of the Turkish nation but was also a group reproducing an alternative model of social organisation counter to the modernisation project of the Kemalist state. The Kurdish population were perceived to reproduce a pre-modern way of life and demanded political autonomy similar to what was the norm during the Ottoman Empire except for certain

periods. From the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, the Kurds had mostly been allowed to maintain their traditional social structure (Yeğen, 2006: 13). Similar to the non-Muslims, the Kurds were a challenge to the nation state as practitioners of a social structure, from the Ottoman times, that the Kemalist state set out to 'revolutionise'. One of the main problematics concerning the Kurds in the perception of the state has been the binary relationship between the 'old' and the 'new', in which the Kurds with their tribes, sheikhs and certainly bandits represented the 'old' – 'all the evils of the Turkish pre-modern past' – while the 'new' was the modern Republic (Yeğen, 1999: 555; Yeğen, 2006: 129). Kurds appeared as 'others' of the state since its inception, mainly as a challenge to the modernisation project.

In this sense, a similar pattern of the hegemonic attempt of the state to silence the counter narratives can be seen in its practices vis-à-vis the non-Muslims, the Kurds and the Turkish left, studied mainly through the case of Nâzım Hikmet in this thesis. The counter narratives posed to the Kemalist modernisation project caused them to be labelled as 'others' of the official definition of Turkish identity and thus followed the bans on language (and in the case of Nâzım on literature), forced migrations, psychological pressures (such as the 'Citizen, speak Turkish!' campaign), in total, an assimilation process. In the previous pages and in the following ones as well, examples of such hegemonic and authoritative state policies have been and will be provided<sup>14</sup>.

The Kurdish issue is one of the most inherent problems of Turkish political life especially since the 1980s; thus, it would be unfair here to try to summarise all of the dimensions of

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<sup>14</sup> Even though such hegemonic attempts are mainly studied here, from our point of view, the relationship of the state with its 'others' is not shaped by binary oppositions but malleability and open-endedness also characterise these relationships and in my opinion represent a more realistic and interesting narrative of the political.

Kurdish nationalism and Turkish nationalism in relation to the Kurdish peoples. The reason why the Kurdish case is included as a part of this thesis is the relevance it has to the definition of Turkishness along ethnic, linguistic and especially religious lines. This chapter is going to try to make the point that religion and language have played a definitive role in Turkish national identity; since they have not only played the role of a marker of identity among the people but also have been articulated as such and even sometimes manipulated by the state, which leads us to the Kurdish case as a clear example.

The war of liberation (1919-23) was a period where Kurdish identity was openly respected alongside the Turkish one. There were a few declarations by Mustafa Kemal claiming that this was a war of not only Turks but of all Muslims living in the territory where the fight took place. Names of the different ethnic groups were recognised; thus, there was no question that the new parliament in Ankara represented Kurds as equal to Turks. By 1924, attempts to achieve the one state-one nation ideal as any nation-state would begin. The constitution declared 'that the state will not recognise any other nation than the Turkish' (Yeğen, 2006: 52).

For the Republican elite, the wording in the Constitution may not have been problematic, because, in fact, Turkish was being used to incorporate all Muslims in the territory of Turkey. Kurds, Circassians, Laz, who were referred to as Muslims with different ethnic backgrounds during the war, would be considered part of the Turkish nation once the Republic was established. Muslims were regarded as compatible with Turks. As Kemalists argue, Turkishness was open to different ethnic groups, as long as they were

assimilated. Muslims who spoke Turkish and ‘live according to the Turkish culture’ – as if what this constitutes can be defined – could be Turks.

The main difference between Muslims and non-Muslims is that Muslims were potentially Turks and non-Muslims – even if they acted according to the same rule of speaking Turkish – could only be considered to be Turkish citizens. Religion again appears as the marker in defining the borders of Turkishness and Turkish citizenship. However, this does not mean that assimilative politics in order to make Muslim populations, especially the Kurds, speak and get educated in Turkish and learn and practice the Turkish way of life were not common. One of the most commonly applied strategies of assimilation of Kurds was population re-settlement.

The Sheikh Said Revolt can be said to be a turning point in the way the Turkish state dealt with Kurds. The Sheikh Said Revolt took place in 1925 and it was suppressed by harsh military measures, which was a sign of the way the state would react to the Kurdish movement in the following years. The state resorted to military oppression and enforcement of martial Law in the East and Southeast Turkey to deal with the Kurdish issue instead of searching for democratic solutions that took into account the demands or needs of its Kurdish citizens. The government enforced non-democratic *Takrir-i Sükun* that banned all sorts of opposition, leading to the closing down of political parties and press media and also introduced special measures for East and Southeast of the country. The following year, the Inspectorate General to govern Eastern Turkey was to be established by the East Reform Plan (*Şark Islahat Planı*).

*The Şark Islahat Plan*, (literally meaning the correction/reform of the East) which had the main aim of assimilating the Kurdish population, was enforced. The report that formed

the basis of the reform plan clearly stated that a resettlement of Kurds to places with more Turks than Kurds was to be implemented to serve the aim of mixing the populations and assimilating Kurds. Assimilation of Turks into Kurdishness during the course of this mixing, on the other hand, had to be avoided. Some families that were believed or known to be active in the *Sheikh Said* rebellion were made to migrate to Western parts of the country (Çağaptay, 2006, 22).

The 1934 Law of Settlement (*İskan Kanunu*) which was basically designed to settle migrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus in the East of the country, also had the same mission of assimilating the Kurdish population by making them live among Turks. The reasoning of the law stated that

The Republic of Turkey cannot tolerate people who enjoy every right as Turkish citizens but who are not committed to the Turkish flag from the heart. This law shows ways to assimilate them in the Turkish culture and make them more loyal to this country because they will be Turkish. In the Republic of Turkey, the Turkishness of one who calls himself a Turk should be obvious and open. (Yeğen, 2006: 64-5, my translation).

Assimilation of Kurds was an 'obvious and open' policy stated in the written laws and regulations as well as by influential officials. Forced migration and the ban on the Kurdish language were the two main strategies of the East Reform Plan that was going to be carried out in the following years as well. The ways language played a role in the process of assimilation of Kurds and defining Turkishness will be discussed in the following pages.

A continuity in the state policies vis-à-vis the Kurds can be traced. The main tool of dealing with Kurdish people has been oppression and assimilation. Similar reports and suggestions have been developed along the years. The East Reform Plan was followed by a Report by Avni Doğan in 1943 that basically argued for the same efforts of assimilation such as resettlement, schooling and transport. The report suggested several ways of assimilation of the Kurdish population, including better transport means, stationing of teachers from the Western part of Turkey to work in areas populated mostly by Kurds, encouragement of government officials who were originally from the West to marry Kurdish speaking girls and settle in the East (Yeğen, 2006: 60-1).

Another tool of assimilation has been the military service. Making Kurdish boys do their military service in the West was a strategy to make sure that Kurds interacted with Turks. During military service, Kurds are taught to read and write, obviously in Turkish. It is still common to find people who do not know Turkish and/or are illiterate; thus, a certain part of the population, especially in the East of the country, has not been through the national education system, which is definitely a cornerstone of every nationalist project.

Basic nationalist and republican knowledge such as the reforms and ideals of Atatürk, are taught to soldiers, which ultimately serves as a reminder to the ones who already have this knowledge and for the rest to teach them what they have missed by not being educated through the national education system. Soldiers go through assimilative process by learning Turkish and nationalist rhetoric so the assimilation is not only cultural but also psychological. They are taught to be Turkish and to have nationalist feelings, allegiance to the Turkish nation and state. Military service is a school for learning Turkish and becoming loyal citizens.

So far a few of the assimilative processes have been mentioned. There have been forced migrations, mixing of the Kurdish population with Turks and the military service as part of the assimilation process<sup>15</sup>. Thus, it can be said that the state was aware of a separate Kurdish identity and was trying to deal with it by assimilation. On the other hand, while the state was trying to make Kurds Turkish, the main state discourse on this issue was denial of a separate Kurdish community. Earlier discourses about the denial of Kurdishness were in the form of equating them to Turks as fellow Muslims. All Muslims of Turkey were Turks. This attitude gained an ethnic, even racial dimension when the state officially argued that Kurds were a strand of the Turkish race. According to historical theories on the origins of Turks, it is a nomadic population that originated in Central Asia, formed of many smaller groups. Kurds are descendants of one of these groups, which make them originally Turkish at the end of the day.

The general strategy of suppression of the Kurdish identity and its culture and language was lifted or softened in certain periods during the history of the Turkish Republic. The Menderes years of 1950-1960 brought a relative relaxation of policies of forced assimilation (Van Bruinessen, 2005: 340). The 1961 constitution, despite the efforts of the junta to resort back to the oppressive single party policies, would help Kurdish intelligentsia to express their identity and political stance in several journals of Kurdish history, economy, language and culture in general. The possibility of intellectuals for expression of thought even in a limited vein, led to the formation of the first legal Kurdish organisation '*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*' in 1969. The late 1960s were relatively fruitful for democracy in Turkey, as will be seen in the following chapter, the

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<sup>15</sup> Assimilation process related to language can be found in the following pages.

Turkish left found room to form organisations and socialism was even represented in the parliament by *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Labour Party).

The 1971 coup ended this tolerant atmosphere and the Kurdish movement became more radical and broke into smaller groups, like the Turkish left. It also adopted a more nationalist face. Despite the fragmentation of the Kurdish movement, its support base had widened. The suppression of Kurdish identity would be harsher after the 1980 coup but the Kurdish resentment would gain a stronger and wilder face with the formation of the separatist *PKK*. The military junta of 1980 'made its goal clear: the Kurdish movement has to be totally crushed and everything that encourages ethnic identity will be destroyed' (Van Bruinessen, 2005: 352).

This chapter is no place to talk fully about the Kurdish problem in Turkey and how the state dealt with it. This summary, rather, can show us that besides its inconsistencies, the state has mainly followed a repressive policy that aims to the assimilation of Kurds. The state rejects a separate Kurdish identity. At best Kurds are fellow Muslims. In fact, all Muslims of Turkey form the Turkish nation; thus, Kurds do not exist as an ethnic identity. Islam is emphasised as the similarity but the attempted consolidation of this commonness is done by erasing Kurdish distinctiveness in culture. Religion plays a role in this relationship as a commonality. Being Muslim, however, is not enough to be Turkish, one has to speak Turkish and live among Turks as well as like them. Kurdish people had to be assimilated in Turkishness to be full citizens and Turks. The strategy of the state, except for during the liberation war, was never to consider Kurds and Turks as equal, as people sharing the same territory and religion, living and ruling this country together. Turks were the *Primus inter pares* and for other groups to survive they had to



be Turk but they also had to prove their commitment to being Turkish, especially by learning and using the language.

## **2.3. Language**

### **2.3.1 Language requirements from the non-Muslim population**

If the non-Muslims were to be incorporated into society, there was a condition: to speak Turkish. Kemalist nationalism required full command of Turkish as a criterion of Turkish national identity. This pre-requisite of speaking Turkish was most obvious in the 1928 campaign '*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş*-Citizens, Speak Turkish!' This was a civilian campaign initiated by the Law School student union at Istanbul University. This group of students decided to prevent minorities from speaking any language other than Turkish in public spaces not only but especially in Istanbul, where non-Muslims minorities were densely populated. Bulletins were posted with this slogan and people who did not speak Turkish were harassed and fined (Balçık, 2002: 782-784; Bali, 2000: 134-147).

Since this was a civilian movement and did not last long it can be argued that the 'Citizens, Speak Turkish campaign' cannot act as proof of state policies making language a core element of identity. However, it shows the general attitude and expectations in society. State discourse required homogenisation of the nation through use of one national language, which was Turkish. Foreign companies were forced to make all correspondences in Turkish (Aktar, 2000: 58) and people were required to give their children Turkish names (Yıldız, 2001: 140). The Law on Population number 1587

declares that 'names that are not consistent with our national culture may not be given to children' (Oran, 2005: 86).

Another important step in making Turkish more widespread was certainly through education. Apart from the change of Arabic letters into Latin and a country-wide education movement, what interests us here is the education in schools for minorities. The regulations concerning the education of the non-Muslim minority were set by the Lausanne Treaty. The phrase 'non-Muslim' that appears in the treaty has been misinterpreted by Turkish law, only referring to the Greek, Armenian and Jewish populations. Besides the neglect of other non-Muslim populations and their rights, the rights of the Greek, Armenian or Jewish populations have not been respected fully, either. According to the article 41 of the treaty, the Turkish government is obliged to give financial support to minority schools and 'in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language' (Anon, 'Treaty of Lausanne': 2007; Oran, 2005: 69). The state could only require teaching of Turkish.

Both of these obligations have been violated by the state. Schools did not receive financial support and, in fact, they were made to spend extra money as they were forced to employ teachers of Turkish descent, whose monthly payments were higher. These schools were also required to teach history and geography in Turkish and the teachers of such courses were supposed to be 'genuine Turks'. All other teachers had to take Turkish language exams and their certificates of teaching were deemed void (Bali, 2000: 185-191). In practice, the state made it difficult for non-Muslims to enjoy the rights they were given by the Lausanne Treaty. School as one of the main arenas of public life was

defined clearly as a national space by the state. The public sphere was to be marked only by the use of Turkish. Non-Muslims were defined as non-Turks but they still needed to show allegiance to the state by using its language in the public sphere, especially in schooling and trade despite the rights earned under the Lausanne treaty.

In the economic sphere, non-Muslims were being treated as foreigners in their own country through restrictions of employment, which was again related to the aim of the state to spread the use of the Turkish language. During the 1923 Economic Congress in İzmir, the issue of language was stressed and it was made clear that all companies should be using Turkish in their trade relations. Some of the members of the non-Muslims minorities were practically losing their jobs because they did not speak Turkish as required. Moreover, it also became a state policy to make companies of foreign investment employ 75% Turkish workers. Private companies that worked with the state and with local authorities were made to employ only Turkish workers (Bali, 2000: 206-10).

Besides the fact that such laws and practices made life difficult for non-Muslims, the language of the laws and how it was interpreted is more important for us. As can be seen, such regulations were made to ensure employment for Turks in Turkey. So far this may not be problematic, but to employ Turks, non-Muslims were let go. Thus, we can see that non-Muslims were not treated as Turks. They were not even treated as equal citizens. They could lose their jobs overnight and could not do anything about it. And if they were willing to keep their jobs, the only way was to learn Turkish.

### **2.3.2 Language as a way of assimilation of the Kurdish population**

Language played a huge role in the assimilation of the Kurdish population as well as being central in defining who was Turkish. The ban on Kurdish language together with various efforts to impose Turkish, were the two strategies that the state pursued vis-à-vis the Kurds.

The previously mentioned the East Reform Plan of 1925 included a ‘ban on the public use of Kurdish in those areas of the country with mixed Turkish and Kurdish populations’ (Çağaptay, 2006: 22; Yeğen, 2006: 58). Language naturally played an important role in the assimilation of Kurdish people into Turkish nationality. They were to live alongside Turks, not as isolated entities, and speak Turkish in order to forget their mother tongue, making assimilation much easier. Starting with this plan, the main policy of the state on languages other than Turkish, especially Kurdish, would be oppressive. In fact, İnönü openly declared the state policy on languages at the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the *CHP* in 1935. “From now on we will not be quiet. All citizens who live with us will speak Turkish” (quoted in Çağaptay, 2006: 60). Policies were in the direction of making the Kurdish language forgotten. Besides the state laws and practices, the ‘Citizens, Speak Turkish!’ movement targeted the Kurdish-speaking population as well as Jews and other minorities as discussed above. As mentioned before, this campaign was mostly a civilian movement by it certainly was in line with the state policies of the time.

The *CHP* congress in 1927 had already declared that one of the main goals of the party was to establish language unity and to this end it would work to make the Turkish language and culture dominant (Bali, 2000: 135). In 1930, as well, the Ministry of

Interior published a secret document, which had the goal of making people who spoke different languages speak Turkish through making the Turkish language their mother tongue. Several policies were cited in this document, to be implemented by mayors, which included humiliation of the cultural practices, dress, and songs of those who spoke different languages. Kurds, Bosnians, Tatars, Circassians, Laz, and Georgians would not be called by names making references to their ethnic backgrounds. The changing of the names of villages and making sure those people called themselves Turkish from the heart by making them speak Turkish even at home was also one of the suggestions given to local authorities in the way they should deal with non-Turkish speakers (Yıldız, 2004: 289). These policies, together with several ones to limit and, in fact, totally erase the use of Kurdish, have been continuously implemented.

One such limitation on the expression of Kurdish identity and language was the Law on Last Names passed in 1934, which stated that the 'names of foreign races and nations could not be adopted as last names' (Çağaptay, 2006: 61). The aim of the Law on Last Names was to hide the differences last names might reveal and, on the other hand, place an emphasis on the unity of the nation (Yıldız, 2004: 236). Again, the state policy was made openly clear by the Interior Minister, Kaya, who advocated assimilation during the debates on the Law on Last Names. He argued that erasing any difference people in the country may be feeling by not making it possible for them to reflect on differences in their names would consolidate 'unity', which would be strengthened by education. Kaya argued that the 'biggest responsibility of a government is to assimilate all who live within its boundaries into its own community' (quoted in Çağaptay, 2007: 61).

This law, among others, is claimed by the state as one of the modernising reforms of the Republican Turkey but it has also helped in the assimilation of Kurdish people by trying to make them forget their heritage and their separate ethnic identity. Yeğen argues similarly that closure of religious schools, which again was projected in the state discourse as a modernising step in the Republic, served to assimilate the Kurds as they were places of reproduction of the Kurdish culture (2006: 67). These instances can be seen as part of the aim of the Kemalist state to modernise those pre-modern Kurds. The Kurdish population was a significantly large population who lived an alternative way of life, thus posing a challenge to the modernisation attempts of the State, which in turn made the Kurds an 'other' that needed to be assimilated. Alongside the previously-mentioned Law on Last Names, the Population Law of 1972 introduced a ban on giving Kurdish names to children. This law was in effect until 2003.

Place names were changed as well as peoples' names. Earlier examples of changing place names, including villages and even geographical places such as mountains, had been carried out by the Committee of Union and Progress (1908-1918). Immigrants from the Balkans were settled in the villages left by the Armenians, Syriac Christians and some Kurdish communities, who were forced to migrate in 1915, and the names of these villages were transformed into Turkish (Öktem, 2004: 569). The same strategy would be applied during the Republic every decade. The changing of the name of the town Dersim into Tunceli after the 1938 Dersim uprising of the Zaza speaking, Shiite Kurds stands as a striking example (Düzgören, 1996: 854). 'By 1968 12,000 out of the total of approximately 40,000 village names had been changed to Turkish' already, with the justification that 'foreign' place names were inappropriate on 'Turkish soil' (ibid,

emphasis in original, my translation). All the links of the Kurdish people with their past and memory were tried to be erased by the state and replaced with Turkish names and thus, new generations would identify themselves as Turkish with Turkish names, living in Turkish villages.

Alongside these cited laws that had an indirect limitation on the use of Kurdish, the ban on education in Kurdish or even the learning of Kurdish at any level of education can be argued to have had the most direct effect on assimilation. Even if children only know Kurdish until they start their elementary school education, from the age of seven they are forced to forget Kurdish and learn and use Turkish as the medium of education and communication. For most of the Turkish Republic, there has been no place for Kurdish from kindergarten to higher education or even private courses to teach Kurdish<sup>16</sup> have not been allowed with the argument that it is against article 42 of the Constitution. This article declares that no language other than Turkish can be taught as a mother tongue (Düzgören 2002: 73-4). School has definitely been the most obvious place where the ban on Kurdish was imposed. The obligation to speak Turkish was not even always limited to the classroom but some teachers took their mission of Turkification and the modernisation of the Kurdish children so seriously that they banned the use of Kurdish, even at home. Several sources cite oral histories of children and teachers that talk about how some children were given the duty of reporting their friends who spoke Kurdish

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<sup>16</sup> Currently, education *in* Kurdish is still not practiced, but as a result of the amendments in law made to adopt EU's *acquis*, education *of* Kurdish and broadcasting in Kurdish have been made possible by law but the issue of education in Kurdish is more complicated. The Kurdish minority cannot receive education in their mother tongue. Private courses to teach Kurdish have been established but they were closed down due to lack of demand. State radio and TV, *TRT*, has launched a TV channel that broadcasts in Kurdish and there are also other private TV and radio channels broadcasting in Kurdish, especially in the east and southeast of Turkey, where the Kurdish population is relatively higher (Uçarlar, 2009: chapter 5).

which was followed by punishment of those who spoke Kurdish (Günel, 2006:320,323; Hassanpour, 1997: 54).

Another effective tool of education to make Kurdish a forgotten language and Turkish more widespread was the Local Boarding Schools of Elementary Education (*YIBO*) that were first established in 1964. *YIBO* were usually established on the outskirts of towns. Children were basically going through Turkification in this isolated environment away from their families and villages where they could have used the Kurdish language or become familiarised with other aspects of Kurdish culture. An oppressive education of Turkish and Turkish culture took place in these schools (Günel, 2006: 329-336).

Kurds were oppressed in relation to the use of their mother tongue. The above-mentioned strategies of bans on the use of the language aimed to make this language obsolete, a dead language. Additionally, another justification for this policy adopted in the state discourse was that Kurdish was not a real language anyway. State discourse has claimed that Kurdish does not have a grammatical structure but is a random combination of words. Only a few of the words are Kurdish and the rest are influenced by Turkish, Persian and Armenian among others (Hassanpour, 1997: 55).

The Kurdish case is the most obvious example of how the Turkish language has been a major expectation of the state from its populace. Public use of Turkish has been expected from non-Muslims and Kurds to demonstrate their loyalty to the state. Teaching in Turkish went hand in hand with the teaching of the civic duties of Turkish citizens. Muslims were to show that they had been assimilated into Turkish culture. Non-Muslims could not become Turkish but they also had to show allegiance by learning Turkish so that they could be considered 'good' citizens. Kurds and non-Muslims, as well as Turkish



leftists, were expected to demonstrate loyalty to the State, especially in the public arena, by use of language and articulation of discourses in line with the nationalistic modernisation project of Kemalism, instead of their counter narratives, which made them 'others'.

## **2.4 Race in Turkish nationalism**

We have seen the various roles religion and language have played in the process of Turkish identity formation. Besides religion and language, race also appeared as a source of identity in the early Republic. It would not be fair to claim Kemalist nationalism is or has been racist; however, race surfaced in state discourse and in some practices, especially in the 1930s.

The issue of race has been tied to homeland; in fact, once again to religion. One of the aims of Kemalist nationalism has been eradication of the influence of Islam in the public sphere. Providing a sense of history apart from the history of Islam was seen as a necessity to build unity based on national identity rather than a religious identity. The early Republic aimed to create a modern, secular state free from the influences of the Ottoman Empire. One way to achieve this was to go back in history and dig out Turkish civilisation before it encountered Islam. A narrative of the pre-Islamic history of 'Turks' was forged and reproduced. This narrative required that the homeland of the Turks had to be established elsewhere. The argument that Turks originated in central Asia and migrated to the West and formed great states in the course of time was enhanced and

found its expression in the 'Turkish history thesis' but it was not a new concept developed in the republican period. The history thesis was influenced by the earlier arguments on Turkism, which were developed in late Ottoman Empire as one of the three proposed solutions to the demise of the empire. The uprisings in the Balkans and the loss of Crimea were signs of decline and three sets of ideas and policies were offered in sequence; *Ottomanism*, *Islamism* and finally *Turkism* – which is where the origins of Turkish nationalism lay.

The first option was *Ottomanism*, which was meant to unite all the people, Muslim or non-Muslim, Turk, Greek or Circassian, as Ottoman citizens. This was a 'dream' in the words of Yusuf Akçura – one of the Russian Turk intellectuals who helped to introduce Turkish identity – as Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs had already been exposed to nationalist ideals of their own. *Ottomanism* was doomed to fail because securing equality for Muslims and non-Muslims was thought to diminish the privileged position of Muslims in the Empire; for Akçura this was a 'threat to the national pride of Turks' (Oba, 1995:63). In this argument it is possible to trace an early example of the argument of this chapter that non-Muslims are considered to be non-Turks and only Muslims could be Turks. The second ideal of Islamism obviously could not 'save' the multi-religious Ottoman Empire, as it explicitly marginalised the non-Muslim populations.

Turkism, which was developed as the third option, was defined by Akçura as the policy to unite all the Turks in the Ottoman Empire in terms of religion and race. The people who were not originally Turks but have been Turkified to a certain level would be represented and those who are not represented at all or who have not formed a distinct national consciousness will be Turkified. What matters is the unity of all the Turks that are dispersed all over the world

and the formation of a grand political nationality (quoted in Oba 1995: 171, my translation).

*Turkism* was more about Turks as a race rather than a territorial nation. It called at times for the unity of all Turks, leaning more towards pan-Turkism. There is not only a reference to a Turkish race but also the so-called Turkish race is presented as the most heroic, able and civilised one. The argument is that Turkish civilisation matured much earlier than any other civilization and that Europeans learned from Turks. Even though the main line of thought is that Turks are a better race, there was a simultaneous desire to prove that Turks belonged to the Western civilisation as well.

The Turkish Republic did not totally adopt the ideas or suggestions of the Turkist intellectuals. The founders of *Turkism* not only praised the Turkish race but also called for the unification of all Turks, but the Republic did not follow the policy of irredentism and, instead, used the arguments about Turkish race to boost pride, offer an alternative source of identity and establish the historical continuity of Turks. A selective implementation of the same narrative can be seen in this example. It has been the argument in this thesis that certain discourses have been colonised by the Turkish state following a dissecting and selection process of the components of a familiar discourse. In this case, the component arguing for irredentism was omitted but the racial definition and praise of the 'Turkish race' found a central position in the Turkish state discourse.

History writing was an important step required by the introduction of nationalism. There had not been much interest in the pre-Islamic history of Turks during the Ottoman Empire except in the last years when we saw a Turkish consciousness develop. Islam played such a huge role so that there was no need to know anything beyond and before it.

Turk in the Ottoman Empire had only a derogatory meaning and was especially used for nomads or the peasants of Anatolia (Lewis, 1961: 333). In the new state Turks were the founders, the heroic fighters and owners of the state itself. The Turks, as such, needed a history that would match these characteristics. It also 'proved' that Turks were not members of the yellow race but were like Europeans, so they could be part of the civilised West and people again could be proud of being white. 'The aim of history was cited in the 1<sup>st</sup> History Congress as the formation of a strong national consciousness based on pre-Ottoman history and support of this consciousness on "laws of nature" (Ersanlı, 2003: 15, my translation).

The 1<sup>st</sup> History Congress held in Ankara in 1932 resulted in this history and argued that Turks had been a race living in Central Asia and possessing a very high culture, which they introduced to others when they had to migrate as a result of a wave of famine in the area (Poulton 1997: 101-9). Turks then migrated to Asia Minor and formed the earliest known civilisations, creating the basis for other civilisations. Defining Turks as descendants of a high civilisation and as ancestors of Europeans would serve to raise self-esteem at home and change the negative image of Turks in Europe. The Turkish history thesis was shaped by an urge to praise pre-Islamic history and to prove that Asia Minor was the Turkish homeland. The Turkish History thesis would establish Asia Minor as the Turkish homeland as well as boost self-confidence.

The founders of the Republic felt the need to make sure Asia Minor was defined as a Turkish land because it was the only land together with a small part of Thrace that remained for the 'Turks' from the vast territory of the Ottoman Empire. The liberation war secured this land and the state had the duty to preserve this territory. The argument

that Asia Minor belongs to Turks was developed to counter Greek and Armenian territorial claims and was declared by Mustafa Kemal himself in 1923; 'This land has been Turkish in history, thus, it is Turkish and will remain Turkish. Armenians and etc. have no rights here' (quoted in Parla, 1995: 207).

Following the Congress on History, the 1<sup>st</sup> Turkish Language Congress was held in the same year and the Sun-Language Thesis was proposed, which basically argued that Turkish is the source of all languages since Turkish civilisation is the source of civilisation. The name Sun-Language derives from the argument that the first god ever known was the sun, which should have created a language related closely to the sun and this language was Turkish (Yıldız, 2004: 192). The methodology used to prove that Turkish was the core of all languages was the comparison of similar words in other languages with Turkish. The aim of the thesis was to provide a historical continuity to the Turkish race and language, as well as prove that there was secular base to the language. The Sun-Language thesis was a way to purify Turkish from Islamic influences (Ersanlı, 2003: 206-9) which would contribute to the replacement of Islam by Turkishness as the source of identity. Certainly, as part of the nation and state building processes, these theories of history and language became the core elements in history books.

There were also attempts to base these theses of history and language on scientific facts thus, use of archaeology, anthropology and geography was common (Ersanlı, 2003: 212-3). Obsession with these sciences was itself a reflection of Kemalist conceptions of a modern state and society. Besides the six core principles of Kemalism, positivism was also a point emphasised by Kemalist thinkers, which was again a way to reject the Ottoman other whom they saw as backward. Modern positivist science and education was

going to replace the out of date religious education of the Ottoman period. Having mentioned the psychology embedded in the insistence on positivism, we can see how archaeology and anthropology were adopted to study the Turkish race and place it in its so-called deserved, honourable place alongside the white European race.

All or most of the findings of archaeological excavations were believed to be and presented as part of Turkish civilisation. Civilisations that had existed in the territory of Turkey today were somehow being linked to a Turkish core (Ersanlı, 2003: 216). Thus, through migrations Egyptian and other civilisations – including Ancient Greek – of Asia Minor and the Aegean were supposedly the offspring of the Turkish race (Yıldız, 2004: 182). Positivism and the creation of historical continuity were supposed to replace Islam. The so-called scientific methods to make sure Turks were not part of the yellow race but of the Indo-European, brachycephaleous, white race were not just rhetorical speeches in the History Congresses but were carried out rigorously by scientists like Afet İnan (adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal), specifically appointed for this task by Mustafa Kemal (Özkırımlı; Sofos, 2008: 94).

The History Thesis was not just an academic conference. It was organized by the state, scholars were appointed by the state, and these theories on Turkish race were taught in schools, showing us that race was an important part of a version of Turkish national discourse articulated by the state. The discourse appeared in speeches of Mustafa Kemal and other elites. Mustafa Kemal's speech to celebrate a Turkish beauty pageant contestant becoming Miss World in 1932 in which he quoted that 'the Turkish race is the most beautiful race' (Parla, 202; Koçak 2002: 40) and other occasions where he emphasized the physical strength of the Turkish race can be cited as a few of many

examples. Race also surfaced in laws that set the standards for who was eligible for certain jobs as well. Such laws included the civil service law (1926), the law on pharmacists (1924), the law on who can become doctors (1928) and, in the late 1930s, positions in the military openly required candidates to be Turkish or of the Turkish Race (Yıldız, 2004: 234-5; 329-31). There was reference to a Turkish race in several laws such as the Resettlement law of 1934 that was mentioned earlier concerning the forced migration of the Kurdish population (Oran, 2005: 88).

This non-exhaustive list of examples gives us an insight into the fact that race had been a defining criterion of who a Turk was. Race was definitely a criterion of Turkishness, especially until the late 1930s. The reasons behind the surfacing of race have been argued to be the influence of the rise of fascism in Europe and the fact that race had been regarded as an instrumental tool by the Kemalist elite to replace Islam and it helped to build the unity of the Turkish nation through racial lines as well. At the end of the day, the Kemalist aim was the forging of the Turkish nation and race, language, loyalty to modern republican ideals of the new state and religion were all components that were at their disposal or were created to impose membership, unity and loyalty in the Turkish nation. Whatever the logic behind the emergence of race as a core element of national identity in state discourses, whether it was limited to a certain period or 'a chromatic fascination with whiteness' (Ergin, 2007) or whether it had influences on future generations, are irrelevant for our purpose. Race, having played a core role in state discourses and practices still reflects a 'chauvinist face' of Kemalist nationalism (Parla, 1995: 210).

The way that race has taken an important place in state discourses represents inconsistencies in the national identity discourse. One ambiguity is that while the arguments about a Turkish race placed its origins in Central Asia, they defined Anatolia as the Turkish homeland. The same argument was used partially to provide historical continuity to Turks as a race and as a nation – there the boundaries are not clear either – as a race that lived for centuries in the Asian steppes and partially to place Turks in Anatolia through migration. Historical links with Central Asia were helpful for history and continuity but were irrelevant to the discourse on homeland. The argument was that Turks migrated from Asia but they made Anatolia their home. Thus, the state did not have irredentist claims against the Turks of Central Asia or over that territory. Besides the inconsistencies and the relative small influence of racial criteria as a requirement in Turkish identity, the case of race also ties in with other cases in its relation to the concept of loyalty and modernisation against the Ottoman ‘other’. References to a Turkish race aimed to create a basis of allegiance for the Turks that would replace religious allegiances. In this conception, Turks were to be united around a common language and a way of life as well as race.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Having taken a look at all these examples where language, religion and race have defined Turks, it is still not possible to reach a clear definition of who a Turk is. Effectiveness in using the Turkish language has been a common requirement. It worked hand in hand with religion as Muslims were expected to speak Turkish more than non-Muslims, as they had the greater potential to assimilate and be Turkish. If we could reach one conclusion, it is



that Muslim populations were forced to assimilate while non-Muslims could never actually be Turkish but had to prove allegiance to the state and Turkish culture by speaking Turkish in return for being considered as Turkish citizens, which they were anyway. Religion was sometimes a marker of differences, at others a source of commonality. The claim that Kurds and Turks are the same people because they are both Muslims and the factor of race was also added to this argument at times.

On the other hand, the use or influence of Islam was in fact problematic and a dilemma as the state, on the one hand, tried to replace the importance of religion with a national identity and allegiance to republican ideals. The Kemalist state tried to replace race with Islam and emphasised or even wrote a history of pre-Islamic Turks for the achievement of this goal.

Reference to race also had its ambiguities as, on the one hand, it located the origins of Turks in Central Asia and, on the other, it defined Asia Minor as a homeland that was made by Turks, who allowed many civilisations to flourish in this land. The same History Thesis was articulated in one way to formulate the historical continuity of the Turkish nation and also defined its homeland, which are both fundamental components of nationalist discourse.

The effort to define a Turk or reach a concise, closed definition of Turkish national identity is a task never to be accomplished. Turkish identity is in the making while, at times, language will prevail as definitive, at others religion but it seems the most continuous requirement has actually been allegiance to the Turkish nation and state as defined by the Kemalist elite. The one, who challenged the rhetoric of national unity of the state by bringing forth the existence of a separate ethnicity in Turkey, like the Kurds,

who challenged the modernisation project by keeping social structures perceived by the state to be as pre-modern; the non-Muslims who reminded the country of the Ottoman Millet system and the heterogeneity of the society; those who questioned the rhetoric of classless society and the rejection of internationalism/socialism of Kemalism like Nâzım did; all found themselves named as ‘others’ or traitors. Those ‘others’ were expected to demonstrate loyalty.

There was always a superior, super-ideal that needed to be fulfilled to be a part of Turkishness: loyalty. Turkishness being open, with a few exceptions, to Muslims and again Turkishness being closed to, with a few exceptions, to non-Muslims, was about their real or assumed loyalty or disloyalty to the state. In other words, loyalty has played a bigger role than being Muslim and non-Muslim, in defining who can be Turkish and who cannot (Yeğen, 2006: 113, my translation).

In this chapter, it has been seen that loyalty to the Kemalist state and its version of nationalism had to be demonstrated in the public space to avoid being treated as an ‘other’ or a traitor. The state required Muslims to contain their religious practices to the private sphere, in line with the secular tenets of Kemalist nationalism. The non-Muslims were not altogether forced out of the country or deprived of places of worship but in daily life they were made to speak the Turkish language to demonstrate their allegiance and the practicing of their own way of life was made difficult. The Kurdish population were constantly forced to speak the Turkish language and practice the ‘Turkish way of life’, especially in public places such as the schools. All these ‘others’ were seen as articulators of counter-narratives and thus, perceived with suspicion, and were expected to prove their loyalty.

Likewise, the Turkish left, as the main ‘other’ studied in this thesis, were treated cautiously by the state and the loyalty of Turkish leftists has constantly been questioned. In the next chapter, it will be seen that even the most ‘benign’ section of the leftist groups would be put under scrutiny and their loyalty to Kemalism would easily be ignored and they would be seen as communists and punished accordingly. Moreover, even when a certain section of the left was tolerated in mainstream politics, incorporated or colonised, this would be a conditional acceptance; conditioned on the possibility of a selective reading of their discourse as loyal to Kemalism.

A similar practice has been carried out in the case of the current re-articulation of Nâzım Hikmet as well. Nâzım’s current definition, in the official discourse on him as a ‘great Turkish poet’ has been conditioned on the selective reading of his life and works in order to re-cluster them as practices and articulations of loyalty to the Turkish nation. Demonstration of loyalty, thus, appears as another common expectation of the Turkish state from its ‘others’ – not only from those studied in this chapter, which were the non-Muslims and the Kurds, but also from the ‘others’ studied in the next chapter, which is the Turkish left, especially communists, as well as the case study of this thesis, Nâzım Hikmet.

### 3. THE TURKISH LEFT AND KEMALISM

#### 3.1. Introduction

We have seen that the Kemalist definition of national identity, or who a Turk is, has been shaped by the challenges from its 'others'. In response to the challenges, religion, language and race were identified as central criteria in defining the Turk. We have also seen that the strategy of the state has been in flux, changing from antagonism to assimilation or incorporation. Expectations based on religion, language and race, thus, have appeared as ways that symbolise these strategies. Moreover, 'loyalty' has been identified here as a core expectation of the Kemalist state. Communism has been one of the main 'others' of Turkish nationalism as well as Kurds, non-Muslim minorities and Islamists, to cite a few. The relationship of the state with communism or the Turkish left as its propagator deserves a separate discussion, due to the fact that our case study, Nâzım Hikmet, is argued to be the symbol of communism. Two commonalities arise from the study of Kemalist nationalism vis-à-vis its 'others', the Turkish left and our case study. One of them is that loyalty has been the 'super-ideal' of state expectations vis-à-vis its 'others', the Turkish left and the poet. The other is that the state strategy has been a continuous shift from the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence*.

In this chapter, the relationship of the state and the left will be analysed. We cannot talk of only one state strategy vis-à-vis the left as well as the fact that we cannot talk of the left as one category. The left in Turkey has been influenced by different ideologies, from

Leninism to Maoism to European social democracy. There have been endless divisions due to ideological or tactical disagreements, especially in the 1970s.

The general strategy of the state vis-à-vis the left has been antagonism, leading to the attempt to oppress most of the leftist groups and political parties. As will be seen, throughout the life of the left in Turkey there have been short intervals when communism was not considered illegal but most of the time communist political parties have been banned and communists have been put into jail, forced into exile or executed. Nevertheless, there have been times when non-communist sections of the left have been tolerated and have even been regarded as allies of the state. When the state has incorporated some of the ideas of the left – that can be said to be the strategy of the *logic of difference* – this was possible because of the fact that many sections of the Turkish left have indeed been Kemalist and patriotic.

From social democrats to socialists who resorted to violence, most of the leading groups of the Turkish left throughout its history have not problematized Kemalism so thoroughly as to be able to offer an alternative policy. The vision of the Turkish left has mainly been shaped by ideas regarding anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, economic development and patriotism, leading them to have an opportunistic approach to the Kemalist state. They have perceived Kemalism as the progressive force that has fought for and could continue to act on the above mentioned principles. A global revolution of the proletariat has never been on the agenda of the Turkish left but they believed socialism would be a better system for the peoples of Turkey, making them potential nationalists rather than internationalists. These factors created an alliance of the left and the Kemalist state on an ideological level that was at times strengthened by the pragmatic strategic interests for

both sides. One can argue that the official line was to treat communism as a threat and have a 'symbiotic relationship' (Somay, 2007: 647) with other leftist groups, but only until these groups were also perceived as threats. It is important to notice that in times of crisis, especially in the periods of military rule, the state would ignore differences within the left and "punish" the whole left with the accusation that they aimed to change the state system into a communist one and that they were guilty of spreading such ideas. The 'symbiotic relationship' of nationalism and socialism is actually not something unique to the case of Turkey.

### **3.1.1. Nationalism and Socialism: An antagonistic or beneficial symbiosis?**

When one thinks of the basic assertions of nationalism and socialism, the relationship of the two would easily appear to be antagonistic. At the core of the clash is the question of which identity should be regarded as primary. Nationalism aims to articulate the masses on the basis of national identity, whereas socialism argues that class differences cut across nations. Nationalist discourse defines the world as divided into nations and their states. Within domestic politics, this implies a rejection of class divisions and, from the point of view of the international states system, a world divided into nation-states is seen as natural. Communism on the other hand, argues for internationalism, which asserts the unification of oppressed classes of any nation against their oppressors regardless of them being foreign/imperialist ones or of the same nation – e.g. the comprador bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, arguing that socialism and nationalism are totally incompatible would be jumping to conclusions especially with regards to the international practices of socialism.

In practice, national identity has not been regarded by many on the left as a constraint on class identity; on the contrary, it has been regarded as a way to fight capitalist/imperialist oppressors. In fact, even Marx did not totally reject this possibility. Marx and Engels argued that the proletariat has to become a national force before uniting internationally;

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself as a nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word (Marx quoted in Schwarzmantel, 1991: 61).

The practice of socialism has shown that the two ideologies could feed off each other and they could also have a more interactive relationship than the theory of each would have one suppose. In theory, socialism and nationalism are two opposing camps but in practice nationalists have articulated socialism and/or socialists have resorted to nationalist discourse. A deeper analysis of the relationship in question requires that '[t]he configuration of political and social forces at any particular historical conjuncture ... [are] taken into account' (Jenkins; Sofos, 1996: 18). This chapter will argue that the boundaries of what is defined as the left and what is Turkish are prone to change and the two 'camps' can influence each other to a very significant degree.

This is not to argue that Turkey is a unique case where we can see the relationship of socialism and nationalism in flux. How Lenin dealt with the national question will show us how national identity was seen as a tool of international socialism. In Leninist analysis nations were not only approached in terms of tactical calculations, but nations and the appeal of national identity were also taken as a given. Lenin had only been critical of bourgeois nationalism.

Lenin defined self-determination as 'the political separation of nations from alien national bodies and the formation of individual national states' (2001:221). National self-determination was a right of all 'oppressed' nations. Here it is crucial to notice that he distinguished between 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' nations. In fact he developed a four-fold typology. The first category consisted of advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, the second of Eastern Europe (Austria, the Balkans, Russia), the third semi-colonial countries (for example China, Persia, and Turkey), and finally, the colonies (Schwarzmantel, 1991: 174). He supported the national liberation of oppressed nations in the last two categories without any exceptions. The Leninist strategy concerning national movements was to back them up as they were seen as fighters in the international anti-imperialist struggle. It did not matter if the national bourgeoisie led this war. He argued

'... *insofar* as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in very case, and more strongly than anyone else, *in favour*, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression' (Munck, 1986: 73, original emphasis).

However, this 'consistency' in supporting the oppressed against the oppressor gets complicated, as the socialists are not supposed to support bourgeois nationalism even if national struggles are led by the bourgeoisie. The Leninist position seems to have risen from the assumption that nations with a particular history already existed and were claiming their natural rights. Based on this view, he then develops an answer to that demand from a socialist point of view.

The influence of Lenin was not alone in blurring how nations, national bourgeoisies and nationalism should be dealt with by socialists. Many of the practices of socialists in Western Europe can also be cited as examples where nationalist rhetoric was resorted to



against the fascists in those countries. As Hobsbawm has shown, during World War I, the socialists referred to national interests and argues that 'civic advantages peculiar to their state' (1992:89) had to be protected. The German Socialist Party, although initially propagating resistance against the war, ended up giving support to German government in the name of 'national defence', which was to be followed by the French, British and Belgian socialists (Munck, 1986: 36). Again in WWII, socialists attempted to 'recapture national and patriotic sentiment' against fascism. '[T]he combination of red and national flags was genuinely popular' (Hobsbawm, 1992: 145-146). From 1934 onwards communists were united 'with social democrats and even non-socialist parties' in fighting against fascism (McGermott, 1996:123). The Comintern by July 1934 also signed a Pact of Unity of Action with social democrats whom it had been critical of until then, even calling them 'social fascists' (ibid: 125).

### **3.1.2. An overview of socialism and nationalism in Turkey**

The fact that socialists used nationalist rhetoric as part of an anti-fascist movement is not only an interesting point in its own right as we shall see, bared similarities to the 'patriotism' of Turkish socialists who claimed to be the genuine nationalists. Similarly, the Leninist theory of national self-determination and anti-imperialism is helpful in our attempt to understand the position of Turkish socialists in relation to their nation and the national struggle led by Mustafa Kemal. This chapter will provide a brief look at the leftist movements in Turkey from the time of the Ottoman Empire to the present and will argue that Leninist anti-imperialism and national independence as a fight against

imperialism are among the most basic influences that have shaped the Turkish left. Leninism provided the pretext for the left to support the Turkish liberation war and led most of the leftist movements to regard Kemalism as a role model. Therefore, the left did not engage in a critical dialogue with Kemalism.

From another angle we can also see that in Turkey, there have been several periods when the nationalist state incorporated socialists or 'let them be' and Turkish socialists themselves have resorted to nationalist rhetoric. One thing that is clear is that the left has not been engaged in a critical dialogue with the main defining framework of the Turkish state. It is necessary to discuss the relationship of the left with Kemalism as it shapes the nationalism as articulated by the state. Even though Kemalism is a bourgeois nationalist ideology, the context that it was shaped in and its first manifestation provided for the possibility of an articulation of it by the left throughout the history of the Turkish Republic.

Kemalism was an anti-imperialist movement besides its role in forging the Turkish nation and its state. During the actual period of the anti-imperialist struggle, namely the Turkish liberation war, this character of the Kemalist movement enabled it to be supported by many socialists, especially by those in the Soviet Union. Moreover, even after the Republic was founded with clear aims defined by nationalism and anti-socialism, leftist groups in Turkey emphasised the anti-imperialist rhetoric. Kemalism was articulated as the role model of the Turkish left as it has been the first anti-imperialist struggle in the history of the 'Turks'. The Turkish left has taken Kemalism as a given ideology, emphasised the tenets of Kemalism that could be in line with socialism, re-articulated some of the six principles, and aligned them with core socialist beliefs. Alongside the

influence of Leninist anti-imperialism, Kemalism can be argued to be another source of the rapprochement of socialism and nationalism in Turkey. Thus, combining the two sources, most of the leftist movements argued that Kemalism was an unfinished democratic revolution in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism (Akdere, 1996: 304).

The six constitutive elements of Kemalism are republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism and revolutionarism, most of which could be articulated as such by the left in a way that would make them appear compatible with socialism (Demirel, 1983: 766). Republicanism is referred to in the *CHP* programme of 1931 such as; ‘the party believes that the Republic is the best political system to carry out the principle of the sovereignty vested in the people. The party thus, will protect the Republic against any kind of threat at any time’ (ibid: 769). The Turkish left had not aimed to change the Republican regime and would refer to this principle of Kemalism in order to show that they were no threat to Kemalism and even to the state *per se*. For example, the Turkish Labour Party of the 1960s and the 1970s aimed to bring about socialism through the existing political system. Indeed, the USSR as a socialist state was also a Republic. Both Turkey and the USSR were states where democracy and Republicanism were treated in terms of a binary opposition and democracy could be sacrificed for the sake of the Republic (Somay, 2007: 652). Such a similarity between the role model socialist state – USSR – and their own – Turkey – could have had an impact on the fact that republicanism was considered as a given among the Turkish left.

The source of how the Kemalists define the second principle nationalism can be found again in various party programmes of the *CHP*. Nationalism as defined in the party

programme is 'protecting the unique and independent character of the Turkish society as well as cooperation and co-existence with the rest of the modern nations on the path to development' (Parla, 1995: 40). Nationalism, at least its Kemalist form, has not been totally rejected by leftist groups in Turkey. Some of the left such as the *YÖN* group, as will be seen in detail later, would claim to be the genuine nationalists as they wished the best (socialism) for the Turkish nation. Moreover, it was also possible for the Turkish left to argue that Marxism did not renounce nationalism totally since, as has been discussed earlier, there have been a number of practices of the left internationally that were compatible with nationalism. National struggles, especially, against imperialism internationally have been considered as contributing to the weakening of capitalism in order for it to be replaced by communism. The liberation war of Turkey has been one of the main reasons why the Turkish left has shown respect and support for Mustafa Kemal, due to the left's interpretation of the war as an anti-imperialist struggle. In this context, nationalism and socialism were allies in the anti-imperialist struggles rather than being clashing ideologies.

The third principle, populism, again carried similarities to the way that socialism envisaged its policies. Indeed, as defined in the *CHP* programme, populism meant that before the law, no individual, family, class or community would have any privileges. Theoretically this formulation is parallel to a classless society that avoids privileges, which was envisaged by communism as well.

*Etatism* is basically state control over the economy – at least over the core elements – which can easily be related to a socialist economy and the role of the state in the sphere of economics. As examples of the left's position on etatism, we can see that both the

*YÖN* group and the *TİP* (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi* – Turkish Labour Party) of the 1960s have openly supported state control of the economy.

Secularism is one of the main ideological bases of both the Turkish left and the Kemalists. The Marxist left has emphasised that ‘religion is the opium of the masses’ in line with their adoption of secularism (Belge, 1993: 153). Secularism in both Turkey and the USSR has meant state control of religious practices and institutions. In both countries the establishment, on the one hand, has perceived society as the ignorant masses who could easily be manipulated by religion, and superstition (and in the case of the USSR by the illusions of capitalism), and the conscious (Bolshevik or Kemalist) elite on the other (Somay, 2007: 653). Again the similarities of the practices of socialist and Kemalist states can be seen as sources of how the articulation of Kemalist principles has been compatible with socialism.

Revolutionarism (*inkılapçılık/devrimcilik*) formed the basis for the left to see Kemalism as a role model. The Kemalist ‘revolution’ was the only example that had been successful in changing the system it challenged; thus, it was followed by many who challenged the current system. However, the irony was that their leading example was the one which formed and protected the existing bourgeois system in Turkey (Aydınöğlu, 1992:40). In the Turkish case, they were the parallels that could be drawn between Kemalist tenets and the aims of the left that contributed the most to the blurring of lines between the state and the left.

This chapter is dedicated to the study of the general theme of ambiguities in the relationship of the Kemalist state and the left in Turkey, which will be done in four sections defined by periods. Thus, the periodisation is also based on the characteristics of

the relationship rather than applying the commonly used periodisation of the history of the Turkish Republic in which the military coups would be the turning points. The formation of the Republic in 1923 and the coups of 27 May 1960, 12 March 1971, and 12 September 1980 are defining events in Turkish political life, in fact having effects on every aspect of life. However, with regards to the relationship of the state and the left, these were not actually *the* turning points. In other words, the strategy of the state in its dealings with the left was not shaped by these events nor did the identity of the main actors of the left and their discourse change from one period of military rule to another. For example, the strategy of the Kemalists vis-à-vis the communists did not change when the Republic was founded in 1923, but it was in 1925 – when the *Takrir-i Sükun* laws were introduced – that communism was made illegal. Another example could be the continuity of *TİP* in 1960s and 1970s. *TİP* was closed down by the military junta of 1971 but was later formed under the leadership of Behice Boran. The second *TİP* followed the same policy of ‘the parliamentary route to socialism’ just as the *TİP* of the 1960s did, in relation to introducing socialism in Turkey. From this point view, thus, the periodisation employed is going to discuss the left in Turkey, first of all in the period between 1908 and 1925, secondly from 1925 to 1960, then the periods from 1960 to 1980, and lastly from 1980 to the present.

To find the origins of Turkish leftist movements, we first need to go back to the end of the Ottoman Empire. In the same section, the liberation war will also be covered during which the strategy of the state can be said to be one of ‘relative toleration’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is necessary to bear in mind that at this time there was no Turkish State as such. Therefore, what we are referring to is mainly the way Mustafa Kemal dealt with the left, who were mostly communists.

1925 to 1960 is the period that was first characterised by the consolidation of the nation-state and the Republic by the *CHP* in the single party period –until 1950 and then by the Cold War. In 1950, the first multi party elections were held and the founding party of the Republic was replaced by the *DP* (*Demokrat Parti* –Democrat Party) whose election campaign gave hope for more freedoms. However, the 1950s did not bring any more freedom for leftist ideas as hoped and Turkey became more and more dependent on the USA economically and politically – a strategic orientation that is still criticised by the left in the name of independence and anti-imperialism. The multi party system did not bring any changes in the repressive attitude of the state towards the left. Thus, again contrary to the classical periodisation, the periods of the first *CHP* government and *DP* government will be studied in the same section, as both followed a repressive strategy to deal with the left. Both *CHP* and *DP* governments had worked in line with the policy to define the place of Turkey as in a close relationship with the capitalist West, instead of being close to the USSR. This idea was based on Turkey's policy of 'facing the West' defined by Mustafa Kemal.

Then, in 1960, Turkey experienced its first military coup. Ironically this led to the development of its most democratic constitution. The period that is marked from 27 May 1960 until the second coup on 12 March 1971 was in many ways the most fruitful for the left in Turkey. The first legal Labour Party was founded and gained seats in the parliament. Various influential groups coming from a socialist background emerged. There were a number of different journals, which were characterised by a socialist outlook. Moreover, it was in the 1960s that for the first time, Marxist literature could be openly published in Turkish, creating the possibility for those primary texts to become

widely available. The coup of 1971, however, put a halt to the flourishing of the left and the 1970s were marked by divisions in the left. Similar groups on the left were active throughout both the 1960s and the 1970s; however, the state strategy did not change dramatically. It is therefore, possible to deal with these in a continuous period.

Before the 12 September 1980 coup, history repeated itself. Leftist groups mostly formed of young generations had resorted to violence and armed struggle and it was also the method of fascist youngsters. With the ‘intention to stop a potential civil war’ the military intervened once more to overthrow a government that was incapable of bringing peace, to show their dedication to the Kemalist state and its values. After 1980, to repeat a cliché, Turkey became much more de-politicised. Moreover, from 1980 until the present time, the USSR failed to stand up against capitalism, which has been interpreted as the end of the communist threat. The influence of such international developments can be felt in Turkey. With the Cold War being over, communism is no longer regarded as a threat. The Turkish State now is much less reluctant to communicate with the left and even re-articulate some symbolic figures of the left such as Nâzım Hikmet, as part of Turkish national identity. On the other hand, the left has become more and more nationalist; *TİP* and its leader, Doğu Perinçek being the most prominent actor of ‘nationalist socialism’.

### **3.2. Origins of leftist movements under ‘relative tolerance’: 1908-1925**

#### **3.2.1. Origins of leftist movements in the Ottoman Empire**

The history of the left in Turkey begins in the Ottoman Empire. Most of the literature on this issue takes 1908 as a starting point and this paper will follow their path as well, with however a reservation. There had been socialist trade union activism in the Ottoman



Empire before 1908, which were led mostly by members of the Armenian, Jewish and/or Bulgarian millets. ‘Two Armenian socialist parties – *Taşnaksutyun* and *Hınçak* – which had offices in [what is now] Turkey, had been attending conferences of the International since 1896’ (Haupt; Dumont, 1977: 19). The most prominent workers union was the *Selanik İşçi Federasyonu* (Socialist Workers Union of Selanik).

On 26 February 1910, the first socialist publication *İştirak*, led by Hüseyin Hilmi, became the party journal when the *Osmanlı Sosyalist Fırkası* (Ottoman Socialist Party – *OSF*) (Tunçay, 1991: 32; Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 25) began to be published. The *OSF* was the main organisation representing the left at the time. The party argued that socialism was wholly compatible with Islam. Islam, according to them, was a socialist religion that talked about the fair and equal distribution of goods. The *OSF* defined itself as a worker’s party and claimed that the rights of the workers were best protected by fair, equal and liberal government policies. This was the earliest example of the left, arguing that socialism was compatible with the existing political regime, in this case, the Islamic state of the Ottoman Empire. The *OSF* supported state control over all layers of the economy and in particular by nationalisation of industries that were currently run by imperialist powers (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 26-27). It was closed down in 1913 by the Committee of Union and Progress, to be reborn as the Socialist Party of Turkey in 1919. Between 1913 till 1918, there had been no leftist activity in the territory of what would become Turkey (Tunçay, 1991: 37). Since these leftist movements had taken place well before the establishment of Kemalism, we cannot identify any relationship here.

### 3.2.2 The left during the liberation war

The period of the liberation war is a crucial stage in the relationship of Turkish left and Kemalism because of two interrelated reasons. The left and the movement led by Mustafa Kemal had its strongest alliance during the war and the left has continued to give special emphasis to the war with the argument that it was an anti-imperialist struggle.

During the liberation war, there were various groups both in Asia Minor and in Istanbul which had a socialist outlook. In Istanbul, where the working class population was high, Şefik Hüsnü founded the *TİÇSF (Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası – Workers, Farmers Socialist Party of Turkey)* on 22 September 1919 (Tunçay, 1991: 169). In Ankara there was the *İştirakiyûn* Party and in Eskişehir there was a group around the Journal *Yeni Dünya*. All these groups were to come together under the *TKP (Türkiye Komunist Partisi – Turkish Communist Party)* after its formative conference in Baku on September 1920. Under Mustafa Suphi's leadership the socialist Turks in the Caucasus formed the *TKP* and in that first conference it was decided that *TKP* would be active in Asia Minor; thus, the origins of legal and effective communist activity in Turkey that Nâzım Hikmet would also be part of were formed (Kalfa, 1986: 48).

All socialist groups of the time supported the liberation war led by Mustafa Kemal. *TİÇSF* especially encouraged its members to go and join the fight (ibid: 171). The ones that stayed in Istanbul started the journal *Aydınlık* which would later celebrate the victory of Mustafa Kemal in the war. The fact that the *Aydınlık* circle supported the war is

significant since this can also be considered to be the official publication of the *TKP*. Even though it was started as the publication of *TİÇSF*, party founder Şefik Hüsnü became the leader of the *TKP* in 1925 and the *Aydınlık* group was the main one keeping in touch with the Comintern (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 141).

At the end of the war, the victory of Kemal was interpreted by Turkish socialists mainly under the leadership of Şefik Hüsnü, as a victory against imperialism. The nationalist elite led by Mustafa Kemal and the socialists also agreed on the abolishment of the sultanate (ibid: 173). The alliance of socialists and Kemalists was justified in the eyes of the socialists since both groups were seen to carry out an anti-imperialist and progressive struggle against both feudalism of the Ottoman Empire and the imperialism of the West. The left had started its opportunistic strategy of alliance with Kemalism to carry out its desired policies of liberty and progress. The way that the liberation war was perceived to be an anti-imperialist war by Turkish socialists would be one of the cornerstones of the characteristics of the Turkish left throughout its history, making its proximity to Kemalism and even nationalism a high probability<sup>18</sup>.

To look at the picture from the eyes of the Ankara government, we can argue that Mustafa Kemal tolerated communist activity during the war. Kemal had an essentially pragmatic approach in dealing with the communists. We have seen in previous chapters that he made considerable efforts as well to keep religious leaders and supporters of the sultan on his side during the war.

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<sup>18</sup> Nâzım Hikmet's views about the war as will be seen in later chapters are also in line with the approach attributed to the Turkish left here. Nâzım Hikmet also regarded and preached the Liberation war as a progressive leap away from feudalism and semi-colonialism to modernity and liberty. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that, in the *Human Landscapes*, he had also written about the continuous existence of several elements of backwardness, feudalism, colonialism and inequality among social classes under the Kemalist Republic.

The way Kemal dealt with the left in this period was mainly defined by strategic concerns vis-à-vis the Soviet Russia. In June 1920, Ankara government requested Lenin's support for the Turkish liberation war. Ankara government played the anti-imperialism card to gain sympathy from Moscow, whose help was much needed during the war. The communists were mostly tolerated as they were also seen as a trump card in this relationship. Kemal's strategy of representing the struggle as an anti-imperialist one and tolerating communist activity had gained Russia's support, which helped by providing rifles, bullets and other military equipment to Turkey including ships and gold (Şismanov, 1990: 67).

The Soviet Union was already willing to help anti-imperialist struggles internationally, especially the Turkish one, which was taking place in its backyard. At the 1920 Congress in Baku, 'oppressed nations' were declared to be natural allies of communism and the USSR simply because they were fighting against imperialist countries (Somay, 2007: 648). The independence war taking place in neighbouring Asia Minor was therefore supported, due to the strategic calculations of the USSR as well as the ideological formulation of Lenin that regarded nationalist movements as part of the path to communism. Lenin claimed that '[t]hroughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements' (2001: 221). The fact that the struggle was a national one led by the bourgeoisie could be ignored, since Mustafa Kemal was regarded to be leading a struggle against the imperialist Western powers, who were the same enemy of Lenin.

The relationship of Moscow and Ankara during the war had been regarded as beneficial to both sides. Moscow supported Ankara in its anti-imperialist struggle, even if the war

was driven by nationalism rather than communism. Ankara tolerated the influence of Moscow over the Turkish people as long as it did not become a challenge to its own power and secured the sympathy of Moscow towards Ankara. However, the communists were not left to act on their own devices by the Ankara government. Kemal wanted to keep them under his control, and if they could not be under control, they would be eliminated, as in the case of Mustafa Suphi.

When Mustafa Suphi travelled to Turkey it was with the permission of Mustafa Kemal. Kazım Karabekir – one of Mustafa Kemal's trusted generals – welcomed them. The members of the *TKP*, including its leader Suphi, were killed in the Black Sea on their way back to Bakü. It is usually argued that this was a murder planned by or at least known by Mustafa Kemal. He saw the *TKP* as a way to ensure Russian support for the war but did not want to risk the independence war becoming a socialist revolution (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 132). The way Suphi and his friends were treated is a typical example of the controlled tolerance of Kemal vis-à-vis the communists during the war. Communist activity was tolerated as long as it did not become a threat to the aims of the Ankara government. At the end of the day, they needed all the support they could get from different groups in Turkey and also from Russia but did not want to open the way towards a socialist revolution<sup>19</sup>.

During the war, another important and interesting case in relation to the left was the formation of a 'fake' Turkish Communist party under the supervision of Mustafa Kemal in 1920. It was seen as a way to show Russia that the Kemal government was open to communism and thus, get their financial support. On the other hand, it was an act that

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<sup>19</sup> After the death of the leader *TKP* was to be run by the Istanbul circles and Şefik Hüsnü, as mentioned earlier, became the general secretary of *TKP* in February, 1925 (Kalfa, 1986: 49).

was staged in order to control communists from within the group. The same strategy of controlled tolerance can be seen in this act. Communism was tolerated as long as it could be controlled and the formation of an official communist party with a few trusted members inside was regarded to be an appropriate method of control. This aim was clearly stated by Mustafa Kemal himself in a telegram he had sent to one of the generals whom he ordered to be a member of the Communist Party. The telegraph cites that communism was seen as a threat to the unity and peace in society and that they definitely needed to be contained. Thus, he appointed a few of his most trusted generals as secret party members, such as İsmet, Fevzi, Kâzım and Refet (Tevetoğlu, 1967:311). However, this party was not recognised by the Third International and communists in the country did not become members of it. It ceased to exist over time without much impact (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 91-96).

It was a symbolic case that showed that Kemal aimed to render communism weak by use of the *logic of difference*. Kemal's own words not only defined communism as a threat or, in other words, as an 'other' but also set out the strategy to deal with it. Instead of banning communist activity and defining very clear lines of antagonism, which would be the *logic of equivalence* and the most common strategy of the state in relation to communism, Kemal had chosen to decrease and eventually eliminate its influence by creating a fake alliance with its 'other'.

This period can be identified as the source of the shift in state strategy on the one hand and the proximity the left imagined with its ideology and that of Mustafa Kemal, on the other. The left supported the war at the time and continuously insisted that it was an anti-imperialist struggle that provided the pretext for the proximity of the left with Kemalism.

We have seen that Ankara implemented both an oppressive strategy (in the case of the killings of Mustafa Suphi and other *TKP* members) and an incorporation strategy (in the case of the ‘fake’ *TKP*). The general policy of Mustafa Kemal during the war can be summarised as controlled tolerance due to strategic concerns. The pragmatic strategy of Kemal towards possible opposition groups such as religious leaders, the sultan and the communists ended together with the war, leaving in its place a harsher repression of opposition secured with the use of force as well. In May 1923, most writers at *Aydınlık* were arrested. They were charged with challenging the rule of the Turkish Assembly and attempting to organise the working class against the government in order to establish communism by means of violence. They were set free since Istanbul was only recently included under the jurisdiction of the Assembly and the laws had not yet been ratified, basically due to the power vacuum in the country (Tunçay, 1991: 176). In 1925, however, harsher laws were introduced that led to the closing down of the leftist publications and the *TKP* becoming illegal.

### **3.3. The Repression of the left: 1925-1960**

The starting point of this period is 1925, following the periodisation of Mete Tunçay, who has written the most detailed analysis of the Turkish left in its early years. He argues that the fact that the left had been pushed to illegality by the state had changed its character. Arrests and exiles, which shaped most of the leftist actors, had influenced their way of thinking and understanding of Turkey. Turkey’s political system had also been through changes. Moreover, Stalin came to power in Soviet Russia and formed his

dictatorship trying to control all the communists as well as in Turkey (Tunçay, 1991: 202).

In 1923 the Turkish Republic was officially formed. It would be led by the single party leadership of the *CHP* until 1950. In this rather long single party period, the new Republic was far from being a democracy. Scepticism and lack of self-esteem defined state policies. There was a fear that the newly-introduced ideas, especially secularism and Turkishness as bearers of the 'one-state one-nation' ideal, would be questioned and that opposition would gain support from the public. According to the party program declared in 1931, the *CHP* was to function in line with the six principles of Kemalism. Moreover, in 1937 these were made a part of the state's main principles with an amendment to the constitution that remained unmodified until 1961 (Koçak 2002: 38). 'The *CHP* in the single party period was the guardian of the definition of Turkish nationalism as the official ideology and its reproduction as such. In that period, the nation = the state = the party formula was already the discourse' (ibid: 41).

However, even before the 1930s, the Turkish Republic set out to be a single party state which would not allow opposition. As early as 1925, the harsher face of the Republic showed its face and, in this circumstance, the communist movement became illegal in 1925 when it was closed down in line with the *Takrir-i Sükun* laws introduced after the Sheikh Said rebellion. *Aydınlık* and *Orak-Çekiç* which were the print media of the Turkish communists – where Nâzım Hikmet had also been contributing – were closed down and the writers of these journals were arrested together with many members of the *TKP*. The bans on every outlet for and form of opposition carried a clear message of hegemony on the side of the state. Turkish communists were among the main groups to



be silenced and punished. The *TKP* members were sentenced to long term imprisonment, which created a significant impediment to communist activity, which was forced to go underground. The year 1925 marked the start of a different period for Turkey and the left in general. The main strategy of the state in this period was antagonistic, which was expressed with the oppression of the left in almost all of its versions. Besides short incidents involving the loosening of hegemony over the left, the period of 1925-1960 will be studied here as a period marked by the repression of almost all versions of the left by the state.

A change in the relations with Soviet Russia could also be detected starting with the formation of the Republic. The close, cooperative relationship during the liberation war had become a tenser one. The arrests of Turkish communists in 1923 and 1925 and the closing down of the publications of the communists came as a 'shock to Moscow' (Carr cited in Tunçay, 1992:16). Historian E.H. Carr argued that, by 1926, the left was forced underground and 'crushed by the iron fist of Kemal' (ibid: 26).

One of the aims of the party was securing the consolidation of the nation-state. The definition of Turkishness in the 1930s, as was talked about in the previous chapter, was influenced by the fascist wave in Europe at the time until it became obvious that Nazi Germany was going to lose World War II. The Turkish penal code was adopted from fascist Italy. Any democratic and liberal intellectuals would even be regarded as communist and would be charged according to the Articles 141 and 142 which 'prohibited any progressive thought or organisation inspired by socialism, contained in its primary form prison sentences starting from six months' (Kalfa, 1986: 278). In 1938, a new Law of Organisations was passed, banning the formation of all class-based

organisations and also any mention of the existence of social classes, although in 1936 the sentences of Articles 141 and 142 had already become harsher demanding death penalty for the leaders of organisations that ‘aim to take down the existing economic or social systems’ (Şişmanov 1990: 132; 134). According to Kemalist nationalism, the Turkish nation was a unitary group free of any division not only in terms of nation/nationalities but also of class. Workers and intellectuals who worked for the equality of classes were considered to be sowing the seeds of separatism. They were also considered to be serving Moscow rather than to Ankara.

During World War II, even though Turkey had not actively joined the war, the pressures were felt and the government became harsher. In fact there was strong pressure from the fascists that Turkey should join Hitler and attack Russia. The military cadres were worried that Turkey would be the next target. Therefore, Turkey should define its position beforehand. There were also economic benefits. ‘Turkey supplied Germany with the chrome essential for its armaments industry in return for trade credits’ (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 171). However, Turkey declared war against Germany only symbolically after it was clear that the USA would defeat Hitler. Either position was problematic for the communist movement. If Germany won and Turkey allied with it, a fascist regime might emerge in Turkey, erasing any hopes for democratic rights for communists or indeed any progressive movement. However, the other option of a Turkey-USA alliance had not been beneficial for socialists in Turkey as the Cold War was about to start.

Immediately after the end of the war, the *CHP* had loosened its grip and there was an atmosphere of freedom of expression. In this context the *DP* was formed in 1946 and it would win the elections of 1950. However, opposition originating from the left was

quickly repressed as their political parties were short-lived and academics with socialist views were expelled from universities, with the argument that they were propagating communist ideas.

Communism was regarded as the central foe by Turkish nationalists for a long period to follow, even after the end of the single-party period. Turkey's position during the Cold War – the beginning of which coincided with the *DP* government – was on the side of the USA. Turkey received aid as part of the Marshall Plan and later on became a member of NATO. The relationship of Turkey and the USSR that could have previously been defined as one of being allies had been replaced by hostility. Anti-imperialism on the side of Turkey was also replaced by an alliance with the USA and Western European powers under the umbrella of NATO. Nationalism and anti-communism were still to define the policies. According to Şişmanov 'during the DP government, 13,500 people were arrested for political reasons' (1990: 174). The biggest of those incidents took place in 1951, when a total of 167 citizens were arrested.

In this period, Turkey's involvement in the Korean War was among the most controversial issues in the country and opposition to the war was interpreted as communism. Behice Boran – future leader of the *TİP* – was among the founders of Turkish Peace-lovers Organisation and its anti-war stance was punished by its members being given a one-year prison sentence (Ibid: 176). They argued that by entering the war, Turkey was only serving imperialism and American interests while the government thought by being anti-war, this group was serving communism, in other words, the

USSR.<sup>20</sup> The state policy of oppression of the left was at its peak under the *DP* government. Leftist groups were seen as being in the service of the strategic 'other', the USSR.

Under the *CHP* government a harsh single party regime had become prevalent that did not allow opposition groups, especially from the left, to participate fully in the politics. Bans on political parties and arrests of individuals representing the left were the common policies of the state. The change from a single to a multi-party system and the rule of the *DP*, starting in 1950, coincided with the birth of the Cold War which bore more oppression for the left in the country since Turkey had made its alliance with the Western camp rather than to socialist one. Having summarised the general policy of the state in this period between 1925 and 1960, we will now turn our attention to the main representatives of the left.

### **3.3.1 Turkish Communist Party**

In the context of nationalism and general scepticism of any opposition, the communist movement was illegal. Imprisonment and court appeals for the activists were carried out regularly.

The Şefik Hüsnü leadership was supportive of the Kemalist regime but this did not help the *TKP* escape from being the target of a silencing strategy of the Turkish State and, thus, in 1925, many members of the party were arrested (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1994: 155).

Thirty eight Turkish communists, among whom Nâzım Hikmet was one, were charged

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Nâzım Hikmet had also written critical poems about the Korean War and involvement of Turkey and he was in this period openly called a 'traitor' and 'servant' of the USSR and had been deprived of Turkish citizenship.

with propagandizing against the existing regime and disturbing the internal order (Tevetoğlu, 1967: 388).

The *TKP* became illegal in 1925 and its leader Şefik Hüsnü escaped to Russia. We can follow the activities of the now illegal *TKP* in 1925 from the article written by Şefik Hüsnü provided by Tunçay. According to the article, entitled 'Communist Activity in Turkey', the *TKP* had gone through three phases that year. In March and April there was a belief in the *TKP* that it could resist state authority. Until 12 August, when the decisions of the courts against communists were in progress, there was a belief that the party could have a semi-legal character. However, after harsh decisions were handed down, such 'dreams' gave way to some awareness that 'nothing should be expected from the nationalist authority' and the party tried to re-organise. In October, however, another blow was struck when an inner party circulation was found by the police and followed by arrests. This led to a breaking of ties between the centre and the organisations based in the rural parts of the country (Tunçay, 1992: 21).

In 1926, Vedat Nedim Tör was, for all intents and purposes, leading the party but within the supervision of Hüsnü who had formed a *TKP* branch outside of Turkey. This was decided at the Vienna Conference of May 1926.

By 1927, Tör and Hüsnü began to have disagreements about activities as Tör was reluctant to organise strikes among workers while Hüsnü was arguing that those were the orders of the Comintern. Tör would cause the 1927 *TKP* arrests by turning in members (Tevetoğlu, 1967: 399) and exposing activities which were already triggered by some publications in Russian newspapers, strikes and an American intelligence report (details of which can be found in Tunçay 1992, 46-57).

On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September 1927 other *TKP* brochures were discovered by the police, leading to one of the biggest waves of communists arrests. The discovery of these brochures convinced the police that a secret Communist Party had been illegally active since 1925. Şefik Hüsnü had been leading the *TKP* outside of Turkey and this external wing, the communists who had been released from prison, and new members had been able to bring the party organisation back together (Tevetoğlu, 1967: 394-7). As a result of the 1927 Communist arrests most of the main leaders of the party were arrested or sentenced in absentia and, once again, Nâzım Hikmet was one of them (Tunçay, 1992: 46).

In 1929 a big wave of communist arrests again took place. The *Takrir-i Sükun* law was lifted by 1929 but this would not mean a softening of the repression on communism. In fact, in a speech, Mustafa Kemal implicitly warned the communists and degraded them by calling them a group of miserable people without a country, without nationality and argued that workers, farmers and the military were all on the same side (Ibid: 68).

In 1929, Nâzım Hikmet started an opposition group within the *TKP* (Tunçay, 76-78). He would, however, be expelled from the party in 1930 and accused of being supportive of Trotsky, a police agent and a traitor.

1936 would be the end of *TKP* as an illegal communist party related to the Comintern. Moscow decided that *TKP* members should go legal and 'support the İnönü government in his policies that foster national independence, social development and all policies in favour of the people and the country' (Ibid: 126).

The *TKP* was mainly supportive of Kemalist reforms. In 1923, Şefik Hüsnü wrote that at the end of the war, three mains groups emerged; the first was formed of the leading actors

of the revolution and were willing to consolidate it, the second group preferred to carry out a revolt on the basis of religion, and the third were the socialists, who would have liked to consolidate the revolution in favour of workers, farmers and the middle classes. He then argued that the first and third groups should work together (Tunçay, 1991: 176). In 1926, the *TKP* was advised by the Comintern to support the Kemalist government as well. A letter sent to the *TKP* on 1 July, 1926 argued that the Turkish Government would not put too much pressure on the party and prevent its attempts to break down communist and youth organisations associated within the party. The duty assigned to the *TKP* by the Comintern was to fully support the foreign policy of the government and to show that the party was willing to render support in the government's fight against all sorts of imperialisms. The Turkish government was argued in this letter to consist of revolutionary workers who had attained certain bourgeois elements. Thus, the internal reforms carried out by this group were to be supported by the *TKP*. The action plan for the party was thus summarised as: 1. Intensify work to attract more members to youth and village organisations, 2. Communicate more often with the proletariat of the USSR, Iran and India 3. Criticise all opposition against the internal reforms carried out by the Kemalist government 4. Support energetically the foreign policy of the Turkish Government as long as it is pursuing a fight against international imperialism. Lastly, it was also advised that the education of the members should be given a special importance (in Tunçay, 1991: 33).

The alliance hoped for by the *TKP* was not realised but instead the communist party became the target of oppression in Turkey. The *TKP* remained illegal from 1925 till 2001 and arrests of *TKP* members took place periodically. Communists were identified as

those whose loyalty lied with Russia rather than Turkey and, as we have seen, loyalty was a major criterion for the Turkish state.

### **3.3.2 Other short-lived leftist parties**

On 14 May, 1946, the *TSF (Türkiye Sosyalist Fırkası – Turkish Socialist Party)* was founded. The *TSF* in its programme dedicated itself to the people and the elimination of social inequalities. It defined itself as a socialist party and in the service of the people and claimed that the people were a unitary group and its party was nationalist (Şişmanov, 1990: 155). The *TSF* was closed down after six months, with the argument that its publications (a daily paper, *Gerçek* and a journal called *Gün*) had contained communist propaganda. The leaders were sentenced to imprisonment (Kalfa, 1986: 288; Şişmanov, 190: 154). However, the Supreme Court changed the ruling and the party leaders re-formed the Turkish Socialist Party in 1950. This experience did not last long either and the party and its publication were closed down again in 1952. They were regarded to be communist for conducting anti-war protests, arguing that Turkey should have friendly relations with the USSR and other socialist states, criticising military expenditures and organising conferences to teach socialism (Şişmanov, 1990: 171-2).

1946 had given birth to another socialist party, *Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi* (Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party). Their aim was to create the necessary conditions for the workers to benefit fully from democratic freedoms and have a direct say in Turkey's foreign and domestic politics (ibid: 156). The party successfully organised workers in trade unions in various cities. It gained popularity among workers



and journalists with a democratic and progressive perspective; however, it was doomed to be short-lived and charged with promoting communism.

Another left-oriented party that was formed during this period was *Vatan – le patrie*. It was founded in 1954 by Dr. Hikmet Kıvılcımlı – an ex-*TKP* member. This party survived until 1958 but was closed down after being accused of spreading communist propaganda. It was a party which was formed mostly by workers and, similar to other leftist groups, criticised issues like Turkey's relationships with the USA, foreign investment, and the lack of democracy and freedom of speech in the country (ibid: 172-4).

These examples have shown us the variety of groups within the Turkish left and the short intervals of non-oppressive state strategy. On the other hand, the variegated quality of the leftist movements was not recognised by the state as all the different groups were categorised as communist and punished as such. The main strategy of the state vis-à-vis its 'other', communism, was shaped by antagonism and was reflected in oppressive policies.

### **3.3.3. The *Kadro* Movement**

The *Kadro* movement requires special treatment as a leftist-inclined movement in this period, especially as it represents the first explicit example of how socialism and Kemalism were brought together. It also shows us the complexity of the left, that it was not confined to political parties only. The *Kadro* movement was legal and was tolerated by the state, even if only for a short period of time. This case stands as one of the clearest examples of the shifting state policy from antagonism to incorporation and also of the

fact that this incorporation was made possible by the articulation of similarities between socialism and Kemalism.

Between 1932 and 1935 a journal called *Kadro* was published by six intellectuals; Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Vedat Nedim Tör, İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, Burhan Asaf Belge, Şevki Yazman and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu. All the intellectuals who formed the *Kadro* – except Karaosmanoğlu – had a communist background. Aydemir and Tör had been among the leading cadres of the Turkish Communist Party (Yanardağ, 1988: 13-5). The combination of the ideas presented in this journal was known as the *Kadro* movement, which aimed to formulate the ideology of the Turkish revolution as it was declared in the journal. The founders of the *Kadro* argued that Mustafa Kemal led a successful revolution but there was no ideological basis to carry on with the revolution. Reforms that were introduced in the early years of the Republic needed to be explained and intellectuals/elites such as the participants of the *Kadro* movement were the ones capable of and responsible for this formulation (Tekeli; İlkin, 2007: 604). Mustafa Kemal and the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü welcomed and even supported these ideas. However, the journal was doomed to be closed as criticism and opposition against them in the country got stronger.

The *Kadro* movement applied dialectic materialism as their main methodological guide in studying the conditions of both Turkey and the international system. In spite of having mostly communist backgrounds and applying dialectic materialism, they had discarded almost all of the Marxist ideology or methodology. They chose to be close to the leading elite in order to have a say in the way Turkey was run (Bostancı, 1990: 149).

The fact that they broke away from the Communist Party and expressed views supportive of the government caused them to be called ‘traitors’ by the Party<sup>21</sup>. However, it was also argued that the ex-*TKP* members of the *Kadro*, especially Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, opposed the Şefik Hüsnü leadership when they were still members of the *TKP*. Aydemir represented the nationalist wing, which advocated that the Turkish Communist Party should be free from the direct influence of the Comintern. He argued that the Kemalist regime should be supported in its leading role in the anti-imperialist struggles while the *TKP* leadership considered this strategy to be an opportunist move and advocated working for the establishment of ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ (Yanardağ, 2008: 105). Supporting the Kemalist regime and turning their criticism towards communism and, indeed, to Marxist analysis, was what Tör, Belge and Aydemir did once they had broken away from the *TKP*.

Their main methodology was dialectical materialism, but they argued that Marxist analysis was only valid for the advanced capitalist West and could not be a useful approach to analyse underdeveloped countries such as Turkey. The main clash for them was not between the bourgeois and the proletariat of capitalist countries but between imperialist and underdeveloped nations. Thus, national liberation movements were the path, rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would resolve the existing clash and end the reign of the imperialists (İlkin; Tekeli, 2007: 607). This analysis was, naturally, followed by the argument that nationalist movements and especially the Kemalist one, was to be supported.

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<sup>21</sup> Şevket Süreyya Aydemir and Vedat Nedim Tör were called ‘renegades’ by the *TKP*. Tör had served as the Party Secretary but he acted as an informant in the 1927 arrests leading to the imprisonment of a number of communists (Yanardağ, 2008: 109). Both of these figures have also been target of harsh criticisms by Nâzım Hikmet in his various works as will be seen in later chapters.

The intellectuals forming *Kadro* had expressed the common themes of the Turkish left. They treated Kemalism as a progressive force, and the Turkish national struggle against imperialism was the leading model. The Kemalist revolution had to be supported and extended according to the arguments of the *Kadro* writers. Their views inspired the *YÖN* and the *MDD* (*Milli Demokratik Devrim* – National Democratic Revolution) movements. All of these three influential leftist movements of Turkey shared the characteristics of favouring etatism as an economic policy, emphasising the role of the elite in the revolution, being overtly Kemalist in the sense they interpreted Kemalism as a revolutionary, anti-imperialist, and anti-feudal ideology.

The proposed economic policy of the *Kadro* was etatism, which had been applied already by the state by that time. The main concern of the *Kadro* and of the later leftist movements was economic development, which they believed would be achieved neither by liberal capitalism nor by socialism but by state control over the whole field of economic activity (Yanardağ, 2008: 144). Following their assumption that the main clash and the main global social dynamic was the antagonism between the underdeveloped and the imperialist nations, the way out of this clash would be economic development secured by state control as part of a national revival. Thus, national liberation movements were seen as the main motors for breaking the established system of imperialism and global inequality. From this point of view, the Kemalist national movement was regarded as a leading example of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolutions. Similar analysis of the Kemalist movement would continue to be a main issue of the Turkish left<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Nâzım Hikmet, as will be seen in a later chapter, also perceived Kemalist reforms as anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, thus progressive, but he also emphasised that social inequalities due to class differences and traces of imperialism did not cease to exist in the 'new system'.

Moreover, *Kadro*, *YÖN*, the *MDD*, and Kemalism were also in agreement that intellectuals had a leading role, indeed a duty, in changing society, whether into a socialist one (the aim of the *MDD*) or a developed nation (the aim of *Kadro* and the Kemalist state). The *Kadro* movement was an attempt by a handful of intellectuals who believed they had the duty of formulating the ideological basis of the Kemalist revolution. *YÖN* and the *MDD* were advocates of the role of the intellectuals, including the patriotic members of the military (Yanardağ, 2008: 205; 210). The latter had formulated a socialist revolution strategy that was led by the intellectuals rather than the farmers and workers. Even though the members of *Kadro* had not aimed for a transition to socialism, they set the example of formulating an argument that emphasised the leading role of intellectuals in the transition of society.

Even though the intellectuals of the *Kadro* tried to be in line with state policies, they could not escape being charged as communists. The movement was criticised by the *CHP*. The General Secretary of the party at the time, Recep Peker, argued that if there were a need for formulating the ideological basis of the revolution this could be done by the elite, who were leading the revolution. There was no need for the *Kadro* movement (Bostancı, 1990: 9). Another and more influential opposition came from the growing bourgeoisie as the arguments for state interference in economy expressed in *Kadro* were in conflict with their interests. They claimed the *Kadro* movement was trying to promote communism as opposed to a liberal economy by promoting state interference (Yanardağ, 1988: 111).

The *Kadro* movement was short-lived and was limited to the ideas of a handful of intellectuals but it turned out to be a leading one that expressed the common arguments of

the Turkish left. It was also significant in its relationship with Kemalism and the state apparatus. It was a case where the state tolerated some form of Marxism but this toleration was only made possible because of the ideological proximity that the *Kadro* had with the Kemalist revolution. Once again, an organization or a movement whose discourse included some leftist over tones was tolerated until it was perceived to be advocating communism, which was seen as the main rival ideology.

### **3.4. The flourishing and division in the Turkish left: 1960-1980**

Having seen the early periods of the Turkish left in the light of its main actors and their relationship with Kemalism, we can turn our attention to the period of the 1960s and 1970s, both of which saw a flourishing of the left. The 1960s are regarded in Turkey as the peak of the leftist movement. There are several reasons for this conclusion. The Turkish left had gained access to the Marxist literature more than before in this period, as was the case in most of Europe. Now, it became possible to have access to a wider set of Marxist resources, generating a broader discussion and arguably a deeper understanding of a range of strategic issues. The deepening of the theoretical grasp of issues was also made possible with discussions and education provided by 'the old school communists' of the *TKP*. Hitherto, the dominant influence in the Turkish left had been Leninism. Besides these internal developments of the left, the political situation of considerably more democracy and liberty made possible by the new constitution made its contribution to the development of leftist views.

The coup d'état of 27 May 1960 ended the Democrat Party rule and the 1961 constitution was the most liberal constitution in the history of Turkey. It protected human rights,

freedom of the press and the formation of political parties and associations. It was possible under the new constitution that 'for the first time in many years, ideological and political currents that had been forbidden and suppressed were admitted into political life' (Lipovsky, 1992: 1). The political atmosphere in the country allowed for much more freedom and diversity of thought and expression where elites from different backgrounds, workers and trade unionists and university students were all politically engaged.

From the point of view of the state, the 1960s and the 1970s, especially the 1960s, were the most flexible period for the activities of the left. On the one hand, the constitution made this possible and, on the other hand, it can be argued that the left began to be more inclined to articulate Kemalist discourse. The Turkish left openly declared itself to be patriotic and would make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism. They were far and foremost concerned with 'saving Turkey'. Even if they were arguing for anti-capitalist economic development or calling for the workers to be more politically involved and take power, the end goal was to have an independent, economically self-sufficient and more democratic Turkey. They saw its salvation in socialism or, in other words, socialism was a means to an end but not the goal. Internationalism did not occupy the minds of Turkish socialists as much as saving the Turkish nation from 'imperialist, capitalist and repressive forces'. The second most common characteristic of the Turkish left that blurs the lines of nationalism and socialism is the use of the Kemalist rhetoric. We can also talk about a third commonality of leftist groups in Turkey; that is their urge to formulate a socialism that is unique to Turkey. 'Turkish socialism' has been referred to by *TİP* and *YÖN* in one way or another.

In the following section a sketch of the leftist movements will be given, together with the analysis of how the ideas or actions of some groups were reconcilable with the state rhetoric.

### **3.4.1 The Turkish Labour Party**

The Turkish Labour Party (*TİP*) was formed on 13 February 1961. It was the first legal socialist party that would gain representation in the parliament as a result of the 1965 general elections. The founders of the party were trade unionists and the charter of the party did not define the party as socialist but the party would bring people from different leftist backgrounds together, such as ex-members of the *TKP*, socialist intellectuals and, of course, workers (Lipovsky, 1992: 15). Mehmet Ali Aybar became the general secretary in 1962 and this was when the party became more and more active. The *TİP* programme consisted of five main tenets that were sub-sections of the ‘non-capitalist path to development’; etatism, a planned economy, agrarian reform, industrialisation, and the peaceful taking over of power. The *TİP* was open to private sector contributions and its etatism meant that the state would not get involved in those sectors of the economy that it did not regard as advantageous to nationalise (ibid.: 16).

One of the central arguments of the *TİP* under the leadership of Aybar was the indivisibility of the national liberation struggle and the struggle for socialism. The national liberation struggle was to be fought against imperialism, especially American imperialism.



The 'peaceful taking over of power' was the main characteristic of *TİP* and would be the main issue that triggered debate among the left in that period. Aybar believed that the route to socialism was through the parliament. If *TİP* became the governing party as a result of democratic elections, then they would be able to employ necessary laws and regulations to make Turkey a socialist state, which they thought was possible under the 1961 constitution. It was true that the constitution and civil laws banned communism but was open to 'democratic socialism' as the Supreme Court of Appeal ruled (ibid: 43). However, this understanding of socialism did not include a central tenet, that of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The *TİP* had a rule that half of the members of all the governing bodies in the party would be formed of workers or trade unionists which was introduced to prevent the 'hegemony of leftist intellectuals' (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 259). Aybar might have thought that this secured the rule of the proletariat if *TİP* was in power but it was certainly not satisfactory in the eyes of other leftist groups. The Labour party was in reality a party where the working class could only have half of the power and share it with intellectuals.

On the other hand, it was Aybar who argued that the working class and its representative, The Labour Party, should lead the revolutionary process whereas other groups argued for the leadership of the intellectuals or left-leaning section of the military. The *MDD* group that had imagined a leading role for the military would, for example, break away from *TİP*, as will be seen.

The 1969 general election was marked by the split inside the *TİP* and loss of its voting support. It lost the majority of its support and the new electoral system was not in favour of small parties like *TİP*. After the devastation of the elections, Aybar was faced with

strong opposition in the party and had to resign. The main opposition was led by the Boran and Aren faction who would finally take power inside the party at the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1970, which would have a short life due to the coup (Lipovsky, 1992: 80). Boran actually followed the same argument as Aybar. She saw the route to socialism through the parliament. This was even more highly criticised by the *MDD* section after the 1969 elections proved the lack of strength in *TİP* to carry out the proletariat movement even in the parliament, let alone change Turkey into a socialist state. After the elections *TİP*'s disintegration was inevitable as the party split and the youth organisations were totally out of control of the party. Eventually, it was closed by the military junta in 1971 and its leaders, Behice Boran and Sadun Aren, among others, were sentenced to imprisonment (Ibid: 81).

*TİP* would be reborn in 1975 under the leadership of Boran, while Aybar and Belli had broken ties with *TİP* and formed their own parties. *TİP*'s strategy of aiming to transform Turkey into a socialist country 'legally' had not changed. The party's main argument of the 'indivisibility of the socialist and national-democratic goals' also remained intact. The party programme argued that the trend in the world is the capitalist countries' becoming socialist and that this can be done peacefully, which was, in fact, was the aim of *TİP*. In the 1970s, the party developed close ties with *DISK* (Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Trade Unions), thus, making it influential among the workers but not as much among the peasants or students (Ibid: 126). *TİP* was also willing to have an alliance with Republican Peoples Party (*CHP*), which under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit was now using leftist rhetoric, as will be talked about in the following pages. *TİP* argued all leftist forces should unite against fascist ones who were ruling the country at the time by the

coalition government of four right wing parties called the Nationalist Front, especially after the elections of 1977 (Ibid: 140).

#### **3.4.1.1 Kemalism and *TİP***

*TİP*'s programme is one of the examples in which Kemalism was openly referred to. Akdere et al. claims that 'Kemalism was an ideology that was on the rise after 27 May among the intellectuals and its influence was also strongly felt in *TİP*'. The understanding of socialism in *TİP* was that it was as an 'advanced form of Kemalism' (1996: 260). The party programme started with a speech by Mustafa Kemal, and another similar speech was also included. Both had the basic argument that the Turkish nation was forging a war against imperialism and capitalism to secure its independence and the national assembly was the body responsible for protecting the nation from imperialists. Akdere argues that the second speech was given several days before the murder of Mustafa Suphi and that *TİP* was aware of the political and geo-strategic context. However, they resorted to the rhetoric of Mustafa Kemal, which defined the Turkish nation as fighting against imperialism and capitalism as the justification of their own struggle against the same enemy. It was still made part of the programme, as this was seen as the only way to take their place in the political arena under the constitutional guarantees, even if the founders of the party were trade unionists and workers (ibid: 261). The choice of a speech that defined the general assembly as the legitimate body must also have been deliberate as *TİP* regarded the parliament as the legitimate route to socialism themselves.

The party programme also made references to the actors that had to work together to 'save Turkey from backwardness' under the umbrella of *TİP*. Those actors were workers,

youth and Kemalist intellectuals and it was stated that *TİP* was the only genuine organisation where those groups could represent themselves. Thus, ‘*TİP* was the “genuine organisation” for Kemalists’ as well (Yurtsever, 2002: 179).

It was not only in the party programme but also in the speeches of Aybar that *TİP* was openly defined as a party influenced by Kemalism and ‘its doctrine was based 100% on the local’ context of Turkey (Aydınoğlu, 1992: 89). His call for unity of the leftist forces was also based on ‘Kemalist principles’ alongside ‘the aims of the struggle for peace and for the rights and liberties of the labouring people’ (Lipovsky, 1992: 37). Those Kemalist anti-imperialist principles were, in economics; etatism, and in foreign policy, rejection of membership in blocs and a peaceful, independent policy in international relations. (Ibid: 38.)

‘Turkish socialism’ was defined by *TİP* as ‘socialism with a human face’. The strong emphasis on a peaceful transition to socialism was one of the ways *TİP* tried to prove that it was not an aggressive movement or even a party that was really a threat to the system. They merely wanted to bring about a socialist system, which they believed was better for Turkey but they were still followers of the founder, Mustafa Kemal, and the republican system of representation as they wanted to take power through elections and winning a majority of seats in the parliament. *TİP* felt forced to distinguish itself from Soviet socialism within the anti-Communist context of the country (Yurtsever, 2002: 177). The main manifestation of this was Aybar’s critique of the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Aybar criticised the invasion by the Warsaw Pact and especially the USSR. He found the fault in the bureaucratic and non-democratic character of Eastern European and Russian socialism. Such socialism was authoritarian but his formula was for a free and

democratic socialism for Turkey (Lipovsky, 1992: 49). His criticism was not only limited to the practices of socialism in those countries but it also became a critique of Marxism and its stance on nations and internationalism. He even claimed that the attempt of the Soviet bureaucracy to repress the opposition of Czechoslovakia was the result of the strategy of 'revolutionary internationalism', which could lead to a denial of the call for all workers of the world to unite (Aydinoğlu, 1992: 128).

*TİP* has a significant place in the history of the Turkish left since it was the first socialist party that was represented in Parliament. It can also be seen as a leftist group that was tolerated by the state. *TİP* was included in mainstream Turkish politics due to its commitment to Kemalism. Rather than questioning the principles and policies of the Kemalist state from a socialist point of view, *TİP* welcomed those principles and interpreted them as a path to socialism. The path to socialism, according to *TİP*, was through the following of Kemalism and through the peaceful method of parliamentarianism. *TİP* argued that it represented the proletariat and the progressive sections of society that could again be interpreted under the influence of Leninism. Besides the general tendency among the Turkish left to support Kemalism as a progressive force as a result of a Leninist point of view, the arguments of *TİP* of the need for a leading party to organize the proletariat along the route to socialism evokes the arguments of Leninist party organization. In short, the *TİP* was again a typical representative of the Turkish left that was shaped by Leninism and Kemalism, together with a commitment to anti-imperialism and development.

### 3.4.2 *YÖN/DEVİRİM*

In the 1960s it was not only political parties that were influential in the left but a group gathered around the journal *YÖN* was also contributing to the arguments about the theory and practice of the left. The first edition of *YÖN* – whose editor was Doğan Avcıoğlu – was published on 20, December, 1961 which included the *YÖN* declaration signed by a hundred and fifty intellectuals, some of whom would be *TİP* members. *YÖN* would cease publication in 1967 but it was succeeded in 1969 by *DEVİRİM*, which took up many of the ideas of Avcıoğlu and other Kemalist socialists.

According to the *YÖN* group, rapid economic development would be the saviour of Turkey, which was to be secured by etatism. The main problematic was economic development based on non-capitalist policies. Another issue that *YÖN* would stand for was independence. Agrarian reform, nationalisation, and fair distribution of income were the cornerstones of independent rapid development (Aydinoğlu, 1992: 61). *YÖN* argued that Turkey's economy should be based on 'a new progressive type of etatism' which included co-operation between the state and the private sector with the state having the leading role (Lipovsky, 1992: 85).

According to Aydınoğlu *TİP*'s programme was a version of *YÖN*'s declaration (1992: 68). However, *YÖN* and *TİP* had major disagreements on the 'paths to socialism.' For *YÖN*, 27 May had been a missed opportunity for socialism and they claimed that there was a need for rapid and radical changes. To this end, another military coup could be supported or İnönü could take power. 'In Avcıoğlu's language revolution meant "a progressive military coup." Thus, the elite should take over the power through the quickest way and then apply a top-down approach to teach socialist values to the workers

and the people at large (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1996: 238). This was an approach that was in opposition to the method that *TİP* was arguing for, that of a peaceful taking over of power.

Some *YÖN* writers formed an intellectual platform called the 'Society for Socialist Culture'; which was criticised by leading *TİP* members such as Behice Boran, who would become leader of the party in 1970. 'The predominant view in *TİP*'s leadership was that any socialist organisation not based on the working class would inevitably turn into a sectarian group of intellectuals whose activities would amount to no more than the promotion of socialist slogans' (Lipovsky, 1992: 87). Thus, all socialist intellectuals should be active in *TİP* and nowhere else.

Moreover, *TİP* argued that national-democratic goals and socialist ones were inseparable, whereas *YÖN* argued that Turkey needed democracy and independence from the West for socialism to follow. Thus, *TİP* argued that only socialists could bring about the required changes. *YÖN*, however, expressed the idea that all progressive forces in the country, including the left-leaning members of the military and the *CHP*, should work to bring about national-democratic changes before beginning to worry about socialism (Ibid: 96-7).

The above-mentioned issues related to the paths to socialism and the leaders are important because they give us clues as to the position of each group vis-à-vis nationalists and the state. It can be said that *TİP*, with its policy of peacefully employing socialism, was not challenging the existing state system of Turkey. They were willing to operate within the limits of the existing election system but to introduce what they thought was a better social and economic system. On the other hand, *YÖN* was in favour of a more

militaristic approach, which led it to try to have close ties with the military, which in Turkey is regarded as the ultimate protector of the Turkish nation and the state.

Even though both *YÖN* and *TİP* called themselves socialist and criticised each other's arguments for the best path to socialism, whether they were really committed to a socialist revolution remains a question. It is not possible to know if *TİP* was being pragmatic in the sense that it did not want to appear too radical and face the antagonism of the state. It might have used a more passive discourse to ensure its existence. It was only after the successful 1965 elections that Aybar declared *TİP* a socialist party which aimed eventually to bring socialism to Turkey (ibid: 20). *YÖN* had a more aggressive tone when calling for a change of government by force but the system *YÖN* would have liked to bring was a top-down application of so-called socialist principles, not a proletariat revolution or governance. It seems that both groups were satisfied with more democracy, freedoms, nationalisation, and state control over economy, which did not necessarily mean establishment of a socialist state.

The significance of the *YÖN/DEVİRİM* movement is probably the influence Doğan Avcıoğlu's ideas had among some of the military cadres. The *DEVİRİM* journal and Avcıoğlu's book '*Türkiye'nin Düzeni*' had become the ideological map of a group in the military who attempted a failed coup on 9 March 1971. By 1970, almost a decade after the 27 May coup, there was a feeling in the country that the coup had failed. The evidence for this argument was the fact that in 1965 the Justice Party, which was the successor of the Democrat Party, had swept the votes in the general election. The economic condition of the country and the use of force among left and right wing youth organizations also caused unrest among the military. Most of the generals and high-



ranking officers had been following a belief that they were responsible for saving the country and blamed the government. In this context, *DEVİRİM* was not only producing such propaganda but also providing the ideological basis and justification for a military intervention. The military cadres who were inclined to attempt a coup thought 27 May was a failure because it lacked ideological justification (Birand et. al, 2004: 196).

The main actor of the planned coup of 9<sup>th</sup> March was the chief of the Air force staff, but the coup plan and the details of the new state system to be formed were given to him. He argues that he was shocked by this plan as it was basically a copy of the one in Avcıoğlu's book, which was 'setting up a Revolutionary Party, a Revolutionary Parliament, closing down all the political parties, and increasing control of the press. It was a plan to take control of all areas of the state and call that Kemalism' (Ibid. 206). After all the planning, the coup was never carried out due to lack of agreement among different forces of the military.

This anecdote from the history of Turkey in the 1970s shows how Kemalism and socialism worked together at times. The military, which always claims to be the most devoted follower of Kemalism and protector of Kemalist principles and the state, almost took part in carrying out a socialist revolution in the country. This scenario from the stand point of *YÖN/DEVİRİM* movement, if successful, would have seen their aims carried out as they have always been supportive of a military coup to bring socialism to Turkey. This brings us to the issue of how *YÖN/DEVİRİM* claimed to be Kemalist socialists.

### 3.4.2.1 Kemalism and *YÖN/DEVİRİM*

*YÖN* and its affiliates were Kemalist and aimed for a unique socialism for Turkey similar to *TİP*'s. 'The *YÖN* declaration was an articulation of the Turkish liberation war as an anti-imperialist struggle and Kemalism as open to socialism with the anti-imperialist movements of the 1960s' (Laçiner, 1983: 775, my translation). What distinguished *YÖN* more and brought it closer to blurring the lines of opposition between the nationalist state position and socialism was that it openly declared itself as nationalist.

*YÖN* turned around the arguments that socialism and nationalism were essentially in opposition. It is usually argued that socialism is about internationalism and 'it originated abroad'. Doğan Avcıoğlu argued that nationalism and socialism were compatible. It was natural for socialists to consider socialism or the previous step of non-capitalist economic development as a better choice but they thought so because it would save the Turkish people. Their main concern was again to save Turkey from the hands of imperialism and capitalism and the people from repressive governments and economic deprivation. Moreover, in the eyes of *YÖN* members, socialists were the real nationalists. It was they who worked for the welfare of the people and total independence of the country, not so-called nationalists. A liberal economy and alliance with imperialist powers such as the USA were the policies of 'fake nationalists', whereas anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist socialists like themselves were the 'genuine nationalists' (Atılğan, 2002: 103).

The *YÖN* manifesto was defined by Kemalism. The largest commonality of *YÖN* and the Kemalist revolution was the top-down approach. *YÖN* members argued in favour of taking power by the elites in a non-peaceful way, through a coup if necessary. *YÖN* was

aiming to develop arguments for non-capitalist development but based on Kemalism. In their eyes, the only mistake of the Kemalist elite had been the choice of capitalism over socialism and it believed that anti-imperialist and underdeveloped countries like Turkey could only prosper through socialism. The Kemalist tenets of etatism, nationalism, populism and revolutionarism were made compatible with socialism after the special interpretations developed by YÖN (Atılğan, 2002: 49).

Revolutionarism refers to the changes introduced in the early years of the Republic, which aimed to break away from the Ottoman system in political, social, economic and legal areas. For socialists this 'revolutionary' character of Kemalism could easily be related to socialist revolutions especially in its fight against imperialism. Populism was also seen as relevant to socialism as it was the ideology that had masses at its core. Populism traditionally meant a 'unified, classless society' but YÖN argued it could mean unification of the workers and farmers against 'feudal lords and the bourgeoisie' (Ibid.).

The YÖN/DEVİRİM movement was one of the symbolic examples of the prevalence of Kemalism and nationalism among the left. It was also influential among the military, which felt it had a self-appointed duty to protect Kemalism and the state, making this movement a case where socialism and Kemalism have been made compatible.

### **3.4.3 The National Democratic Revolution Movement and Youth Organisations**

The third influential group that took part in the discussions on the ways and actors of a socialist revolution was the National Democratic Revolution Movement (the *MDD-Milli Demokratik Devrim*), whose leader was Mihri Belli. He was a *TİP* member with a Communist Party background. This group expressed its views mainly in the journal *Türk*

*Solu* (Turkish Left). Mihri Belli first announced his views marking the beginning of the grouping of Proletariat Revolutionaries in *TİP* at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress in 1966. He declared that the ‘supporters of the *MDD* understand “national” to mean the struggle for independence from imperialism and the word “democratic” to mean the anti –feudal struggle’ (Lipovsky, 1992: 24).

The *MDD* was highly critical of *TİP*’s aim of achieving a parliamentary path to socialism and demanding a more aggressive taking over of power, calling for an armed struggle which was closer to the *YÖN* line. The *MDD* regarded the efforts to bring democracy and social justice in the existing bourgeois legal and political system as limited and argued for a total change of the system to socialism (Aydinoğlu, 1992, 108). However, they were different from *YÖN* as well, in the sense that they argued for the revolution to be a proletariat movement, not one of the elite. The National Democratic Revolution was needed in Turkey under its current circumstances and a socialist revolution run by the proletariat itself would consequently come into being (Ibid: 114).

The call for an armed struggle by the *MDD* received criticisms in the *TİP* but found its followers among the university students of the time. In line with the developments of 1968 youth movements in Europe, mainly in Istanbul but also at other universities, became the platform for socialist protests. Mihri Belli was considered the ‘spiritual father of the Federation of the Revolutionary Youth of Turkey (...better known as *Dev-Genç*)’ (Samim, 1987: 158). As a unique university student’s organisation, *Dev-Genç* led a movement that marked a complete challenge to the system.

The context of this movement was also crucial. In 1967, *DİSK* – a socialist workers union – was formed. Its foundation was interpreted as a possibility for mobilising the workers

to lead a radical form of revolt. It was a time when workers recognised their power. Besides *DİSK*, a great deal of unionisation was taking place among the working class. Thirdly, the socialist or even workers' movement changed its character from being limited to the large cities and such developments were seen all over the country, especially among the Kurdish population of Turkey. It can be claimed that from 1967 onwards was a time when radicalisation was taking place among the whole of society (Aydınöğlu, 1992: 134-5).

The 15-16 June 1970 events were a turning point in the youth movement. 100,000 workers showed up in Istanbul to demonstrate against legislation that would limit trade union organisations. The demonstration ended with the involvement of the police force and the military. After this incident *Dev-Genç* split into various groups such as *THKO* (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* – The People's Liberation Army of Turkey) led by Deniz Gezmiş and *THKP-C* (*Türkiye Halk Kutuluş Patrisi-Cephesi* – Liberation Front of Turkey) led by Mahir Çayan, who were among those who led guerrilla activities (Samim, 1987: 159). In fact, this situation would also signify another turning point in Turkish political history. The guerrilla movement among the left and the lack of government influence in controlling the situation would become the justification for the military coup of 1971.

The 1970s, especially after 1974, saw a radicalisation and more and more division on the left. The radicalisation was carried out by the successors of the youth movements of Deniz Gezmiş and Mahir Çayan, which would split as well. The youth organisations were driven by a concern with immediate attainment of power. This explained their use of armed struggle instead of participation in democratic, political parties. In terms of

ideological guidelines, socialism meant anti-imperialist struggle for them more than anything. The classical works of Marx, Lenin or Stalin were disregarded while Mao and Che Guevara were becoming the main sources of inspiration. The psychology of armed struggle caused by the need to have an immediate revolution, led to military like discipline, increasing the power of central decision making and lessening freedoms (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1994: 298).

#### **3.4.3.1 Kemalism and the *MDD***

The influence of Kemalism or nationalism was highly observable. In relation to the emphasis on anti-imperialism, nationalism would prevail. *THKP-C* used rhetoric from the Turkish liberation war such as ‘Ya İstiklal Ya ölüm (Victory or Death!)’. The influence of the *MDD* was felt in *THKO* which was first heart of after 4 March, 1971 and *THKP-C* as the struggle was defined between ‘national and non-national forces’, not as a struggle among classes (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1994: 299).

The *MDD* supporters were not less influenced by Kemalism either. Mihri Belli called for a National Front to fight against imperialism and feudalism. This front would include Kemalist intellectuals and youth. He actually argued that this call would be welcome by all ‘Turkish patriots’ and defined revolution as following a Kemalist development strategy. According to Yurtsever, Belli not only called Kemalists to work together, he assumed they would become socialist and have a leading role among other socialists in the revolution but did not give any room for the proletariat to lead a revolution (2002:189). *THKP-C* defined Kemalism as the ideology of the most radical bourgeoisie

and regarded co-operation with Kemalists as a possibility (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1994: 308). *THKO*'s stance towards Kemalism was more than just co-operative as it praised the Kemalist anti-imperialist struggle, namely again, the Turkish liberation war.

In the 1970s Maoism would become highly influential among the left. Doğu Perinçek formed and led the *TİİKP* (Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi – Turkish Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Party) after January, 1970, whose ideas were published in the Journal *Aydınlık*. Perinçek defined the USSR as 'Turkey's greatest enemy' (Lipovsky, 1992: 142). Doğu Perinçek has an openly nationalist and Kemalist discourse that has been more prevalent since 1980 when he took over leadership of *TİP*. The significance of the Maoist *TİİKP* was that it gave birth to a different group after the 12 March, 1971 coup, which took the name *TKP-ML*; Turkish Communist Party-Marxist-Leninist.

The leader of *TKP-ML*, İbrahim Kaypakkaya, has been the only socialist leader in the history of the Turkish left who has had a critical stance towards Kemalism. As we have seen, the liberation war has been interpreted mainly as an anti-imperialist struggle by the left, with Kemalism being supported. Kaypakkaya, on the other hand, defined the war as a struggle between the 'comprador bourgeoisie and landowners' (Akdere; Karadeniz, 1994: 304). The Kemalist struggle was criticised from the eyes of the oppressed classes. However, the *TKP-ML* shared other characteristics with the above mentioned groups.

All of the youth guerrilla groups, *THKO*, *THKP-C* and the *TKP-ML* fought for the revolution in the rural parts of Turkey and thought they would bring revolution by use of force. They were organised as guerrilla groups involving mostly university students. Neither the actual participants nor their support groups were workers. Following the Maoist analysis of the path to revolution in underdeveloped nations, they emphasised the

role of the peasantry but, in fact, the role of the peasants and the workers had been limited to 'ideological and political leadership' and members – university students – of these groups had self-appointed themselves the duty of leading a violent revolt (ibid: 301). Their main concerns were economic development and anti-imperialism. Leaving aside the ideas of *TKP-ML* on Kemalism and the liberation war, the radical section of the Turkish left carried on the legacy of the rest of the Turkish left. They were also Kemalist, 'patriotic', anti-imperialist and concerned with development. However, these groups were not subject to tolerance from the state but were instead treated with antagonism and oppressive force.<sup>23</sup>

#### **3.4.4 The *CHP* and Social Democracy**

It was in the second half of the 1960s that *CHP* leader İnönü would claim the party to be a left-of-centre party. In the context of the country where nationalist parties were strong, this was a courageous move and maybe not very wise considering that right wing votes were higher than expected and the *CHP* was routed in the elections. Moreover, it was an invitation to be labelled a communist and the *CHP* had to spend all its time persuading the people that left did not necessarily mean communism. Persuasion did not work until the 1977 elections and it took Ecevit's interesting articulation combining concepts of social democracy with populism and Kemalism to win. Until 1977, support for the *CHP* was very low. It only secured votes from the Alevi population. With this fact in mind the

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<sup>23</sup> The leader of *THKP-C*, Mahir Çayan, was killed together with leading members by the military; the leader of *THKO*, Deniz Gezmiş, and two other members were executed; and İbrahim Kaypakkaya died under torture (ibid: 311; 317; 306) .



choice of the *CHP* to resort to leftism can be seen as a pragmatic one. The leftist movement was quite popular at the time, which was thought to be proven by the aforementioned election success of *TİP*<sup>24</sup> and it was certainly popular among the students and intellectuals. However, it needs to be pointed out that Ecevit's leftist rhetoric did not target the intellectuals but the people at large. In 1966, Ecevit became the general secretary of the *CHP* and his aim was to re-articulate the *CHP* as a social democratic party.

He was certainly influenced by the experiences in Western Europe but he differentiated the *CHP* in two ways. Firstly, Ecevit made it clear that the *CHP* was an anti-Communist party. Thus, he coined the term 'democratic left' instead of social democracy. Secondly, the Turkish democratic left was different because it originated from the history and practices of the Turkish people and, of course, Kemalism.

The "democratic left" argument developed by Ecevit was very cautious about its stance towards communism. In a country where communism had been defined as an 'other' opposed to the indivisibility of the state and the nation and any left-oriented idea had been discarded as being communism, the founder of the state was claiming to be a leftist one. Thus, Ecevit clearly defined his position as anti-Communist. He rejected any arguments that compared his position to European Social Democracy, arguing that the origin of it was Marxism (Alper, 2002: 131). The Democratic left was also defining itself differently from the Marxist left of the time. As we know, some of the factions of the Turkish left in the 1970s had taken a radical path and resorted to armed struggle. This was again deepening the differences among the leftist movements in Turkey, which made

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<sup>24</sup> *TİP* only got 3% of the votes.

it impossible for a unified left, one of the persistent problems until the present day (Laçiner, 1983: 1238).

Ecevit was determined to distinguish his democratic left formulation from Western practices. In economics, etatism was being justified by a model in which the state would only play the role of a control mechanism and the people would participate in the economy by taking part in decision-making bodies. The model was certainly European social democracy (Alper, 2002:127). However, he would try to find the origins of so-called Western ideas such as humanism in Turkish culture with special references to Anatolian Islam. In conclusion, his new democratic left was not only anti-Communist but also anti-capitalist. Thus, the ‘genuineness’ of the Turkish social democracy was again emphasised.

Ecevit tried mainly to challenge the top-down approach of the *CHP* of the single party period. Instead of introducing new and foreign Western ideologies and practices to the people, he tried to show that the ideas he aimed to bring stemmed from the people of this country. This was because he assumed that there was a gap between intellectuals who were arguing for a fast-track modernisation of the country and the people at large who were still mainly conservative. The votes for right wing parties appealing to the people via messages of religion and traditions supported his ideas. For the *CHP*, the challenge was to increase its own support and try to close the gap between intellectuals or the state and the people, which, in fact, was widened by the practices of its successor *CHP* leadership. The Republican Peoples Party was certainly the founding party of the Republic, so its name gave credit to that characteristic and Ecevit aimed to make it a real “People’s” party. The *CHP* had to be transformed from being the party of the state to

being a party of the people (Erdoğan, 1998: 24). The refined *CHP* ideology argued it to be unique to Turkey. Turkish social democracy was not based on Marxism but on Kemalism (Alper, 2002:131). There was certainly a link with Kemalism, especially with its populist tenet.

Ecevit played the populist card to infuse the new, leftist views. The references to the uniqueness of the Turkish experience, the *CHP* being 'not only a People's Party but the people itself' (Erdoğan, 1998: 26), justification of social democratic practices wedded to Turkish or Anatolian culture all boiled down to a populist approach. Ecevit's populism was not only based on a discursive explanation of his arguments but was also backed up by his personal appearance and lifestyle. 'Ecevit has a nickname 'Karaoğlan' and he wears a plain blue shirt and black hat', which can be found in any village market. 'He [leads] an ordinary life... even a poor life' (ibid. 23).

The populism adopted by Ecevit can be said to have been successful as the *CHP* vote share increased to 42% in the 1977 elections. The *CHP* was once more the governing party. During its rule, the *CHP* continued to disassociate itself from other leftist movements in Turkey. The parties that claimed to be socialist such as *TİP*, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Turkish Socialist Labour Party and Belli's Turkish Workers Party were willing to work with the *CHP* against fascism. Ecevit, though, did not see any reason to co-operate with socialists. He was merely stressing the fact that they got only 1% of the votes and ridiculed their situation (Ibid: 142).

While the *CHP* was making it clear domestically that it was not socialist let alone communist, in 1977 the *CHP* became a member of the Socialist International (SI). The argument about the relationship of the *CHP* with the SI was that the SI accepted different

paths to social democracy and respected, the particularities of different countries and the particularity of the *CHP* was that its basis could be found in Kemalism (Alpay, 1983: 1241).

Ecevit's social democratic *CHP* was certainly Kemalist and nationalist. Ecevit had indeed attempted to justify his position by emphasising his ties with the local. It was a significant introduction in Turkish political life but Ecevit himself and the *CHP* after his rule would become more and more defined by Kemalism and nationalism rather than by socialism or social democracy.

### **3.5. Overview of the Turkish left after the 1980 Coup**

The political unrest in the country, especially among the military cadres who had 'saved the country' twice before, ended with the military coup of 12 September, 1980. According to the justification provided by the Chief of Staff, Kenan Evren,

the intervention was caused by the failure of the Justice Party government to halt...a mini-civil war between the leftists (including the Kurdish separatists) and the rightists, to break the legislative logjam...or to lower inflation, which had gone over 100 percent (Karpas, 1981:1).

The National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*) headed by Kenan Evren – who was also declared to be the Head of State on 14 September – assumed all legislative and executive powers (Karpas, 1981: 4, Zürcher, 1993: 293). The heads of political parties represented in the Parliament were banned from politics and taken into custody. All the MPs of the 1980 Parliament were banned from politics for five years; the ban was ten years for the heads of political parties, even though, at first, the political parties had not

been closed down (Ahmad, 2006:188). Nevertheless, all political parties would be abolished in June 1981. The control of and halt to political activity was not limited to political parties. All local governments, including mayors and municipal councils, were dismissed on 25 September 1980 (Zürcher, 1993:293, Tanör, 2000: 32).

The junta acted decisively to eliminate remnants of politics from the pre-coup period. Besides bans on politicians and bureaucrats, civil society and, especially labour, organisations were also closed down and silenced. The military government engaged in a dramatic crackdown on the activities of the left. Its intervention brought to an end the activities of *DISK* and a host of other associations that were deemed to be part of the left. A number of doctors and lawyers associations among them were considered subversive and, therefore, their activities were duly suspended (Karpas, 1981: 6, Tanör, 2000: 29). The regime also declared that strikes and similar activities were equally subversive and made them illegal. Workers on strike were warned to abandon industrial action and go back to work (Ahmad, 2006: 186).

The 1980 coup was different from the previous ones as it was harsher and more determined. The regime of 12 September was highly repressive. It aimed to 'protect the state' at all costs, which was secured by the new oppressive and conservative constitution that replaced the previously-mentioned rather liberal one introduced after the 27 March coup. A plan to control all areas of life was acted upon. The junta wanted to make sure its ideas were consolidated and institutionalised instead of just staging a quick intervention to stop violence and stepping aside for the political parties to re-open. On the one hand, they intended to control all forms of collective action and organisation that were supposed to play a subversive role. A period of repression was seen as the prelude to a

comprehensive reshaping of all key social institutions from political parties, local governments, civil societal groups and even the universities,<sup>25</sup> which were all being reshaped to make sure the coup, would be successful in, on its own terms, to eliminate all opposition to the Kemalist state, especially that of the left.

The military government aimed to shape a new era of political life for Turkey. Even though parties known to be 'nationalist', such as the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP*) (and its leader Türkeş) and the nationalist trade union *MİSK* (Karpat, 1981: 6) were also subject to the repression by the junta, the left in all of its forms was severely attacked. In the quest for a new era of political life, 'the 'left' in all its forms, socialists, communist extremists, social democrats, leaders and members of trade unions, and even the intellectuals forming the Peace Organisation, were crushed' (Ahmad, 2006: 187).

All the repressive actions were carried out in the name of Kemalism. Nationalism backed up by militaristic elements was being articulated and reproduced through every possible source of media and this was all done in the name of Kemalism. The ruling military believed that Kemalism and the state needed to be protected from the Islamic and socialist derivations (Belge, 1993: 9-11). The September 12<sup>th</sup> regime was first and foremost a regime of oppression. Belge argues that since the transition to multi-party politics in 1950, including the previous intervals of military rule, this was the era with the harshest methods. In this period, individuals and organisations were systematically eliminated via imprisonment, bans, and mental and physical violence (Belge, 1993: 10,

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<sup>25</sup> *YÖK* (The Council of Higher Education) was founded to ensure control over higher education and many academics were let go from universities via implementation of Law 1402 (Ahmad, 2006: 187).

Zürcher, 1993: 294) in order to secure the elimination of all political opposition of the pre-coup period and the establishment of a new regime of oppression.

In such a context, it is difficult to find an accurate reaction to the coup. Many works narrate that the military takeover took place without incident. Karpas mentions that, 'the population in general greeted with jubilation the announcement of the takeover. Significantly, *Bizim Radyo* [Our Radio], the clandestine radio station of the Turkish Communist Party in Berlin, called upon the masses and, particularly, National Salvation Party supporters, to resist the takeover' (1981: 4). However, no such mass movement in reaction to the coup took place. Yurtsever argues that an organised opposition on the side of the left or labour or even a resistance to the junta did not emerge (Yurtsever, 2002: 283).

When we turn from the general situation of the country to the left, in the immediate aftermath of the coup, the reaction of the left resembled a show of support for it. The leftist organisations at first did not realise the impact of the coup. They regarded it as similar to previous ones, which, after a short period of control manifesting in the closure of political parties and the conducting of arrests, would leave room for the left. In fact it was after the coup of 1961 that the left had flourished and after the second one it had been radicalised and asserted considerable power and support in rural areas of the country. However, 1980 was different. The military was more determined and it had the support of the majority of the people, even in areas where the radical left had been influential (Akçam, 2002: na).

For example, the *TKP* made a declaration expressing its views on the military take-over. It reiterated the hackneyed theme of Kemalism defined in terms of anti-imperialism. It

called for the possibility of uniting with military cadres who interpreted Kemalism as such and also with Islamic movements that emphasised anti-imperialism (quoted in Yurtsever, 2002: 284). Yurtsever provides a report produced by the *TKP* in Europe about the coup which casts light upon the position of the party. In this report, party followers were advised to almost fully support the military regime, and certainly not to react negatively to it. The first point of the report argues that the coup should not be labelled an American Junta or as organised by imperialists without factual evidence. The report argued that the junta aimed to prevent fascist organisations, even if it is not effective in this task. On the issue of 'left terrorism and Maoism', the party advises that the attacks on these groups should not be interpreted as attacks on democratic forces or the Kurdish national movement but that the party should oppose use of violence upon individuals. The issue of Kemalism is also included. The junta's self-definition as Kemalist is interpreted as empty bourgeois demagoguery adopted by the higher ranks of the military. However, the majority of the military were the real Kemalists who reproduced the anti-imperialist elements of Kemalism and the *TKP* could ally itself with those groups. Here, again we witness the two common arguments of the Turkish left that Kemalism is anti-imperialist and that the left are the genuine Kemalists.

In 1983, elections were finally held, which were in theory to bring about the end of the military government. However, the political parties aiming to take part in the elections were regulated by the junta. *Büyük Türkiye Partisi* (The Party of Greater Turkey), which was the follower of the Demirel's Justice Party, was closed down. *SODEP* (the Social Democratic party founded by Erdal İnönü – son of İsmet İnönü) was not closed down but its members were not found eligible to run for elections so *SODEP* was also out of the



1983 general elections (Admad, 2006: 189, Tanör, 2000: 53). The attempt of the military to erase the influence of the political parties prior to the coup was still felt during the election period. Accordingly, *Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi* (The Party of Nationalist Democracy), headed by a retired general, *Halkçı Parti* (The Populist Party), a Kemalist successor of the *CHP*, and *Anavatan Partisi* (The Motherland Party) got the approval of the military. The Motherland Party won the elections with 45.15 % of the votes (Tanör, 2000: 57).

The 1983-1992 period can easily be called the reign of Turgut Özal, the founder of *Anavatan*. This political party was not a direct successor of any pre-1980 parties but it aimed to bring together people from different positions on the political spectrum '(e.g. Liberals, Conservatives, Social Democrats, Extreme Nationalists)' (Aral, 2001: 73). In reality, it was a right-of-centre party with an emphasis on liberal economics. The Turkish economy would become a completely free market one under the Özal government. In the 1980s, for the first time, it was possible to see all sorts of goods in the supermarkets (in fact supermarkets themselves), and it also became possible, even normal to own foreign currencies. There were private TV channels, and later, private radio stations. The youth became less and less interested in politics. Consumer-entertainment culture affected the masses and the youth become apolitical in a way incomparable to the youth of the 1970s. The educational system also made its contribution alongside the media and big companies. These are certainly issues that need deeper analysis than the one that can be provided here. Nevertheless, Turkey's increasing participation in the liberal global economy, followed by the oppression by the military contributed to the formation of a generation of citizens who were not interested in politics as much as they were in the

1970s. The international context where the Cold War was over, in addition to the belief in the triumph of liberal capitalism, has also had its impact on Turkey, making it much less possible for the left to envisage a socialist revolution.

The Özal period together with the help of the international system and the military was a time of change for Turkey but some of the main tenets of the Republic such as 'facing the West' or in other words, catching up with 'contemporary civilisation' would still be served. Özal's approach to catching up the West was, however, based on economic development rather than emphasising Western political rhetoric such as secularism (Ibid: 74). On the one hand, Turkey made an official application to the EU; on the other, Özal was the one talking about 'Turks stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Walls of China'. With the collapse of the USSR, the newly-formed Turkic Republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia became places of interest for Turkey. Turkey was claiming the role of big brother to export Western values such as democracy and a liberal economy to its Turkic cousins. In its relationship to the new markets, Turkey was emphasising its ties, based on language and culture, with the Turkic Republics.

One of the typical characteristics of this period was the rise of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that defines Turkish Islam as a distinct interpretation from that of the Arab world and also defines Turkish national identity and religious identity (Islam) as inseparable. Özal was among the first of the Turkish statesmen not to have hesitated to stress the 'Islamic' dimension of the Turkish national identity' (Ibid: 84).

After a period of military rule, the late 1980s brought a relative relaxation in the political arena. The oppression of the military lessened. Between 1989 and 1991, a gradual liberalization of the political system could be noticed. The government worked towards a

more liberal political system by allowing the formation of socialist parties, the use of the Kurdish language in private, and ‘deletion of articles 141-142 and 163 (which banned politics on the basis of class or religion) from the penal code’ making it possible for *DİSK* to be re-organised after eleven years (Zürcher, 1993: 305). Legal leftist journals began to be published. In 1987, the Socialist Party was formed, later to be followed by the Socialist Unity Party in 1989. The Socialist Party was closed down by the Constitutional Court after fifteen days. In 1990 the Turkish United Communist Party was founded as a party aiming to unite the older *TİP* and *TKP* (Tanör, 2000: 84). One of the symbolic gestures of the Özal government was to allow Turkish leftists who had gone to exile in Europe to return to the country. Some of these leftist intellectuals and artists had been deprived of citizenship (just like Nâzım Hikmet) by the September 12<sup>th</sup> junta. Among those, the return of Cem Karaca, a well-known Turkish rock musician who had also reproduced leftist narratives in his music (he had made Nâzım Hikmet’s poetry into songs) attracted special media attention at the time. The pictures of Cem Karaca and Turgut Özal were presented as images of peacemaking between the Turkish left and the state. Cem Karaca gained his re-naturalisation in 1987, shortly after his return (Aya, 1998: 144).

However, it is also possible to argue that the socialist parties have not asserted much influence especially since then, due to their lack of unity among themselves. Since the 1970s, the Turkish left has experienced polarisation. The impossibility of de-emphasising ideological differences and uniting for the common goal has rendered the socialists powerless, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. In contemporary Turkey, socialist

parties exist and even now there is an official Turkish Communist Party but they have almost no mass support if we take elections as a criterion.

When we look at the situation of social democrats, they have not been successful in unifying either. Social democrats are divided into at least three parties; the *Democratic Left Party*, the *Socialist People's Party* and the *CHP*.

The *CHP* has claimed ties with the first *CHP* of the 1920-30s that justifies itself as the founding party of the Republic or, in other words, the party of Atatürk. Thus, it is the protector of the Republic and it is normal that it is the representative of Kemalism's six principles – symbolised in the party emblem. The *CHP* of the 1970s had declared itself to be a left of centre party and, in 2006, it redefined itself as a right of centre one. The leader, Deniz Baykal has been using the secularist, nationalist, statist elements of Kemalism to get support, mainly to criticise the government of the *AKP* (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – The Justice and Development Party), who he claims to be a religiously oriented one. In the latest debate concerning secularism, the *CHP* has been leading the opposition against the *AKP* and its agenda is set around the protection of the state, the republican system and Kemalism. Elements of social democracy are non-existent on the agenda of its leadership. However, the *CHP* still remains a member of the Socialist International.

The rhetoric of so-called socialist parties is not immune from nationalism either. The most prominent example is the *TİP* of Doğu Perinçek, who is probably the reason why the party is only well-known rather than achieving any electoral success. As it was mentioned earlier, Perinçek was an active participant in the guerrilla wars/youth movements of the 1970s which followed Maoism. However, at the moment, he seems to

have been more and more influenced by nationalism. The *TİP* is a case that would give us a good example of the theme that has been carried out in this paper, namely how socialism and nationalism has been articulated by either the Turkish left or the Turkish state. The Workers Party has its own TV channel – National channel – a journal called *Aydınlık*, and its programme and propaganda can also be followed on its web site.

The stance of the *TİP* in relation to the ‘national questions’ of Turkey is a parallel to that of the state. It sees Cyprus as a national issue and does not support any compromise. It totally rejects allegations of an Armenian Genocide. In fact, Perinçek was sentenced in Switzerland for denying the genocide while he was in Switzerland to celebrate the anniversary of the Lausanne Treaty, which helped found the Republic of Turkey. This was a gathering/rally to declare to the world and, especially to the EU, that Turkey had been defined as an independent, sovereign country. Its indivisibility was confirmed in Lausanne, which was achieved at the end of the liberation war. Thus, it was an overtly nationalist statement that rejected claims about Cyprus, the Armenians and the Kurdish population and also the EU’s attempt to question Turkish sovereignty.

Perinçek (or the *TİP*) is not the only example of the left becoming nationalist. The group behind the journal *Türk Solu* (Turkish Left) – *Öncü Gençlik* – has broken away from Perinçek, as they regarded him as not Kemalist enough. The journal has a very similar stance. They totally reject claims by the Kurdish population; in fact, they refuse the existence of a separate Kurdish identity. Similar issues about Cyprus and the EU are again expressed. The position against the EU is the only one that might be understood from a leftist point of view as the EU represents the capitalist, imperialist world. Being

anti-EU is anti-imperialist. Here, we can see the continuous theme of anti-imperialism on the Turkish left.

*Türk Solu* has become the journal where the left, and nationalists and some Kemalists have come together to express their newly-developed ideology of the *Kızıl Elma*. *Kızıl Elma* (the Red Apple) is a theme adopted from Turkish mythology. It represents an ideal place in the West that is to be reached by a given Turkish tribe or state. It changed over time. For example, before the conquest of Istanbul, the Red Apple was thought to be in Istanbul and then it was thought to be in Rome. This purely nationalist idea has given its name to a coalition in the left, right and Kemalists in the 2000s. The *MHP* (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* – Nationalist Action Party) members and leftist radicals used to be on opposite sides of the armed struggle in the 1960s and the 1970s and in 2003 they organised a common meeting against the EU and the USA. They called upon the spirit of the liberation war to protect the country, defined in those times as *Misak-i Milli*. This seems to be quite an extreme example but it is also very symbolic in showing how in modern Turkey, in fact in the world after the Cold War, the political divisions of left and right, socialist and nationalist have become so blurred. It is an example that supports our argument that socialism and nationalism or the left and the state are not always antagonistic polarities. As we have been trying to show, the relationship is much more dynamic and in flux. It has always been a platform of ebb and flow but today the divisions of left and right can be argued to be more and more irrelevant.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The rise of nationalist discourse adopted by the left since the 1980s can be interpreted as an end result of the fact that the left, since its birth in Turkey, has not distanced itself from the leading ideology of the state. A genuine left critique of Kemalism, its economic and social policies have not been made from an internationalist point of view or even from the point of view of the proletariat. In the history of the left, the interpretation of Kemalism as progressive and anti-imperialist has indeed been a continuous characteristic. It could even be argued that the Turkish left was overtly Kemalist and sometimes nationalist. Such elements have made it possible for the left to act with the state and be able to participate in politics but, most of the time; the left has been pushed to the margins of the political.

State strategy has been mainly antagonistic to the left, especially to communism, which it has banned and punished. On the other hand, this chapter has intended to present that state strategy in its dealings with its 'other', communism, and has at times been shaped by the *logic of difference*. The pragmatic rapprochement during the war of liberation, the case of the *Kadro* movement, and the representation of the *TİP* in Parliament stand as cases where antagonism did not shape the relationship of the Kemalist state and the left. Some versions of the left have been tolerated or even been incorporated. It needs to be pointed out that those versions have been the protagonists of the left who have openly articulated the similarities between Kemalism and socialism. Indeed, most of the Turkish left has been supportive of Kemalism, which they have interpreted as a revolutionary, anti-imperialist ideology.

In the final analysis, it has been the malleability of Kemalism and the Turkish left that has made their proximity to each other and symbiosis possible when they were not necessarily acting in terms of binary oppositions. The six principles of Kemalism were made compatible with socialism, and the leftist movements, due to their interpretation of the official discourse, have been considered tolerable in this picture. As long as the left has been loyal to the official discourse, or could be articulated as such, they were 'allowed' to be part of the political scene.

Nâzım Hikmet has been subject to a similar set of strategies and his incorporation has also been conditioned on his being articulated as Turkish, thus loyal. His incorporation as part of the Turkish national identity has been made possible by the fact of the malleability of his work, life history and more generally of what a national canon is. The next chapter will try to introduce a theoretical discussion about the national literary canon; hence, Nâzım is argued in this thesis to have been canonised in the last couple of decades.



## 4. NATIONALISM, LITERATURE AND THE LITERARY CANON

### 4.1. Introduction

It has been argued in earlier chapters that nations are modern constructions and its construction and/or reproduction is an ongoing process. Nationalist discourse, among other things, is about the invention of a common national identity, which is made possible by the interpellation of the peoples of a given territory as nationals, leading them to ‘imagine’ themselves as part of a nation. Nationalism cannot operate without the feeling of commonness, a feeling of a family that national identity provides for people.

Nation is a narration, as Bhabha (1990) defines it, which takes place in a double temporality. Nation is, on the one hand, a creation of the past that is supposed to represent an already existing nation and is also something in process of being made in the contemporaneity. There is, in other words, a double narrative of the nation. The *pedagogical* narrative disseminates the idea of the nation as a historical continuity and a unity. The continuous reproduction of the national identity, which Bhabha calls the *performative* narrative, however involves alternative narratives to the *pedagogical*.

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (1994: 145).

Following this view, it is argued here that both nations and literature are created and these two creations are interdependent and reinforce each other. Literary works can and do help to reproduce national imagination and national identity in various ways, which will be mentioned in the following pages. However, it is also argued here that literature does not only employ – or is not used by – the nationalist discourse but can be a source of contestation, contributing to the impossibility of closure of national identity as a sutured entity.

Nationalism and literature are not only related in the way that literature helps to reproduce nationalist discourse, but both are areas of contestation and power struggles. Nations are not natural human groupings but are modern forms of imagination. Similarly, literature is not a product of a natural process, either. In other words, literary works do not represent a natural national cultural heritage. In the formation and preservation of nations, a selection process takes place.

The similar process operates in relation to national literatures or national literary canons. Power relations and nationalist discourse defines who and what is going to be a part of the national literature. Thus, this unnatural selecting or choosing means different works/writers can either become part of the canon or lose their popularity. National identity is not given or defined, once and for all. National identity is never a closure nor is literature.

This chapter aims to introduce a theoretical approach to the concept of a national literary canon. Even though in the later chapters, Nâzım Hikmet's being part of the official Turkish canon will be studied, this chapter does not claim to analyse the formation of the 'official' canon but indeed studies canon formation of both official and informal ones.

The main argument of this chapter is that literary canon is not a fixed list of 'literary greats' but it is a contested area where different actors are at play. State actors such as the Ministry of Education, studied later in relation to the case of Nâzım Hikmet, are not argued to be the sole actors in defining the canon. Indeed this chapter aims to present the formation of the canon as a process of power relations. From this perspective, the existence of a rival canon and writers reproducing counter narratives to the official discourses are considered to be a natural part of this dynamic process of canon formation. It can be argued that, it is the interplay of official and informal canons that makes the national canon a contested zone and, thus, different canons appear diachronically.

Before going into the discussion about the literary canon, it is also argued that literature is not the only contested area of a given national identity. Literature can be situated in the general context of cultural products and inputs to the national identity, such as cuisine, films and music, which are all contested and fluid areas, on the one hand, articulated by the national discourse, and, on the other, embody the potential to reproduce counter-narratives.

Nationalist discourse articulates different areas where national identity is reproduced and defines the content that is reproduced in and through these. It reproduces core nationalist ideas such as the concept of the world being naturally divided into nations, national identity being the supreme identity, historical continuity, homeland, sovereignty, indivisibility, and the superiority and distinctiveness of the national culture. This rhetoric is manifested in many areas of not only high-culture but also in areas of popular culture. Cinema, music, media, space, collective memories, and even the most mundane or 'banal' areas can become sites of articulation of national identity. One good example of

how the everyday is regarded as the manifestation of a unique national identity has been demonstrated by the work of Linder-Laursen et al. (1993) with reference to the differences between ways of organising domestic practices, namely, washing up in Danish and Swedish cultures.

Even cuisine can become a place where the greatness of national identity is attempted to be proven. Almost all nations claim and are also expected to have a cuisine that is both specific to the nation and sophisticated. It is common to find sections on food in brochures and Internet sites aimed at tourists which usually claim that that particular nation is home to one of the best cuisines in the world. Food can also become a tool of politics among nations who define each other as 'other'. Such a rivalry concerning ownership – maybe with an implication of greatness – takes place between the Greek and Turkish nations. The nationalist clichés of whether coffee or yoghurt etc. is either Turkish or Greek shows that the contestation takes place in many areas even as banal as food.

Cinema can be cited among the arenas where nationalist discourse operates, even though unintentionally. Famous director Julio Medem's *The Basque Ball* (2003), a documentary on the Basque country has become controversial among the Basque and Spanish nationalists. Medem has clearly stated that he is not a Basque nationalist and he is against secession. However, Basque nationalists take his documentary as unquestionably nationalist. The Popular Front (The Spanish right wing party) has heavily criticised the documentary (Gibbons, 'Medem's Basque documentary sparks bitter controversy': 2003). This is not very surprising given the fact that the documentary slips into the domain of 'film' with admiring scenes of the Basque landscape. All the interviews have been shot in the outdoors with the beautiful Basque country as a background (Medem, 2003). Use of

the landscape as such reproduces the image of the homeland, which is one of the main components of nationalist discourse.

Films, music, cuisine and even the everyday are reproduced daily by nationalist discourse as indicators of the cultural uniqueness, if not greatness, of a given nation. Literature is part and parcel of such cultural elements of national identity, which are all argued here to be contested. Literary products or the literary canon of a given nation is shaped by the nationalist discourse and counter narratives. The impossibility of the suturing of the literary canon as well as the national identity derives from the simultaneous existence and operation of the official nationalist discourse and the counter ones. In the following part, the role of literature in the reproduction of nationalist discourse will be introduced, followed by the argument that literature can also be a terrain of counter-narratives.

#### **4.2. The role of literature in the reproduction of the nation**

Among the areas where nationalist discourse is prevalent, either of the so-called high culture or popular culture, literature arguably has a profound importance. It is probably no exaggeration to say that 'Nations are to a very large extent invented by their poets and novelists' (Huxley quoted in Corse, 1997: 7) if we look into the various ways in which literature is inextricably linked with the construction and reproduction of national identity.

Nationalist discourse tries to create the idea that people are part of a given nation. As Anderson has argued like many communities, nations are imagined ones. In fostering this imagination print-capitalism has played the biggest role. The novel and the newspaper

‘provided the technical means for “re-presenting” the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation’ (Anderson, 1991: 25, original emphasis). They made it possible for people to imagine themselves as part of the nation in a ‘homogenous, empty time’ (Ibid. 24).

Literature acts as a tool of reproduction of nationalism in many ways. There is an undeniable link between literature, language and nationalism. First and foremost, literature is the manifestation of language. A romantic nationalist ‘[Leavis] argued that it was in language itself, in its most literary moments of articulation, that the truths of a particular national culture were most clearly formed’ (Milner, 2005: 9). Language is regarded as one of the determinants of national and ethnic identities.

The increasing importance and rise in literary products in vernacular languages has been one path to inventing national identities. In the late eighteenth century Europe, the ‘vernacularizing’ of languages was common among Rumanians, Greek and Hungarian peoples so Bulgarian and Slovene were created (Anderson, 1991:72-3). ‘Modern Pan-Serbism [also] emerged as a result of the Romanticist idea that vernacular language is the main criterion for the identity of a nation, combined with the thesis that all štovakian dialects are Serbian’ (Anzulovic, 1999: 74). These peoples developed a national consciousness and broke off from the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. This is not to say that their consciousness of languages directly led to the break-up of the empires but it was one of the factors facilitating national awareness.

Vernacular languages replaced Latin in the modern era as the main language of writing and communication in other European countries such as Italy, France and England. They become literary languages, thus making literature available to more people than ever before. In short, ‘the nineteenth century was, in Europe and its immediate peripheries, a

golden age of vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and litterateurs' (Anderson, 1991: 71). The rising importance of vernacular languages was one important factor in the modern times, the era of the birth of nationalism. National consciousness was reinforced by vernacular languages becoming literary ones.

However, it is also important to note that literary versions of languages are usually products of selection. It is not possible to find entirely homogenous nation-states. Many different dialects or even different languages can lie in the territory of a nation-state. It is not common that all these languages represented as national are indeed national languages maybe with the exception of Switzerland. Even in Switzerland languages of immigrants are not official languages. In the process, one dialect or one vernacular language in a given area prevails while others are marginalised.

The idea that there is a single 'normal' language, a common currency shared equally by all members of society, is an illusion. Any actual language consists of a highly complex range of discourses, differentiated according to class, region, gender, and status and so on which can by no means be neatly unified into a single homogeneous linguistic community (Eagleton, 1983:5).

Exclusion of certain ethnic groups and the prevailing of one – mostly the majority – ethnic group as the nation, even if the nation is argued to be unitary, begin with the prioritisation of the language of the majority or of a certain region. That would be, for example, the dialect of Paris for France and Sofia for Bulgaria in order to distinguish the language from similar neighbouring languages and prevent any possible commonality with peoples in other territories; in this way territorial unity is supposed to be secured by linguistic unity.

The links between vernaculars and the selection of certain languages over others can be argued to be about the birth of nationalism; however, literature, by use of language, contributes to the longevity and the continuity of the national language. Writers are often impelled to create new uses for words or even come up with new words thus, increasing the number of words in a language and widening its scope and areas of use. What is more, having a 'rich' language is seen as proof of a 'rich' national culture. How many words languages are composed of is usually one source of pride. A language bearing many words is a sign of how rich the culture is in the sense that the nation has been productive in many areas so the nation developed words to express.

In relation to the 'richness' of the language, it can also become an area of contestation, discussing whether a group claiming national sovereignty is actually a nation. In Turkey, the state has been denying language rights to the Kurdish population arguing that it is not possible to teach in Kurdish, as it is not a language but a collection of dialects, which are quite distinct from each other. There is usually the argument about the lack of expressions in Kurdish and the fact that Kurdish people resort to Turkish or use many Turkish words to communicate. Literary works are a source of national continuity as they maintain and develop the national language.

Language is also about uniqueness; thus, it is the claim of immunity from external influences. Nations are usually proud of the purity of their language. State policies on language aim to 'protect' national languages from other languages –especially recently from the influence of English – but also states sometimes can have campaigns which 'cleanse' the language. The early Turkish Republic, having defined the Ottoman Empire as an 'other', initiated a program of promoting the use of Turkish instead of Arabic and



Persian words and expressions. The alphabet reform was introduced, establishing the Latin alphabet as more appropriate to the Turkish Language than the Arabic one.

The uniqueness of the nation can be facilitated by literature. A literature unique to the nation is seen to represent the distinctive and maybe even 'better' qualities of the nation. One should remember that national identities are created in relation to 'others'; thus, constant reference to the differences from the 'other' is essential in defining the nation. 'National literatures, unique national literatures, help provide that extremely important piece of national life – 'a conception of what makes Us into Us,' and 'what separates "Us" from "Them"' (Corse, 1997: 23).

Literature, though, is not only an active participant in the creation and reproduction of national identity in its use of the language but can be an area where most nationalist rhetoric works. Literary works as means of talking about, describing, visualising, and as narratives of belonging and moral tales can also produce nationalist rhetoric by their content. Novels can be places where official stories of glory can be told, which can be called 'militant' or explicitly nationalist works. However, novels do not always reproduce the pedagogical or official versions. An 'innocent' poem that refers to beautiful landscape or the purity of the people can unintentionally reproduce a nationalist imagery. Literature also produces a typology of the nationals by praising a certain set of morals. Literature is not claimed here to be propaganda material as such but it can be used to create and reinforce the national imagination of unity, historical continuity, homeland and glory. Such implicitly nationalist works can become sources of solidarity as well as more 'militant' ones.

Some of the possible ways in which literature can produce national identity through the use of nationalist rhetoric and create the possibility of imagining the existence of nationals have been mentioned, based on the argument that nations are themselves constructed and literature is one factor that gives impetus to the production/invention and reproduction of the national identity. Nationalists would not agree. The nationalist view would not question the naturalness of nations and literature or any other artistic product of the nation that is thought of as representations of a naturally existing culture. Culture naturally exists and it finds its representation in art is the view of nationalists. However, it is argued here that nations are not natural, rather that they are modern constructions. 'Social groups do not agree on values, which are then expressed in their cultural acts but they only get to know themselves as groups through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement' (Frith, 1997: 111). Values and the imagery of a nation are in fact reproduced by means such as education.

National literature and other works of art help to invent and reproduce the national culture and provide the basis for allegiance to national identity. National art gives us films, novels, poems, to be proud of, so that we can feel we belong to the same nation (as Shakespeare's work did for example), and we want to belong to it. It gives meaning to what it is to be part of a nation. Nationalist discourse argues that since we are naturally born into nations we are supposed to be proud of it in any case but, if that nation actually has a culture to be proud of, then individuals would question their allegiance even less.

The literature of a nation reproduces the nation. Literary works might as well be in line with the official rhetoric of national history and thus, make the rhetoric stronger. However, this is not necessarily the case. Another point that is important about national

identities, besides being constructed, is that they are contested. There is no one national identity that does not change over time. National identities are not about being but about becoming. The areas of national identity can be the source of contestation.

There can be literary works that provide alternative versions of history. They can talk about various groups in a country in contradiction to the official rhetoric of a unified, homogenous nation as the work of Atilla İlhan and the case study of this thesis Nâzım Hikmet has done, as will be studied in the following chapter. Atilla İlhan's novels and poetry extends the Turkish national identity to include or at least recognise 'the existence of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities' (Köksal, 2001: 79). Another example of how an alternative narrative of Turkish history reproduced in literary works is the work of Kemal Tahir. Tahir writes about the Turkish liberation war in a way that is contrary to the official narrative. In the official history, the Turkish nation is represented as an already unified people who only needed a leader to fight against foreign invasion. He, however, questions this by emphasising the reluctance and even rejection of the people to help the *Kuvayi Milliye* (National Militia) and he 'portrays the indifference of the Western Anatolian townspeople toward the approaching Greek invasion forces' (ibid:76).

As Chatterjee has argued in his critique of Anderson's assertion of nations in a homogeneous empty time, there are always alternative narratives and readings of the same story. Giving the example of '*Dhorai-charit-manas*' (vol. 1, 1949; vol. 2, 1951) by the Bengali writer Satinath Bhaduri, Chatterjee shows how different groups in India had perceived Gandhi and the nationalist movement. Untouchables had imagined Gandhi as a sacred 'godlike' creature with spiritual powers and the main character – Dhorai – in the novel was in fact devastated when he saw Gandhi was wearing spectacles like an

ordinary human being (Chatterjee, 2005: 65-7). Thus, the nation is not imagined in the same way by all peoples as nationalists hope and try to achieve by the pedagogical but it is reproduced in a heterogeneous time by various groups.

Taking into account the contestation by literary or other works, asking the question whether these will be included as parts of the national identity is a political matter. The process of national identity formation is a political process in the sense that the elimination or choosing of what or who falls within the national boundaries is not a matter of natural selection. The selection of which music, which film, and which novels represent the nation best is not left to its own course. Elites and, especially, the state make a deliberate effort of choosing what national identity is in line with how they want to define the nation.

To give an example, in 1930s Turkey, Ottoman traditional music was banned. It was not played on radios nor was it taught in the academies of music<sup>26</sup>. This was a way the state had chosen, at the time, to emphasise the separation of the Republic from the Ottoman Empire. Instead, Western classical music was promoted, which was to deepen the understanding that Turkey was part of Europe or modern civilisation. Even if Ottoman traditional music was more 'authentic' (relevant/known) to Turkish culture and classical music was alien, the latter was chosen by the state to become a national music.

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<sup>26</sup> 'In 1926 with the decree of Ministry of Education, education of classical Turkish music was banned and the curriculum of the State Academy of Music was altered' (Anon. 'İstanbul Üniversitesi Devlet Konservatuarı Kuruluş Tarihçesi ve Amacı': 2008).

### 4.3. What is a literary canon?

Literature helps to reproduce national identity and choosing which literary works will represent the nation is a political process. National literary canons are supposed to be the 'classics', the great examples of a nation's high literary culture. Thus, canon formation is a terrain where the relationship between literature and nationalism takes place. However, as will be talked about later on, canons do not represent unchanging, absolute values but rather are contested and nations tend to have a different list of canons in different periods. A literary canon usually refers to works by exemplary figures, usually of the past that have been defined and reproduced by academics, literary critics and other institutional authorities (Winders, 1991: 11) such as the Ministry of Education. Again, from a nationalist perspective, the canon would emerge naturally. The works that best represent the nation and survive over time are great works and great works constitute the national canon. However,

As Tompkins notes, literary evaluation is "not an activity that is performed outside of political struggles and institutional structures, but *arises* from them". A group of specific people – academics, critics, editors, publishers – with certain class positions and specialized types of training select and value one group of texts over others. The canon is a product of human choice and contestation, not a natural occurrence (Corse, 1997: 16).

The origins of the canon refer to a more fixed understanding of the term but this approach to canon and, especially, literary canon has gone through a transformation leading to a more complex, multiple, fluxing understanding. The term canon (*kanon*) dates back to Ancient Greece. It meant, among other things a rule, standard and model. It not only

referred to artistic excellence but it established the morality almost like the 'Form' of Plato. Later, Romans changed the word *kanon* to canon and it also changed its definition to mean as a 'standard'. Roman writers would try to copy Ancient Greek canonical works such as 'The Iliad' (Kolbas, 2001: 12-15). With Christianity, the canon as a standard and ideal came to mean 'officially recognized "sacred" books... It had referred to the books of the Bible recognized by the Church as genuine and divinely inspired... as distinct from apocrypha, those other texts... rejected by the Church' (Milner, 2005: 6). Thus, the canon as a boundary setter had been established long before nation-states. In ancient times the canon set the boundary between so-called aesthetically excellent and the others, and in Christianity it would include works defined as sacred by the church.

With the rise in literary products in vernacular languages, the canonisation entered its modern and, in fact, national phase. This period was different from ancient and medieval periods in three ways, argues Kolbas. First, in this period the production and distribution of literature became much more efficient and quicker. As Anderson also showed, the links between the birth of print-capitalism and the rising popularity of vernacular languages were strong. 'Second, the incorporation of the modern nation-state and its increasing influence as a primary form of cultural identity helped to fix distinct national canons'. Third was the rise in interest to study secular literature that contributed 'in canonizing selected works in nationally standardized curricula' (Kolbas, 2001: 17).

In this period, the contested character of the canon was also at stake. The publishing of more and more works in vernacular languages led to the criticism of ancient works as authoritative, great examples of literature. Besides a general proliferation of literary works and literary criticism, the canon in the modern era has been mostly shaped by the

birth of nationalism and nation-states. '[T]he consolidation of independent states and their respective nationalistic ideologies...ultimately began to fix multiple and distinct national canons' (Ibid: 19).

#### **4.3.1. Canon formation**

The literary canon is supposed to set a boundary to define who is included as a nation's representative and who is not. It can also help in defining the nation as separate from other nations, and especially in the context of colonisation, it can help to forge a national identity resisting the cultural hegemony of the coloniser. As Shirane and Suzuki have mentioned 'in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the formation of nationalistic "traditions", particularly those based on vernacular literature, has...been crucial in decolonization, and in movements of national liberation in India, Korea and elsewhere' (Shirane et al, 2000: 12).

Canon formation not only defines external 'others' but also internal ones. Canon defines who can speak for the nation. In defining who can speak a number of factors come into play. One basic influence, on which works can be included as part of the national literature, comes from language. By prioritisation and standardisation of a certain dialect or language by the nation-state, the rest of the literary works in other dialects or languages are automatically excluded. Access to education in the first place can also work as a tool to exclude certain groups from the national identity, as represented in literary works.

Among the literate who write in the 'national language' the selection still continues. As 'postcolonial critics have argued, canon formation acts as a tool of exploitation or political control, particularly as a result of official or state nationalism, ...by often denying the identity of a particular gender, class or subgroup' (Shirane et al, 2000: 11).

Gender, race and ethnic background can be obstacles in being part of the canon, given that members of these groups have overcome the education barrier. There have been debates going on in North America about a more inclusive literary canon. Works by women, black writers or from other social minority groups are being included in university curricula to represent the diversity of the American and Canadian nations.

The identity of the writer is a definitive character in this discussion of inclusion or exclusion, even if their works may not be explicit stories of the minority the writer is supposed to represent. In this category we can also cite political identity as a definitive factor in being considered as part of the canon or not. Every nation has certain 'others' who challenge the discourse of the nation one way or another. Therefore, even if a male writer from the majority ethnic group is producing aesthetically valuable works of literature, he may still be excluded from being a part of the canon if his political affiliations are not in line with the discourse of the nation-state, which was the case with Nâzım Hikmet. Gender, race, ethnicity and the political identities of writers can become obstacles in being part of the canon.

Secondly, we have to consider the actual literary works as well. The content of the works influence the inclusion and exclusion process. The canon, therefore, defines not only who can talk but also what they can say. This point is very much in line with the previously mentioned links between literary works and national discourse. Novels, poems, epics that



reproduce the national discourse about a certain historical event, of heroes, of the morals and the general human topography of the country, would be more welcomed than others that challenge these discourses. From our point of view, which is that both nations and literary canons are constructed, follows the argument that literature is one domain where nations are reproduced. Certain histories, the homeland, heroes, and morals are defined for the nation; literary works are supposed to reproduce these and help to diffuse them to future generations so as to secure the continuity of the nation. As mentioned earlier, literary works do not necessarily have to be within the domain of explicit nationalism, but must still reproduce the above mentioned components of the national imagination.

In fact, it needs to be pointed out that the 'real' content of works is not the definitive criteria but how it is received by authorities that define what the canon is. As, 'Guillory has argued ... the ideological or cultural value of the texts in a canon does not lie in the texts themselves but in the processes and institutions that give the texts value' (Shirane et al, 2000:10). The case study of this thesis is a good example of how these perceptions have played a role in Nâzım Hikmet's exclusion and in his recent inclusion into the Turkish Literary canon, as will be discussed in the following chapters. His works have included hints of patriotism expressed in his love for the country and the peoples of Asia Minor but also analysis of Turkey's problems as issues of social justice. However, which element will be emphasized depends on groups and their political preferences.

Canon formation has another important characteristic, which is probably the most important for the purposes of this study. Literary canons of a nation are contested and they do change. In different periods, different works can be considered to be canonical. 'The so-called 'literary canon', which is the unquestioned 'great tradition' of the

‘National literature’, has to be recognized as a construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time’ (Eagleton, 1983: 11).

It is also possible to talk about the simultaneous existence of alternative canons, the official one and an informal one. The significance of literature in the reproduction of the national discourse and state involvement in defining which literary and other cultural products are central to the national identity has been mentioned. Since canon formation is studied here as a construct and a contestation, besides the state involvement and the official canon, there are also other actors who do not necessarily reproduce the official rhetoric. Moreover, another body of canon which cannot find a place in the official canon may be imagined, reproduced and enjoyed by writers, intellectuals and people of the art<sup>27</sup>. The forging of a national canon can be argued to be a product of interplay between the state, intellectuals in higher educational institutions and literary critics who enhance the place of writers in the official or the informal canon by various methods such as inclusion in the curricula, awards and praises in literary journals.

Canon formation is a political process which is linked with how the nation is imagined. When those who are included in the canon changes, this is also influenced by political decisions. It may represent a slight change in the definition of the nation. It may signal a more democratic, more representative nation, as the aforementioned recent inclusion of works by more women and African-American writers in the American canon exemplifies. Or, as in Japan, inclusion of a literary product in the canon can be a way to strengthen the belief that the nation is united. *Man'yōshū*, an ancient collections of poems, which was

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<sup>27</sup> In the Turkish case it is possible to observe the existence of such a body of writers, including Yaşar Kemal, Kemal Tahir, and more recently Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak. Nâzım Hikmet had a significant place – despite the bans on his work – in this body of writers, which can be called the informal Turkish canon, even though it is argued in this thesis that he be included in the official Turkish canon as well.

originally a product of the ruling class and has had no real connection with the majority of the people for centuries, is now articulated as a national poetry collection. It is argued that it includes poems by people of all strata, thus representing the entire nation. *Man'yōshū* is now one of the classics in the canon of Japanese national literature (Yoshikazu, 2000: 31-33).

Giosue Carducci of Italy sets another example of how political identities have come into play. Carducci was a literary scholar, leading promoter of the *liceo classico*, co-founder of the Dante Alighieri Society among other remarkable positions (Arpaia, 2000: 192). He was very popular in the Fascist era, as his ideas about a glorious Italian past had received a warm welcome.

His notion that Italian national consciousness was defined in terms of a perennial desire for Italy to become nationally compact and independent and to assert itself on the world stage supported the efforts of the Nationalists and then the Fascists to assert Italian hegemony in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and Africa (ibid.: 211).

However, his contributions to Italian nationalism and literature were disregarded after World War II, as he was strongly associated with Fascism even if himself was not one (Ibid:193).

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

From these several examples, we can conclude, as did Guillory, that '[C]anon is never other than an imaginary list; it never appears as a complete and uncontested list in any particular time and place' (1993: 30).

Power relations and change in the nationalist discourse can lead to a change in the imaginary canon. 'Certain pieces of writing are selected as being more amenable to this discourse than others, and these are what is known as literature or the "literary canon" (Eagleton, 1983:200). As demonstrated, there are alternative narratives of the nation represented in literary works as well as in cinema, media and other areas. The concept of literary canon is another construct that is not fixed. It can be concluded that it is not possible to talk about an eternal list for a national canon. Moreover, an alternative body of canon exist, challenging the official version. Since the state is not the only actor in defining which literary products symbolise the nation, the official canon reproduced by the state apparatus is not the only body of works appreciated by the people of the arts and literary circles, but these elite contribute to the reproduction of their own literary canon.

Contestation appears as a constant in the area of literary canons and other cultural manifestations of the national identity, as it does in the definition of national identity, itself. The existence of such a contestation makes it impossible for national identity to become a closure. Minority groups, being of a different ethnic group, race or gender, pose a challenge to the aim of nationalist, which is to create the idea that the nation is a unity and it is a totality that transcends time.

Literature or the formation of literary canons, is one important cultural field in relation to national identity, not only because it itself is an area of power relations as national identity formation but also due to its contributions to the reproduction and contestation of nationalist discourse. In both national identity and literature, we see identity as a process of becoming a continuous realm of power relations where there are not clear boundaries or binary relationships.

This ambivalence leads to the possibility that ‘indeed the exercise of power may be both politically effective and psychically *affective* because the discursive liminality through which it is signified may provide greater scope for strategic manoeuvre and negotiation’ in nation-states (Bhabbha, 1994: 145, emphasis in original). It is such an understanding of ‘the exercise of power’ that opens up the possibility of a dynamic relationship between official and informal canons in the context of the canon formation and state discourses and counter narratives in a broader context, instead of binary relationships shaped by mere state hegemony. A similar analysis of liminality is also applied to the case of Nâzım Hikmet in this study. It is argued that the discursive liminality in Nâzım Hikmet’s life experience and works have functioned as the terrain of clashing representations of the poet. That combined with the flux of national identity and the central place he had acquired in the informal canon as a great Turkish poet in Turkey and abroad, finally led to his re-articulation as a figure in the official Turkish national canon.

## 5. THE TWO INFLUENCES ON NÂZİM HIKMET'S WORK: PATRIOTISM AND COMMUNISM

### 5.1. Introduction

#### Traitor

"Nâzım Hikmet continues to be a traitor.

'We are a semi-colony of American imperialism', claimed Hikmet.

Nâzım Hikmet continues to be a traitor."

These were published in a newspaper in Ankara ...

...

"Yes, I am a traitor, if you love your homeland, if you are patriots, I betrayed

my homeland, and I am a traitor.

If homeland is your farms

if homeland is what is inside your safes and chequebooks,

if homeland is dying from hunger beside macadam,

if homeland is trembling in the cold like dogs, and suffering from malaria in summer

if drinking our red blood in your companies is homeland

if homeland is the nails of your lords,

if homeland is the walls of your guards, if homeland is a police baton,

if your payments and salaries are homeland

if homeland is American military bases, American bombs, American navy and cannons

if homeland is not escaping from our rotten darkness...

All right, I am a traitor

Publish these words:

'Nâzım Hikmet continues to be a traitor'"

(Hikmet, 'Traitor' 2008 [1962]).

Among twenty-seven volumes of work<sup>28</sup> ranging from poetry to plays plus film scripts, *Vatan Haini (Traitor-1962)* is probably the poem that most strongly reveals the two main influences on Nâzım Hikmet's life and works, namely patriotism and communism. Patriotism and communism, especially for the Turkish left, have not always been two antagonistic poles shaped by the *logic of equivalence*. In fact, this situation is not particular to Turkey, but anti-colonial movements have brought nationalist politics and left-wing agendas closer together in Africa and Latin America as well. However, the impact of Lenin's anti-imperialist analysis has most likely been felt strongly in Turkey because both of the 'revolutions' took place in close proximity. The Leninist interpretation of anti-imperialist national movements as an analogy for the workers' struggle against the bourgeoisie has been a definitive discourse adopted by the Turkish left (Somay, 2007:648). Marxist-Leninist analysis has been the main tool that the Turkish left implemented in its analysis of the independence struggle led by Mustafa Kemal. The Turkish left has been inclined to single out and emphasise the anti-imperialist, progressive, or (for some) revolutionary character of Kemalism. The origins of Kemalism – the liberation war and the reforms introduced by the early Republic to change society from a feudal semi-colonial one to an independent nation – and the pragmatic alliance with the Soviet Union sought by Mustafa Kemal, especially during the liberation war, have been the basis of the proximity between Kemalism and the Turkish left, as we have seen in the chapter on the Turkish Left. The case of Nâzım Hikmet bears similarities to the relation of the left with Kemalism, and with nationalism in general. Nâzım Hikmet shared certain elements of the discourse of patriotism, as it was articulated by the Turkish left, and supported certain Kemalist policies.

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<sup>28</sup> Based on the collection of all of his work by *Adam Yayınları*.

In this thesis, the case of Nâzım Hikmet in terms of his relationship with the state is studied as an exemplar of the relationship between the Kemalist state and communism. Despite the ups and downs in Nâzım's position in the Turkish Communist Party<sup>29</sup>, Nâzım Hikmet can be cited among the main figures of the Turkish left not only as an active party member but also as a symbol of the left's cultural productivity. His works can be read as articulations of the certain elements of the discourse of the Turkish left. As will be studied in this chapter, Nâzım adopted the following concepts that were identified with a leftist discourse and made them central to his work: the concepts of progress and change, anti-imperialism, anti-war protest, internationalism, as well as dialectic materialism as a methodological tool. Accordingly, he had been treated as a fervent producer of counter-narratives or, at least, narratives that challenged the official Kemalist discourse about the modernisation and progress of the Turkish society. Nâzım Hikmet, during his lifetime and in the many years that followed, was perceived as a communist, thus, as an 'other' in the official discourse and was treated accordingly. On the other hand, Nâzım, despite his internationalism, was also part of the Turkish left which articulated a certain nationalist discourse but named it patriotism. As we have seen in the chapter on the Turkish left, most of the groups of the left have not only problematized the official state nationalism of Kemalism but also supported it. Moreover, the Turkish left have also included the claim that the leftists are the real patriots and their concern is the salvation of Turkey. In Turkey, it is fair to say the left has formulated a space of a certain type of nationalism and claimed this to be 'the genuine patriotism'.

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<sup>29</sup> Nâzım Hikmet organised an alternative group in the Turkish Communist Party in 1929 (Tunçay, 1992: 76) and he was expelled from the party in 1935 due to claims of treason and Trotskyism (Fuat, 2001: 89). However, during the prisoner-release campaign of 1949-1950 the *TKP* rehabilitated Nâzım and actively participated in the campaign (Karaca, 2001: 244).



In the case of Nâzım, elements that can easily be articulated as products or evidence of patriotic feelings can be found in the vast literature that he has produced. The opening poem of this chapter can be cited as an example. In this poem, with the help of irony, he claims he is a better patriot than those who have, in his opinion, become agents of American imperialism. In his words that refer to the existing relationship with the USA, Turkey is no longer a place to long for. There is a claim that an alternative socio-political system should be established in Turkey. Similar to the analysis made by the Turkish left, even when a criticism to the polity has been raised, the main aim of the leftist actors or Nâzım, in this case, appears to be the progress and modernisation of Turkey. The Turkish left have legitimatised their position, as critics in the political arena, by reference to their patriotism and goodwill towards the people of Turkey. In doing so, the left has created a grey area where patriotism was articulated rather than the binary opposition of communism verses nationalism. Nâzım, also, intentionally or not, reproduced elements of patriotism in his work and helped in the construction of the concept of leftist patriotism. As has been argued in the chapter on the Turkish left, the relationship of the left and the State has not been a case of binary opposition but incorporation or colonisation of the left has taken place conditioned on the fact that the leftist elements were harmonised by a level of Kemalism and patriotism. The current discourse on Nâzım can be studied along this logic. It is due to this grey area created by the Left and, to a certain extent by Nâzım, (that is, the element of patriotism in their narratives) that has currently made it possible to colonise Nâzım on the condition that he is re-articulated as a Turkish patriot. As a result of this process of re-articulation since 1993, Nâzım has a new position in the official discourse that represents and treats him as a patriot and a part of the national canon.

The discourse of the State on Nâzım (details of which will be provided in the following chapter), emphasising his patriotism, presents a selective reading that ignores the other element, communism and all the consequent tools of analysis used by the poet such as historical materialism, emancipation, and the criticism of all forms of oppression<sup>30</sup>. However, when we look at Nâzım's work, it can be claimed that the discursive elements of both communism and patriotism can be traced. It is the argument of this chapter that indeed, Nâzım Hikmet's works makes a selective reading and an interpretation of him both as a patriot and a communist possible. His works involve the elements that can be articulated as evidence of his patriotism as well as communism. Nâzım's lifelong works could be and have been portrayed in such a way that enhances his rehabilitation since his work involves motifs that support the image of an apolitical, patriotic poet. Anti-imperialist, humanist issues, among others, together with occasional praise of Kemalist reforms and Mustafa Kemal himself can be seen in his literary productions. On the other hand, the opposing discourse could have – and indeed has – easily found the relevant data to claim that Nâzım was nothing more than a devoted communist, as his work involves anti-fascist, Marxist-Leninist motifs, among others, and criticism of policy choices of various Turkish governments, together with the use of Marxist methodology.

The two concepts of patriotism and communism are the main area of interest in this chapter. However, it needs to be pointed out that neither of these concepts is used to refer to essential categorisations nor will there be a claim made here that Nâzım was indeed a patriot or a communist. These concepts are important as they are studied as a reflection of categorisations and definitions in the State discourse and the self definition of both the

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<sup>30</sup> These and other elements that are related to the influence of communism as well as the influence of patriotism which shaped his work will be further studied in this chapter.

Turkish left and Nâzım Hikmet. Nâzım in the official discourse has been either labelled a communist or a patriot and these two concepts have been used in the official line to refer to binary oppositions. From this perspective, the current shift in the representation of the poet, from a communist to a patriot, deserves attention. He has been transformed from being a symbol of the 'other' to being part of the national canon, one of 'us'. This thesis is mainly interested in this shift and the analysis attempted here suggests that, indeed, the two poles of the Kemalist State and the Turkish left or more specifically, Nâzım Hikmet, were indeed not articulators of two irreconcilable narratives. Patriotic discursive elements that could be traced in Nâzım's work condition the possibility of the shift to a *logic of difference* in the current relationship. Even though, from the social constructivist point of view, patriotism is considered yet another form of nationalism and a social construction, this term will be used in this chapter for its centrality in the relationship in question. The use of the terms 'patriotism' and 'communism' here, only aim to refer to their place in the discourse of the left, Nâzım Hikmet and the State. As will be seen in more detail in the following chapter, references to Nâzım as a patriot are important elements of the current representation of him by the State.

In this chapter, there will first be an introduction to the discursive elements recurrent in Nâzım's work, which relate to the argument that his work makes a selective reading possible and this selectivity, moreover, helps to convey an articulation of him either as a communist or a patriot. In this discussion, it is also important to situate Nâzım Hikmet in the broader context of the Turkish literary scene of his time and the Turkish modernisation in the field of literature, since the process of modernisation in literature can be read as part and parcel of modernisation of Turkey and Nâzım's position on both

subjects has made him a target of antagonistic treatment. The following pages will be dedicated to an analysis of a limited number of his works, which are chosen to reflect the dynamics of the influences of patriotism and communism.

### **5.1.1 Positioning Nâzım Hikmet in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish literature**

Nâzım Hikmet was a revolutionary not only in terms of his political commitment to communism but also in terms of the novelties he brought to Turkish poetry. He became one of the leading figures of change in Turkish poetry by his introduction of a new approach, both in terms of content and structure. Many established literary critics such as Atilla Ozkirimli (1995), Talat Halman (1996) and Memet Fuat (2003) have defined him as the first representative of the social realist school among Turkish poets and the first poet to write with free verse in Turkish. The fact that he was the first to write with free verse is certainly significant for the history of modern Turkish literature but its significance for us is that it shows he was looking for new and revolutionary methods of writing.

The context of Turkish literature is as important as the political context of Turkey to get the full grasp of the time when Nâzım Hikmet emerged as a revolutionary poet. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman literature was shaped by two literary mainstreams: Folk literature and Elite literature. Folk literature constituted of oral tradition, minstrel and dervish literatures whereas the Elite literature mainly consisted of the *Divan* type and the new literary trends under the influence of the West (Alangu, 1974: 12). *Divan* literature, which was the most common and respected form in the late Ottoman period, embodies

elite, upper class, urban, learned, ornate and refined literature. Folk literature was spontaneous, indigenous and down-to-earth oral literature common to the countryside. 'The former... has a strong commitment to the principle art for art's sake, whereas the latter is preponderantly engagé or utilitarian in function and substance' (Halman, 1996: 3). The 'engagé' and 'utilitarian' character of folk literature helped make this literary strand find its core place among influences on Nâzım Hikmet. His works had a utilitarian charge and borrowed elements and themes from folk literature.

The influence of the Ottoman literary tradition was still felt in the times when Nâzım Hikmet was busying himself with advocating a literary transformation, indeed a revolution. He had made a great contribution to Turkish literature but it would be wrong to argue that he was unique in his quest for novelty and transformation. Turkey had already been through a process of Westernisation since the *Tanzimat*. Westernisation and nationalisation in literature went hand in hand and can be dated to the early 1900s. The influence of Westernisation on the literary scene was more obvious with the introduction of various new forms such as the novel, short story and theatre (Özkırımlı, 1983: 104). The second novelty on the literary scene was the emergence of national consciousness, which led to the declaration of the principles of the *Milli Edebiyat Akımı* (National Literature Movement) in 1911. The members of the National Literature Movement or, *Genç Kalemler* (Young Pens), were mainly concerned with purity in language.

Another prevalent literary group of the time was *Beş Hececiler*, whose main characteristic were the use of syllable metre and interest in folk literature and language use, as well as the way of life in the rural areas of Turkey. In contrast to the 'ideal of artistic perfection as dictated by Perso-Arab standards and its norm of divorce from

reality' in *Divan* literature (Burrill, 1973: 14), and the preference of prosody, *Beş Hececiler* tried to portray rural life using everyday language. Their stylistic contributions through the use of syllable metre, which opened the path of change in Turkish literature, were the arena that brought them close to Nâzım. However, their conceptualisation and the handling the folk differed fundamentally from his. Nâzım's position vis-à-vis the popular is one that sees a potential in it for change, whereas the Romantic, nationalist movement in literature had an understanding of the people as authentic and under the threat of the modern culture industry. A common criticism lodged towards *Beş Hececiler* was that they were unaware of the actual lifestyle of Asia Minor, which eventually led them to romanticise and have a static understanding of the folk (Geçgel, 2003: 4; Özkırımlı, 1983: 116).

Besides the discussions on language and the quest for novelty in literature, a common debate was taking place among the artists of the time. Nâzım became party to a vital debate between progressives and conservatives on the question of whether art was for art's sake or whether it had a commitment to society<sup>31</sup>. Nâzım argued that art was political, arguably as a result of his own political commitments. In his view, art and artists were obliged to convey social messages and be the voice of the common people (Nesimi, 1977: 7). This was due to his previously mentioned belief that the masses were capable of making change and art was a tool to inform the masses. Revolutionary change was needed and inevitable and, as a writer, he had the responsibility to call for this change (Karakuş, 2002: 296).

In this brief introduction of the literary scene when Nâzım emerged as a new poet, the differences among the works of Nâzım, *Divan* poets and his contemporaries, such as the

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<sup>31</sup> More on this topic can be found under the section on his polemics.

*Beş Hececiler*, can be identified. Nâzım aimed to introduce a modern form of poetry that would be an alternative to *Divan* poetry, experiencing more freedom in style and in content. He had an affinity to Folk literature due to the common elements of engagement in social realities and utilitarianism. In comparison to other modern poets who were interested in the ‘folk’, Nâzım can be argued to have had a non-static view of the people and charged them with a potential for emancipation.

This short section aims to position Nâzım among the literary trends of his time. Thus, the description of his position is not a claim that his was a more realistic or somehow better perspective in studying the ‘folk’ or their emancipatory potential. Indeed, this thesis is aware of the fact that ‘folk’, with its cultural traits such as language and literature, is another social construction just like the other concepts that have been studied here, such as ‘national identity’, ‘national literature’ and ‘literary canon’. Nâzım’s affinity to the folk was a way of constructing his version of nationalism (that is patriotism) as was common to the left. He contributed in the formation of an imagination of the people as actors of progress, modernisation and even revolution, which was, in itself, a social construction. However, what is relevant for the current study is to understand how these constructions have acquired a life of their own and been presented as evidence of Nâzım’s patriotism, which is the current situation in the relationship of the State and the poet, as will be studied in more detail in the following chapter.

### 5.1.2 The language reform

Nâzım wrote in the context of the transformation of the early Republic. The introduction of the Latin alphabet in 1928 to replace the Arabic script, among other reforms, aimed at the modernisation of Turkish society and distancing it from its Middle Eastern or Ottoman origins. It was a drastic but significant reform for the consolidation of the modern Turkish language (Ahmad, 2006: 107). A nation-wide campaign of education followed the shift of the alphabet in order to contribute to the creation of the unity essential for the new nation-state.

Alongside the education reform, debate about how to improve the Turkish language was on the agenda of the elite. In 1932, with the initiation of Mustafa Kemal, the 1<sup>st</sup> Turkish Language Congress was held, in which the Sun-Language Thesis was adopted. The Sun-Language Thesis basically argued that ‘all languages derived from a primeval language spoken in Central Asia and Turkish was the closest of all languages to this origin and that all languages had developed ... through Turkish’ (Zürcher, 1993:198). A purist approach gained the upper hand at the 1<sup>st</sup> Turkish Language Congress. The institution, which was formed to support this thesis, was The Society for the Study of Turkish Language. The Society, accordingly, also had a purist approach to the language reform and aimed to replace all Arabic and Persian words with those collected from Central Asian dialects, Turkic languages, and other ancient literary sources.

On the other hand, some of the elite like Ziya Gökalp had a more moderate stance concerning the transformation of language. They rejected revolutionary changes that did not take into account the preferences of common people in everyday language. Ziya



Gökalp was one of the main ideologues of Turkish nationalism especially influential in that period. Gökalp, in his famous *Principles of Turkism* (1923), wrote that what is more important in terms of language is the grammatical structure of sentences rather than the origin of the words. He argued that it would be better to keep the words originating from Arabic or Persian, in case they were commonly used in everyday language. What needed to be done was to get rid of the grammatical rules of Persian and Arabic (Gökalp, 1996:18). Gökalp opposed manipulation in language but argued that languages go through an evolution (Ibid: 35). It can be argued that getting rid of Persian grammatical structures is another type of manipulation: However, Gökalp being a nationalist justified his argument about keeping non-Turkish words but omitting non-Turkish grammatical structures by claiming that these words were commonly used by people. Gökalp, similar to Nâzım, stated that the people's traditions should set the standard in language reforms. Nâzım Hikmet's opinions about language, mostly expressed in his newspaper columns, were close to Ziya Gökalp's moderate line. For example, in 1934, Nâzım advocated a synthesis of oral and written language. Nevertheless, in an article about the 'turning point of language', he gave more emphasis on the origins of language being in oral, everyday use (Hikmet, 1996: 51; Yağcı, 2003: 15). Both Gökalp and Hikmet argued that people's choice of words in everyday language should be the basis of rules about language since, which words or usage are appropriate is something that evolves with general use, not by state intervention. For Gökalp, if there was a need for new terminology the place to look was folk literature. He expressed this view in 'the principles of Turkism in language' (ibid. 136). Nâzım also argued that the source of any change in language and literature had to derive from the local traditions and common practices of the masses. As

mentioned in an earlier section, Nâzım valued folk traditions. He argued that the people were to be the source of change and modernisation, as a result of his imagination of the folk as a group with emancipatory potential. Nâzım's views were challenges to the official practices of language reform and to the ways the Kemalist modernisation project was implemented. Nâzım resisted a top-down form of modernisation. In his view, people had a central place, while for the Kemalist elite; the fastest and most effective way of development was the imposition of Western beliefs on the peoples of Anatolia. Nâzım, in his work and in his newspaper articles, posed a challenge to the official strategies.

On the other hand, he commented on the need for the modernisation of Turkish literature and had a stance that was parallel to the modernising views of Kemalism on this topic. He was critical of the dogma and the feudal and monarchic structures of the Ottoman period. He argued that Turkey was going through a transformation, that a revolution had taken place, and that a similar revolution was needed in literature. In relation to this issue, the parallels between Nâzım and the Turkish left are noticeable. Both actors supported what they interpreted as progress and revolution in the Kemalist project. These parallels between Nâzım and the left; the left and the State, and Nâzım and the State contributed to the dynamism in their relationship. The relationship of the left and the Kemalist State has not always only been shaped by antagonisms but also by incorporation or colonisation of certain groups of the left. The binary relationship between Nâzım and the State has also left it place to the rehabilitation of Nâzım and his colonisation, based on a re-articulation of him as a Turkish patriot. Among the ambiguous discursive elements that can be selectively read both as communism and patriotism, anti-imperialism deserves special attention.

### 5.1.3 Anti-imperialism

Anti-imperialism is a continuous theme of Nâzım's work, especially apparent in his interpretation of the liberation war in *Human Landscapes*. His analysis of events through the lenses of anti-imperialism was not limited to the Turkish context. As it will be seen in the following pages, he targeted British imperialism in India and China, in his works *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?* and in *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* respectively. In *Letters to Taranta-Babu*, Italian Fascism and its imperialism in Ethiopia and in various poems about the Korean War, American imperialism – alongside war in general – were criticised. He also wrote about anti-imperialist struggle in his newspaper column in the daily *Tan*. Common to all this is his Leninist approach to the relationship between anti-imperialism and national struggles.

Anti-imperialism is especially important in his work as it possibly emerged from the combination of patriotism and communism. In *Vatan Haini* – with which this chapter opened – we see that he opposed American imperialism on Turkey, coupled with a harsh criticism of the Turkish government and the bourgeoisie. There are references to the coalition of capitalists, imperialists and the power apparatus of the army and the police as exploiters of labour who, on the other hand, suffer from low wages and hunger. Those references point to the fact that Nâzım articulated Marxist discourse. He was directing attention to the inequalities in society and voiced the problems of the labour class. At the same time, however, all this criticism involved patriotic sentiments. He was advocating

absolute freedom for his country and its people rather than being dependent on American financial and military aid.

Adherence to and struggle for liberty, as opposed to dependence on foreign support, had been the stance of Mustafa Kemal during the liberation war. Indeed this characteristic of the liberation movement was praised while those who argued for an American Mandate or, who had collaborated with the occupation forces like the Sultan, were condemned in Nâzım Hikmet's *The Epic of the Liberation War*, as will be seen in the part on this work.

#### **5.1.4 Folk tradition and modernity**

The second important continuity that is characteristic of Nâzım's work was the impact of the local traditions of Turkey and of folk literature. He either wrote about a well-known folk story – as he did in works such as *Like Kerem, Ferhad and Shirin*, and *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* – or paid tribute to folk heroes or artists by mentioning them in a different context as in *The Epic of the Liberation War*. The fact that the stories and the protagonists of his work were based on the local culture makes it possible to argue once again that Nâzım was a patriot. He was not a realist internationalist; on the contrary, he wrote about the sentiments and tales of Turkish people. His affinity to the folk opened up the possibility of his articulation as a patriot. When he is articulated as the poet of Turkey, this can be done by reference to his ties to his country, which were ignored before.

A further argument could be made that Nâzım regarded the people or masses as progressive agents, bearing similarities with the Latin American experience argued by

Rowe and Schelling (1991). Rowe and Schelling identified three main narratives of popular culture:

1. Most familiar is the view, which arose with Romanticism, of an authentic rural culture under threat from industrialisation and the modern culture industry...
2. The second interpretation... takes the modern culture of the advanced capitalist countries as the inevitable goal towards, which Latin American societies are moving.
3. The third position, whose history goes back to Marx and beyond, ascribes to popular culture an emancipatory and utopian charge, whereby the practices of the oppressed classes contain within them resources for imagining an alternative future society (1991: 2).

Folk literature or folk traditions in general are articulated as the source of authenticity in Nâzım's work and there is an element of romanticism about this approach to the folk. However, his vision can be argued to coincide with the third position summarised above. He does not romanticise the traditions leading him to imagine a static past, as is usually argued to be the case, through the lenses of the Romantic Movement. Inspired by Marx, Nâzım's version of the masses contains within them the ability to imagine and create an alternative future society.

Even though Nâzım's treatment of the folk, its cultural productions and potential is yet another social construction or a certain way of imagining the folk, his treatment of the subject is significant for our analysis. Nâzım's analysis of the folk appears as a case where he articulated a complex discourse combining the local with the discursive elements of communism. The issue of the folk, in this sense is another important yet ambiguous area in the discussion about the influences of communism and patriotism on

his work. As will be seen in the analysis of his specific works, he had developed a specific narrative of patriotic themes and Marxist methodology that was once treated as a counter narrative by the State but which was now colonised. A dissection of his work that ignores the influences of communism and the Marxist analysis of modernisation would easily lead to a selective reading of his work as praises of the Turkish people and their traditions. His combination of the modernist approach and the use of local traditions is like the experience of modernity in Latin America ‘which does not necessarily entail the elimination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process’ (Rowe; Schelling, 1991:3).

This similarity of the Latin American and Turkish experiences leads us to notice Nâzım Hikmet’s commitment to modernity and the importance of his alternative version of modernity as opposed to the one imposed by Kemalism. He produced modernist works following in the footsteps of Mayakovski, or as Aguiar argues, resonated with the formal innovations of British modernists (2007: 110). But more importantly, he had a vision of modernisation, which emanated from and is inclusive of the people. Even though the official rhetoric of Kemalism as the founding ideology of the Republic declares that sovereignty rests in the nation/people, modernisation had taken a top-down, elitist form in the hand of the Kemalist State. ‘Political elites saw themselves as the most important force for change... in Turkey. To them, Ottoman-Turkish society was a project, and the people who lived in Turkey could at most be the objects of their experiments’ (Kasaba, 1997: 24). Nâzım’s vision of modernisation – as well as his vision of the nation or the people – was a challenge to the Kemalist one, as he placed ‘people’ at the centre of the project of modernization and charged them with the responsibility for change.

The above-mentioned works are based on the local cultural heritage; however, Nâzım re-wrote these stories with a modern and communist approach. The love story of Ferhad and Şirin had been transformed into a work voicing a message about the worth of the devotion of one's own life for the good of humanity. In *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin*, the historical record about a 15<sup>th</sup> century peasant revolt becomes an epic with an explicit communist message, pointing out the possibility of building a society based around common ownership and production. Thus, for Nâzım, the Sheikh Bedreddin revolt was not important only because it took place in the history of Turks, but also because he interpreted it as an attempt to create a primitive communist society. He himself declared the undeniable ties his work had with the culture of his land. As Nazım Hikmet puts it; 'the roots of my poetry is in the soil of my country, but I wanted to branch out to all the lands of north, south, east and West and all the civilisations born in those lands' (Hikmet quoted in Gürsel, 1992: 8). As much as he respected and benefited from the local literary traditions of Turkey, he worked to revolutionise it. The description of Nâzım's use and analysis of folk traditions is a contribution to the reproduction of a certain view of the people, which can in turn be analysed as a nationalist or patriotic attempt. Nâzım, in a certain way, reproduced his image of the Turkish people with certain positive characteristics. His vision of the folk is pure and progressive. We are aware of the fact that he is reproducing another construction and a construction that could feed nationalist sentiments. Having said that, the point of interest of this chapter, are the ways Nâzım combined a Marxist approach with his affinity to the folk and how he constructed a complex point of view which would in return be read selectively as evidence of his communism and patriotism in the official discourse about him in different periods.

A selective reading of his work on the liberation war can thus be made. Even when he wrote about the ‘biggest national struggle’ of the Turkish people, namely the liberation war, he did not do so without the influence of the Marxist approach or methodology. He introduced an alternative narration of that period by telling the story of the working classes, peasants and women of Asia Minor who were, in his vision, the actual but nameless actors of the liberation movement. *The Epic of the Liberation War* emphasises the role of the masses rather than leaders. When Mustafa Kemal – the leader – is mentioned, it is only because he represents the interests of the people. The argument that there are different classes and that their interests are in conflict with each other is implicit in the story as well. The actors in the ‘Epic’ can be grouped as the peoples of Asia Minor and their representative (Ankara government) as opposed to the imperialists and their supporters (the Sultan and other members of the capitalist class). On the other hand, the same work can be and has indeed been presented in the current discourse on Nâzım as a pure case of articulation of patriotism. His *Epic* has a central place in the current discourse as the story of the national struggle, as will be studied later in this chapter.

#### **5.1.5 The influence of Marxist methodology**

Communism was a clear element in Nâzım’s works, not only defining the themes he chose to elaborate but also influencing his methodology. In terms of style, one of the most important contributions of Nâzım to Turkish literature besides free verse was the application of the materialist conception of history and dialectic materialism.



As early as 1925 in his poem, *Piyer Loti*, criticising the orientalist approach of Pierre Loti, Nâzım declared his materialist position and that he did not 'believe in a soul separate from the body'. In the poem *Berkley* (1926), he mocked idealist philosophy –, which regards ideas as *a priori* and ignores material being existent independent of our conception of them – from a materialist point of view (Bayar, 1978: 70; 76).

His opinions about the relationship between content and structure also reflect his Marxist approach. It is the content that requires its own structure, as he wrote to Vâ-Nû from Bursa Prison in the 1940s (Hikmet, 1970: 108). On the other hand, he applied a dialectical approach to the problematic of the content-structure relationship and added that even though 'content determines the structure... in fact content and structure are a unity' (Gürsel, 1992: 49). Content and structure have a dialectical relationship and they cannot be thought of as separate from each other. For Nâzım, content, form and sound and, therefore, the appeal of a poem make it a totality.

The relationship between human beings and natural and historical conditions has been studied from a materialist standpoint in his work as well. In an interview given to *Edebiyat Gazatesi (The Newspaper of Literature)* in 1932 he gave his opinion on this subject by stating that human beings changed their nature and they adapted to new conditions (1996: 11), but the role of humans was limited. Nâzım had a fatalistic understanding of history, arguing that all societies will go through the same general phases towards a revolution. He expressed this fatalistic view in the first article of *Demolishing the Idols* – the debate about the old and new generations of Turkish literature, which will be talked about in detail in the following pages. He argued that a writer should be able to write about local sentiments without lacking an international

appeal, which is possible, because all societies go through the same stages (Hikmet, 1996a: 14). The role of human beings is only in the form of contributions that either speed up or slow down the already defined process (Bayar, 1978: 82). This argument is most prevalent in *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?*, a work that deals with the duties of revolutionaries.

Throughout his life, he applied dialectic materialism to his work. In his most important work, *Human Landscapes*, the reader is constantly reminded of the different social classes and the clash of interests between them. The materialist analysis of the historical events and scenes from ordinary lives of Turkish peasants, the petit bourgeois, the German bourgeois and, Soviet partisans form the basis of the book.

The application of Marxist methodology is probably the area which is least open to debate and reflects his commitment to communism. Based on the fact that he analysed societies and history with the perspective of a materialist, it can be claimed that there was no doubt Nâzım was a communist. However, the aim of this thesis is not to discuss whether Nâzım was a communist or a patriot: but to argue that he wrote with the influence of both, providing solid grounds for both of those who argue one or the other. Even though the works just mentioned have been talked about as arenas where he applied Marxist methodology, they can also be argued to show his patriotism. For example, the poem, *Piyer Loti*, criticises Western exploitation of the cultural heritage and resources of the East. Similarly, *Human Landscapes* is rooted in the local. In it, Nâzım is voicing stories of his countrymen with a Marxist approach.

In this chapter, the main themes of patriotism, anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, pacifism, humanism and the methods Nâzım manifested in his work such as satire, the use of folk

literature and dialectical materialism will be analyzed in detail. In doing so, we will not go through all of his works but concentrate on the ones that are signifiers of these themes. The works will not be grouped under thematic titles to avoid repetition and to respect the coherence of his work, be it a poem, play, newspaper article, story or a political pamphlet, but instead, his main works will be summarised in chronological order.

## 5.2. Early writings

Throughout this chapter, it will be seen that Nâzım Hikmet not only produced materials that were both complex and innovative in style but also combined elements of patriotism and local literary traditions, together with Marxism, internationalism and humanism. The argument that has been deduced from studying his work and lifetime is that Nâzım has produced material that could easily be supportive of both of the claims that he was a patriot or a communist. It is important to look at the trajectory of Nâzım Hikmet's work in order to understand its complexity and ambiguity. This would help us understand how the selective reading of his work and his life, which will be studied in the following chapter, has worked to formulate the two representations of Nâzım as a communist and as a patriot. Thus, how this complexity is articulated in his literary discourse will be analysed, starting with his earliest poems.

Nâzım Hikmet started writing poetry as a child. His grandfather Nâzım Pasha, who was a Mevlevi<sup>32</sup> with a great interest in poetry, had the biggest impact on his poetry during his childhood. The influence can be found in his first published poem, '*Serviliklerde*, which appeared in *Yeni Mecmua* on 3, October 1918' (Babayev, 2002: 19).

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<sup>32</sup> A Mevlevi is a follower of Mevlana Celattin Rumi, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian theologian and poet.

Nâzım's first poems contained mysticism, as his grandfather had taught him about the 'Sufi ideals of freedom, spirituality and love' (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 6). When he was a child, he merely admired his grandfather and copied his style and worldview. The impact of learning about Rumi at such an early age, however, probably left a great mark on him, since throughout his life he was – as Göksu, Timms and Halman called him, a romantic. It can be said that those Sufi ideals of 'freedom and love' were a continuous element in his work, as well as the fact that he incorporated cultural traits of his country in his work. However, in his later years, he would become a poet who dedicated his life and works to communism. As Denis Levertov wrote in the foreword to the English translation of *Human Landscapes*;

Hikmet's Marxism did not make him a Social Realist, a facile and dishonest optimist; his faith in human possibility is grounded not in shallow and narrow economic determinism but in a poet's vision of the hidden aspirations of humble people and the power of imagination and courage (1982: ix).

In 1943, Nâzım would take issue with Rumi and other Islamic theologians from a Marxist perspective. He wrote twenty-three *Rubailer (Rubaiyat)*<sup>33</sup>. *Rubaiyat* are usually formed in such a way that the first three lines are steps leading to the last line, which reveal the actual message (Gürsel, 1992: 310), which itself is a form appropriate for dialectic materialism. Nâzım wrote in this style to criticise the mysticism of religion and wrote about his materialist conception of the world. In the following example he quotes Rumi's Platonic expression 'All forms are shadows' and he develops a materialist counter argument only in four lines:

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<sup>33</sup> The Persian poetic form of quatrains that was mostly used by Islamic poets.

The world you saw was real, Rumi, not an apparition, etc.  
It is boundless and eternal; its painter is not the First Cause, etc.  
And the best of the rubaiyat your burning flesh left us  
is not the one that goes, "All forms are shadows," etc... (Hikmet, 'Rubaiyat'  
2008 [1943]).

Going back to the 1920s, Nâzım's childhood and youth took place in an era of war and turmoil at the end of the Ottoman Empire. He witnessed the devastating results of World War I and the defeat of his country. His patriotic cry against the occupation was particularly exemplified in poems such as *Ağa Camii (The Mosque of Ağa-1921)*<sup>34</sup> and *Marmara'da bir Gurup (A Sunset in Marmara-1920)*<sup>35</sup> (Hikmet, 2001: 115; 104).

In this political atmosphere, he would soon leave Istanbul to join the anti-occupation movement led by Mustafa Kemal in the interior of Asia Minor. Together with Vala Nureddin Vâ-Nû, he took a long trip to Ankara hoping to fight in the war. This trip formed his mindset in mainly two areas in such a way that it left its influence on him for the rest of his life. He got to know about the reality of Asia Minor, which was mainly the poor condition of life in the villages. *Yalnayak (Barefoot-1921)* and *Açların Gözbebekleri (Pupils of the Eyes of Hungry People-1921)* and, later, *İnsan Manzaraları (Human Landscapes-1941)*, and *Türk Köylüsü (The Turkish Peasant in Human Landscapes)*, all show how he was influenced by the conditions of poor people and he analysed this reality from a Marxist perspective. *Barefoot*, as Behramoğlu argues, involves all the elements that can be seen in Nâzım's poems, which are 'love of people, patriotism, realism, materialism, revolt against social injustice, critique of the "intellectuals"... advocacy of

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<sup>34</sup> In *Ağa Camii*, he expressed anger about seeing foreign flags in the minaret of Ağa Mosque in the middle of Istanbul.

<sup>35</sup> This was a poem about his discomfort about seeing British war vessels on the shores of Istanbul.

technological development and science' (2002: 278). Some of those issues, such as love of people, patriotism, materialism and critique of social injustice, can be traced in his work in the following years.

His first encounter with socialism also took place during this trip, which actually ended in Moscow via Baku. He and Vâ-Nu met Spartacists who taught them about the basics of Marxism and informed them about the revolution in Russia. Learning about socialism was the second significant impact of that trip. Nâzım produced works that reflected his sentiments towards the poor conditions of common people that could be read as the views of a patriot but also as those of a communist. His work has been a combination of the local cultural heritage with communist ideals analysed through Marxist methodology but also always reflecting his sentiments. In that period, he not only wrote about Turkish peasants but also produced a poem – 28 *Kânunisani* – about the murder of founders of the first Turkish Communist Party. At the time, it was probably just the reaction of an emotional young person, but one who would soon, however, become a fervent communist and write from a Marxist approach throughout his lifetime.

*Pupils of the Eyes of Hungry People* (1921) was written as a reaction to poverty, not only in Asia Minor but also in Russia, after watching a film on the starvation, drought and poverty that was widespread right after the revolution (Babayev, 2002: 70). The importance of this poem was not only its content, through which Nâzım reflected the sensitivity he had developed towards the poor and villagers of both Asia Minor and Russia, but also its structure. It was written in free verse with broken lines, which was a first in Turkish poetry.

It is commonly argued that Nâzım was influenced by the style of the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovski and that he tried to apply it to his own work (Babayev, 2002: 74; Fuat, 2001: 56; Gürsel, 1992: 46; Karaveli, 2002: 160). For some this was only a matter of ‘approximating’ the style he saw in the Russian poem (Halman, 2002: 11). Nâzım himself made inconsistent declarations about the influence of Mayakovski on his work. Once he argued that he did not know enough Russian to be able to understand Russian poetry at the time; thus he was simply fascinated by the structure and copied it as an admirer (Babayev, 2002: 74). On the other hand, he denied any similarity between himself and Mayakovski in an interview in 1937 published in *Her Ay (Every Month)*, arguing that Mayakovski was mainly an individualist, while Nâzım regarded himself and his work in the service of the masses (Hikmet, 1996: 33). The kinship between the two poets was not limited to their stylistic approaches to poetry but, more importantly, in their approach to art in general.

It has already been mentioned that Nâzım was an advocate of the argument “Art for society/ art with a purpose” as opposed to the claim “L’art pour l’art” (Art for the sake of art) and this is where he shared common ground with Mayakovski. Both had actively participated in propagating socialism with their work. At a time when bourgeois aesthetics was inclined to be represented as an ‘indifferent liking of a beautiful object’ and was hand in hand with the principle “L’art pour L’art”, Mayakovski, as a poet of the proletarian revolution, argued that art was supposed to be in the service of society (Huppert, 2002: 87). Art should entail a purposeful and useful character. Artists, writers in particular, are not simply producers of an aesthetic object for the pleasure of the few but are active participants in the education and the transformation of society. Nâzım

expressed similar thoughts about the place and purpose of art in the same interview when he accused Mayakovski of being an individualist (Hikmet, 1996: 35). Both poets, however, argued for and practised art with a purpose.

The Russian poet wrote an epic about Russian workers fighting against the forces of capitalism, *150,000,000*<sup>36</sup> and also painted propaganda posters, which was an effective tool of communication at the time. He had become a prominent leader of the Russian Futurist School (Maden, 2003: 67). Nâzım admits that he belonged to the same literary school as Mayakovski among the various schools common in Russia in the 1920s. In fact, he recognised the influence, probably the modernist element, of Futurism but ‘Futurism did not last long’ (Hikmet, 1996: 34). In his futurist phase, Nâzım mainly exposed the theme of glorifying the machine age and industrialisation, among which *Makinalaşmak İstiyorum (I Want to Become a Machine, 1923)* is a poem that stands out. He ‘simulated the sounds of machinery’ like ‘Trrrum/trrrum/trrrum/track tricky tack’ (Halman, 2002:12; Hikmet, 1998b: 22) producing a novel strand in poetry in Turkish literature once again. Nâzım became a revolutionary poet like Mayakovski, introducing Marxist content and a new style of poetry to the Turkish literary scene. In the 1920s as a young poet, he mentioned that he was looking for a different structure to fit his content and use language as an ‘orchestra of various wind instruments’ to enhance the appeal of his poems (Babayev, 2002: 75). He found what he was searching for in the modern structure of free verse with short and long lines, together with occasional rhyming in contrast to the quatrains written with already-defined rhyme patterns.

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<sup>36</sup> A further similarity between the two poets can be found in their epics as well. Mayakovski wrote the story of Russians fighting against imperialists told as a Russian folk tale while Nâzım wrote about the struggle against imperialists in Turkey in his *National Militia* and was generally inspired by folk literature and language in his work.



In his poem *Yeni Sanat (New Art)*, written in 1922, Nâzım declared he would be an artist who would be contributing to the progress and change of society. He criticised older poetry with an allegory to music. The common poetry of his time had a low voice like a song played by a single instrument, as opposed to his poetry, which would be performed by an orchestra of anvils and hammers (Babayev, 2002: 99). In fact, in this early poem, Nâzım expressed his position about the purpose of art and the need for bringing new forms and new areas of interest as the subject matter of art, in order to assist in bringing about the necessary changes in society. For him, loud poetry is a necessity in the mobilisation of the masses. His poetry, being shaped by Marxist ideology, would be polyphonic<sup>37</sup>, voicing social problems loudly and asking questions (Timuçin, 2002: 24-5). Similar concepts about ‘purposeful art’, concerned with social realities and his aim of producing poems whose form and content are consistent and complementary, can be traced in the trajectory of his work. He not only tried to achieve this in his work but he also claimed that contributing to the development of poetry and, consequently, language by bringing new areas of interest and challenging old structures were basic requirements of a good national poet, as we will see in the following section.

### 5.3. ‘Demolishing the Idols’ (1929) and other polemics

From 1928 onwards, Nâzım Hikmet worked for the legal papers *Resimli Perşembe (Illustrated Thursday)* and *Resimli Ay (Illustrated Monthly)* but also wrote for the

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<sup>37</sup> Polyphonic as opposed to monophonic literature implies the thematic richness of his poetry and the need for a louder and more convincing structure due to the commitment of poetry to social causes.

underground papers *Kızıl Yıldız (Red Star)* and *Komünist (Communist)*, until his arrest in 1938. In these newspaper articles, mostly written under the pseudonym ‘Orhan Selim’, the main issues of interest were the everyday problems of transport, health, and infrastructure in Istanbul. He also dealt with the politics of the time, especially with the rise of Fascism in Europe and the prospect of a future world war.

Satire was the main method Nâzım Hikmet/Orhan Selim would employ in that period in his replies to conservatives and poems ridiculing the main figures of the older generation of literary schools, such as Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Peyami Safa, Ahmet Haşım and Namık Kemal. In 1929, he was mainly engaged in a discussion on literature and its relations with society and politics.

Among his articles what stands out the most in this period was the campaign *Putları Yıkıyoruz (Demolishing the Idols)*, started in *Illustrated Monthly* on June 1929. In fact, these articles were designed as a reply to Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu’s criticism of the writers of the new generation – especially Nâzım Hikmet – published in *Milliyet* in May 1929. Karaosmanoğlu had made a distinction between individualist poets and poets in the service of society and criticised the latter by adding that poets who claim to voice the problems of communities could only produce disorganised, loud, irrational sounds lacking the eternal harmony of classical art. Secondly, he criticised the new poets who rejected the past and their predecessors. Then he argued that the fact that the new literature was not so great was understandable as these writers were raised in the time of war. They suffered from malnutrition and, instead of culture, all they had, was news about war (Göze, 1975: 168; Fuat, 2001: 91). This article had a derogatory tone, which caused a reaction from some columnists.

Peyami Safa and Nâzım Hikmet replied to Karaosmanoğlu in their own styles, both emphasising that he spent his time in a Swiss Sanatorium with public funds during the liberation war, while young people were fighting in the war and against poverty in Turkey (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 89). There were two sides to the polemic. One was a reaction against the arrogance of Karaosmanoğlu, mocking the poor from the standpoint of a conservative bourgeois. Secondly, it launched a literary discussion between the old and the new. Karaosmanoğlu had opened the debate about ‘individualist poets vs. poets in the service of society’ or, in other words, the debate about the purpose of art.

As mentioned before, as early as 1922, Nâzım decided that he would produce works to voice the problems of the community. He thought that the ones who argued in defence of “L’art pour l’art” were artists who had an antagonistic relationship with their society or their social classes. On the other hand, arguing “Art is not for art’s sake” led one to ‘envisage art as an active institution in society and artists as “engineers of the soul’ (Hikmet, 1996: 35). Nâzım’s approach called upon artists with a responsibility towards their society, which was to contribute to progressive change (Timuçin, 2002: 24). Art and artists were charged with a duty to lead progress but, in doing so, they were strengthening their ties with the masses rather than forming elitist aesthetic fortresses distant from the realities of society. Thus, it is possible to see here the unbreakable bond Nâzım imagined between himself/his work, in particular, but more importantly, between artists and the masses. It has been mentioned that, according to this approach, masses are the progressive agents who are capable of bringing about change and here we see a comment about the place of art and artists in this picture. From this point of view, change or modernity in the case of Nâzım is not contradictory with tradition, but has risen from

local cultural elements. Nâzım's approach to transformation and the place of masses and traditions in this process of change can be traced in his newspaper articles of the 1930s, which especially expressed his views about the need for a new kind of literature in Turkey.

The discussion on a need to question old literature and praise new work was Nâzım's starting point in his campaign *Demolishing the Idols*. The aim of this campaign was to show that figures who have been made into idols or worshipped are really not worthy. Nâzım argued that people needed to abolish idols, which they are made to believe in order to be able to appreciate real geniuses. His first case was Abdülhak Hamit (Tarhan),<sup>38</sup> about whom he wrote in June 1929.

According to Nâzım, the quality of a literary work can be tested and this test is the appeal the work would have if it were to be translated. Then he goes on to his criticism of Abdülhak Hamit. Hamit wrote in Ottoman and it is fair to claim he was a great Ottoman writer but nothing more.

The biggest test for a writer is to be both local and international so that it would have similar appeal in all languages... Abdülhak Hamit's genius would melt like a foam even in today's [1929, B.S.] Turkish, let alone in other languages (Hikmet, 1996:13, my translation).

A writer, Nâzım claims, has to reflect the social conditions of his time and, if there was a change in perspective, he/she had to express how the new social structure was going to be shaped. While doing so, the writer had to have a universal appeal at the same time. Nâzım thought it was possible to write about local sentiments or one's own society but in such a way that all societies could relate to that sentiment because, he argues, all societies

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<sup>38</sup> Abdülhak Hamit (1852-1937) was one of the first poets to try new form in Turkish poetry. There was a claim that he was 'şair-i azâm' (the Greatest poet) and when he passed away, he was buried in a state ceremony (Özkırmılı, 2004: 19).

go through similar phases (Ibid: 14). According to him, looking at folk culture and being inspired by it does not make an artist parochial but it is indeed a contribution to the universal human experience. Local stories are not only national ones. They are not only the stories of Turkish, Russian or Indian people but part and parcel of a universal story of humanity. The influence of Marxist internationalism appears in the background to this approach.

The second article of *Demolishing the Idols*, published again in *Resimli Ay* in July 1929, focused on Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul),<sup>39</sup> whose sixtieth birthday was officially celebrated by the Ministry of Justice (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 88). The main criticism was that Mehmet Emin was called a national poet, a Turkish poet. This article was quite important since we can see Nâzım's opinions on language, literature and national literature here.

According to Nâzım, Yurdakul did not embody any of the characteristics that a national poet should. First of all, he took issue with language. In fact, Yurdakul had written in 'simple Turkish and in the syllabic meter used in folk poetry' (Lewis: 1965: 343), which should have been a common ground for both poets. However, Nâzım claimed that Yurdakul did not even write in Turkish. His language was an artificial creation that used Turkish words but not according to the grammatical rules or sentence structures of the Turkish language (Hikmet, 1996: 20). Yurdakul preferred Turkish words instead of Persian or Arabic ones. This was in line with attempts of the state at the time to brush aside non-Turkish words in order to purify the language. According to Nâzım, however, his use of language was superficial because using Turkish words did not make a work Turkish as it also had to be structured like Turkish. Moreover, Yurdakul's language was

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<sup>39</sup> Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul) published *Türkçe Şiirler* (Poems in Turkish) in 1897 where the famous poem *Cenge Giderken* appeared. The importance of this poem was that it declared the first eulogy to Turkishness in the lines; 'I am a Turk. My religion, my kind is grand' (Özkırımlı, 1983: 106).

not Turkish because it was not used by any of the social classes like the peasants, artisans, merchants or intellectuals. 'Today's Turkish originates from the literature developed by the peasants and artisans, or in our everyday language, folk literature and folk poetry, not from Mr. Emin' (Ibid: 21, my translation).

It has been mentioned that Nâzım regarded the people as progressive agents and here, in the context of language, we see the articulation of this argument. For him, it was the people who developed the language. He gave weight to the influence working people and its contribution to the evolution of language and literature. He was implicitly criticising elitist approaches to bringing about changes in society. National literature should have its sources in the language and literary traditions of the masses. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Nâzım was critical of top-down language policies, even though he supported some of the modernising efforts of Kemalism.

To put it briefly, according to Nâzım Hikmet, a national poet should;

write in the national language, using words and sentence structures commonly preferred by the masses; write about the struggles of the people against feudalism, imperialism or both; contribute to make a change in language (Hikmet, 1996: 20-22).

Produced by a communist poet, an article about how to be a national poet raises the question why it was important to be a national poet. This is a significant question as it gives us hints about how he envisaged the nation and the relationship of literature and the nation. This discussion is also related to our general argument about the different interpretations of him. It is possible to argue that Nâzım dealt with the issue of national literature as a space where the masses who had been pushed aside, took a more active role in the central project, which was the modernisation of Turkey. In opposition to *Divan*

literature or the elitist literary trends of the Republican period, he was engaged in a deliberate effort to voice the problems of the masses, expressed through the folk traditions of language and literature. His literature aimed to be plebeian but he did not regard the folk as a static cultural bank upon which to draw genuineness. Rather, it is a sort of populism, as mentioned earlier, with an emancipatory charge. It is, indeed, a non-elitist patriotic project aiming to be inclusive of the masses through the production of a modern national literature that was drawn from the practices of and understood by the people.

Thus, Nâzım's stance concerning national literature was, again, not a clear space where patriotism prevailed but reflected the complexity of the driving force behind his work. Patriotism and communism were intertwined and probably complementary elements of inspiration for him. His interest in the people and local culture could project patriotism but his approach was clearly Marxist, charging these people with the ability and the duty to create progressive change.

*Demolishing the Idols* certainly did not remain immune from criticism. In fact, it created a divide in the literary world of the time between progressive publications, such as *Resimli Ay*, *Hareket*, and *Akşam* and the traditionalist ones such as *Milliyet* and *İkdam*, which were supported by conservatives in the Turkish Hearths (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 87). The attacks on the progressives by conservatives were not literary criticisms but took shape around politics. The first reply to *Resimli Ay* was written by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who declared the writers of the paper unpatriotic communists blinded by dogma. When Nâzım wrote about himself and other new literary figures, he had not replied to Karaosmanoğlu directly, but rather chose to concentrate on the question of old

vs. new literature. Nevertheless, when he received a personal attack from Karaosmanoğlu for being a communist, he replied with a poem mocking Karaosmanoğlu personally, which only helped to intensify the divide between conservatives and progressives.

Hamdullah Suphi<sup>40</sup> also criticised *Demolishing the Idols* in line with conservative ideals. He claimed that communists only wanted to demolish religious idols to replace them with ‘the idols of Bolshevik religion’ (quoted in Göksu; Timms, 1999: 89). These nationalist writers used their columns to rally an anti-Communist attack on the papers that published articles by the critical writers. Some nationalist youth called upon by these columnists attacked *Resimli Ay* on 7 July 1929 and were praised by *İkdam* as ‘the noble Turkish Youth showing itself’ (Fuat, 2001: 99). The polemics continued with Nâzım writing derogatory poems about other well-known and respected literary figures, such as Ahmet Haşım and Hamdullah Suphi.

Finally, Nâzım and his old friend Peyami Safa were involved in a polemic even though Safa, as mentioned earlier, had criticised Karaosmanoğlu, together with Nâzım, in 1929. Safa had written articles praising Nâzım on several occasions and even dedicated one of his novels, 9. *Hariciye Koğuşu*, to Nâzım. However, their ideological divide widened over time and was reflected in their columns, by June 1935. They were writing on the same page in the daily newspaper, *Tan*. The details of the polemic, which will not be dealt with here, lasted for about a year. The significance of the duel was that Nâzım was being attacked again for being a communist. Safa also mocked Marxism itself. He said it was easy to be a communist intellectual, that all one had to do was to memorise a few

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<sup>40</sup> Hamdullah Suphi was the chairman of the *Türk Ocakları* (*Turkish Hearths*), a nationalist organisation formed in 1912. Turkish Hearths were nationalist organisations with more members, branches and longevity than any other (Üstel, 1997:51) that helped to spread Turkish nationalism, mainly based on Turkism. Turkism can be summarised as an understanding of Turkish people spread in a larger (than Turkey) geography with racial, linguistic and cultural ties. For more on the Turkish Hearths see Füsün Üstel (1997) *Türk Ocakları (1912-1931)*, İstanbul: İletişim.



generalisations about history and class structure, etc. (Safa quoted in Göze, 1975: 212). He also criticised Nâzım for trying to be a poet of the community, express the wrongdoings in society, and voice the grievances of the exploited masses. He said these writers were only part of a herd that did not have their own opinions or own voice (Ibid: 198-200). Basically, Safa simply downgraded Marxism and fingered Nâzım as a Marxist figure. In reply, Nâzım expressed his feeling of betrayal as he thought his old friend was making him a target for the fascists. Thus, he named his poem that mocks Safa, *Bir Provakatör Üzerine Hiciv Denemeleri (Attempts at Irony on a Provocateur)* (Hikmet, 2002b: 150-55).

Other nationalists joined the attack against Nâzım again, always emphasising that he was a communist and a servant of Russia (Fuat, 2001: 171). There was always more emphasis on his communism than the literary merits of his work, reflecting the fact that the representation of Nâzım solely as a communist had been salient.

From the standpoint of Nâzım Hikmet, however, the main point we can detect from his polemics was the importance he gave to introducing novel approaches to poetry or literature in general. This view was expressed once again in *İt Ürür Kervan Yürür* (Dogs Bark while the caravan goes on), published originally in *Akşam* on 05.01.1935. Nâzım emphasised that there would be groups which would work for change and progress while others would be reluctant and critical of change. World history was nothing more than the history of some making progress while others – dogs just barking behind their backs – stayed behind and made noise (Hikmet, 1996: 67). Here, we can detect his commitment to modernity as a conception ‘of the “now” as a moment of possibility... as a narrative of transformation’ (Aguiar, 2007: 107). The continuous theme of transformation brought

about by the masses can be detected in these articles which were directly about modernity.

In the second article of the same title, he talked about the changes brought about in the Republic such as the laws that abolished the caliphate and the law regulating the dress-code and introducing European-style hats and attempts to purify Turkish. He regarded these as stages in a revolution. Nâzım argued there were and would be backward people who would not want change, and described them with certain references to aspects of their appearance (such as their beards) so that the reader could tell he was referring to religious conservatives (Ibid: 68-69).

These articles are meaningful in showing not only that he was a progressive and critical of dogma but also that the specific references he made show us that he thought along the lines of the Kemalist elite of the time. He at least praised the changes brought about by the Republican regime that replaced Ottoman laws in certain areas of life. In line with the tendency of the left in Turkey, he saw Mustafa Kemal as a revolutionary and the Republic as a step forward from the feudal structure of the Ottoman Empire. Nâzım as a symbolic figure of the Turkish left shared the view that Turkish modernisation was progressive and was indeed a revolution. Those articles also demonstrated that Nâzım was, on the one hand, supportive of the Kemalist modernisation and, on the other, expressing his own vision for a better society, which was not accepted by mainstream discourse. It was those criticisms from a communist point of view that led to him being treated as an articulator of counter narratives, an 'other', mainly as a traitor.

We see that, like the Kemalist elite of the time, he regarded religious authorities and the Ottoman Empire as symbols of the past that needed to be forgotten and definitely

replaced. Turkey had been transformed from a traditional feudal structure and this transformation had taken place through a struggle against feudalism and conservatism domestically as well as against the imperialism of outside forces. He claimed the new society required a new literature, a literature that was also going to talk about those struggles. Writers of his time, he thought, should talk about the change in Turkish society.

Even though he was critical of conservatism he was not indifferent to tradition. In fact, one of the important characteristics of Nâzım as a writer was that he used certain traditional works and transformed them by placing them into his own time, giving them a modern and also revolutionary outlook. This use of tradition and combining it with communist ideals and methodology could clearly be seen in his poem *Kerem Gibi (Like Kerem)*, written in 1930.

#### **5.4. *Like Kerem and Ferhad and Shirin***

*Like Kerem* was the first poem in which Nâzım made a direct reference to the folk literature of Turkey. It was based on a folk tale about the impossible love of Kerem and Aslı<sup>41</sup>.

Nâzım borrows the theme of burning and applies it in the poem to express his commitment to communism. The poem basically explains the oppressive political

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<sup>41</sup> It is a folk tale about Kerem – son of the local leader in Isfahan, and Aslı – daughter of an Armenian monk. Their love is impossible because of their religious beliefs. After the long story of the monk sending Aslı away and Kerem chasing her, Aslı's father gives in and lets them get married. However, he has made Aslı wear a magical shirt, the buttons of which could not be totally undone. Kerem tries all night and when the morning sun comes up, unable to reach his lover, he burns with the fire of his love and is consumed by his own fire. After forty days of mourning on his grave, Aslı also dies and their ashes mix and they are finally together (Hikmet, 1998b: 188-9).

atmosphere in Turkey by using allegories. Then he refers to the warning issued by his friends Vâ-Nû and Şevket Süreyya that he will burn like Kerem in his own fire. They told him to keep a low profile in order to avoid getting in trouble with the authorities. Vâ-Nû writes that he told Nâzım to conduct politics within the boundaries of what is possible (Vâ-Nû, 1999: 356). Şevket Süreyya, who was part of the *Kadro* movement and who had close relations with the central authorities there tried to get him a job in Ankara. However, Nâzım did not take their advice and did actually get into trouble for his communism and spent most of his life in the courts and jail. Nâzım in this poem declares that he is ready to ‘burn’ for the sake of his ideals. Personal lives can be sacrificed for the common good. The actual lines can speak for themselves:

If I don’t burn

If you don’t burn

If we don’t burn

how will

the darkness

change

into

light? (Hikmet, 1998b: 189).

As Nedim Gürsel argues, Nâzım calls for a modern and communist responsibility while borrowing a theme from traditional folk culture (1992: 22). Kerem dies in this poem not because of his longing for Aslı, but for his revolutionary ideals.

The poem is also a prominent example of the use of the new style the poet tries to develop. He not only uses tradition and transforms it into a call for and declaration of his own modern responsibility as a communist but also challenges traditional structures in Turkish poetry. It breaks from traditional uses of rhymes and instead makes use of short lines and broken rhythms. As mentioned before, Nâzım believed in and tried to achieve a dialectical harmony of structure and content. He implemented a new poetic form in order to enhance the Marxist content, which he also tried to introduce to the Turkish literary scene. In poems such as *Like Kerem*, it can be argued that '[t]he power of the poem derives from the tension between sonorous repetitions and staccato line-breaks, accentuated by experimental typography' (Göksu; Timms, 1999:86). Experimental typography is an artistic style combining scripture and drawing that was especially common to the Dadaist, Futurist and other artistic movements of the 1910s and 1920s (Drucker,1994:2). It can be said to be a stylistic experiment to enhance the appeal of words by implementation of a striking structure. It cannot be argued with certainty that Nâzım applied experimental typography as a deliberate artistic choice. He did not mention it in any of his articles in that period or in his interviews on that period. Göksu and Timms refer to this style only in passing in the above quotation and do not dwell on the subject either. Nevertheless, we know that Nâzım was in search of stylistic 'experiments' in his poetry and he was influenced by the style of Mayakovski, who had applied this style and was one of the artists studied by Drucker. The poet experimented with typography and introduced free-style sentence structures into the Turkish literary scene, which made him one of the main figures in modern Turkish literature.

Nâzım tried to revolutionise Turkish poetry. The drive behind this search for a new and revolutionary structure was, in fact, Marxism (Gürsel, 1992: 23). A similar attempt at transforming a folk tale into a revolutionary call would appear in future works of Nâzım such as the play *Ferhad ile Şirin (Ferhad and Shirin)*<sup>42</sup>, written in 1948.

In Nâzım's version, after Ferhad had worked on the mountain for a decade, Mehmene Banu died leaving no barriers to the lovers being together. However, Ferhad prefers to finish his job. He chooses helping the community over his personal happiness (Hikmet, 1948: 59-135). Ferhad, towards the end of the story, explains to Şirin that their happiness and love cannot be thought separately from the happiness of the whole community or even humanity, which is the argument of the play (Gürsel, 1992: 99; Hikmet, 1948: 134).

It should be mentioned that Ferhad carves the mountain on his own and probably with bare hands or small tools. In other words, his mission is pure labour dedicated to the good of humanity and probably his strength comes from the awareness of the contribution he was making to the development of the community that would come with fresh water resources (Şener, 2002: 66). Moreover, there were underlying messages about the class differences between the ruling elite like Mehmene Banu and the villagers (Ibid: 71). It can easily be argued that the elements that the *Ferhad and Shirin* play was based on – glorification of labour, idealism and dedication of Ferhad to a revolutionary change, depiction of class differences – were evidence of the Marxist approach Nâzım had added to the traditional folk tale.

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<sup>42</sup> Similar to *Kerem and Aslı*, *Ferhad and Şirin* is originally a love story in which Şirin's older sister Mehmene Banu, a powerful and wicked leader, is in love with Ferhad herself so she objects to the lovers' marriage. She sets a condition that Ferhad opens a waterway through the mountains surrounding their town that is suffering from drought and related illnesses, saying that Ferhad and Şirin could get married only if he were successful.

### 5.5. *Jokond ile Si-Ya-U (Gioconda and Si-Ya-U)*

*Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* (1929) is another poem that borrows a well-known element and uses symbolism to express revolutionary commitments. This time the element is not rooted in folk culture but is Gioconda herself or, she is as more commonly known, Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci. *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* is 'a vehement indictment of Western bourgeois decadence and colonialism' (Halman, 2006: 91), told as a love story between a Chinese communist student and Gioconda that is sparked in the Louvre, in which Gioconda follows Si-Ya-U to Shanghai but only to witness his execution. After Si-Ya-U's execution, Gioconda becomes a fighter against anti-communists. At the end of the poem, she is also arrested and burnt (Hikmet, 1998b: 59-94). The last lines suggest that she was finally totally free and satisfied, having a genuine smile on her face as she had done her part for the struggle of liberation (Babayev, 2002:143). This poem, which possesses fantastic elements, is based on a piece of reality. Si-Ya-U is in fact Emi Siao, one of Nâzım's friends from the Communist University in Moscow who, Nâzım thought, had been killed alongside other communists.

This poem combines various elements. According to Göksu and Timms, it 'subverts traditional gender roles by emphasising the involvement of women in the revolutionary struggle' (1999: 91). Involvement of women in struggle is a theme that would also appear in Nâzım's *The Epic of the Liberation War*. Kurdakul, *et al.*, argued that it was a poem reflecting the sensitivity felt by Nâzım for oppressed people internationally. The poem is an expression of discomfort about the impact of imperialism in India and China, forcing people of those countries to work in inhumane conditions (Kurdakul, 2002: 23). Mehmet

Fuat referred to the references to *Divan* literature in the structure of the poem (2001: 114).

Certainly, the poem stood out among Nâzım's works with its complexity of content. Personal reality is combined with fantasy, a world-wide known artwork becomes a revolutionary woman, breaking 'free from the passivity assigned to her by the culture of the museum and becomes an active subject whose ideas challenge both bourgeois aestheticism and the patriarchal cult of femininity' (Göksu; Timms: 91). The message of the poem was that art should be in the service of the freedom of peoples and was also trying to draw attention to the revolutionary struggle in China (Babayev, 2002: 140).

#### **5.6. *Benerci Kendini Niçin Öldürdü? (Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?)***

Making a reference to a communist in Asia, this time in India, *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?*<sup>43</sup> is one of the works whose message about revolution and communism was quite clear and explicit. The main theme or the conflict dealt with the right of a revolutionary to commit suicide and the question of under which conditions committing suicide would be justified (Hikmet, 1996: 9). Once more fiction and reality are used together in this work. Some commentators even argued that it was the story of Nâzım, Şevket Süreyya and Vedat Nedim, while the latter two were fellow communists whose ideological commitments had changed (Nesimi, 1977; Karaca, 1992). Vedat Nedim had done more than just change his position regarding communism: he transformed from

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<sup>43</sup> It is the story of Indian independence against British imperialism told through the interlinked lives of Somedeva, an imprisoned writer, Banerjee, who was taught to be a traitor and Roy Dranat who becomes a supporter of the bourgeoisie. Somedeva represents the idealist who devotes all his energy to support the resistance even though he had tuberculosis. Banerjee is believed to be a traitor because he had an affair with a British woman and was set free when other revolutionaries were arrested (Hikmet, 2002b: 7-90).



being the secretary of the Turkish Communist Party to an informer in 1927, causing many arrests. Şevket Süreyya was criticised by Nâzım for having close ties with the central government in Ankara (Karaca, 1992: 86-7).

Suspicion about Banerjee among other communists and his being treated as an informer also derives from Nâzım's own life. In 1929, in Izmir, police discovered the underground communist movement accidentally and many communists were arrested. There was a divide in the Turkish Communist Party at the time and Nâzım was leading an opposition movement against the leadership of Şefik Hüsnü. After mass arrests Nâzım and his followers were not accused of secret communist activity in police reports, making them the target of suspicion in the party cadres that would end up in his suspension from the party (Nesimi, 1977: 19-21).

To go back to the story, Banerjee was isolated from the movement for a while and thought of suicide but he chose not to, in order to devote himself to the cause as long as he could after he heard Lenin's exhortation that, 'you must devote all your life to the revolution'. Thus, he became involved in revolutionary activity again and spent fifteen years in jail. During his sentence, he became a hero and was asked to be the leader after his release. Banerjee, however, chose to kill himself, to let younger generations lead the independence movement, as he saw himself not fit to lead a revolutionary movement anymore (Hikmet, 2002b: 7-90). His decision to die, like his earlier decision to stay alive, is shaped by the commitment to his cause. 'The right thing for a revolutionary is to speed up change and, if one is impeding change, one could cease to exist' (Nesimi, 1977: 25, my translation). Each time Banerjee is certain he is making the choice that would be in the best interest of the independence movement at the time.

The protagonists of the poem, Banerjee and Somedeva, are representative of the revolutionaries in colonial and semi-colonial countries, even though they have different choices about how to serve the cause. Somedeva tries to be part of the struggle under any condition even though he is very ill, while Banerjee chooses death when he believes he is not strong enough to be part of the struggle. In their own ways they are committed fighters of freedom against the petit-bourgeoisie of their own country and also against the imperial power, Britain. Certainly, even though the story takes place in India, the story of Banerjee and Somedeva is an international one of activists in the anti-imperialist struggle. As Babayev cites, 'similar problems about organising the leaders of working class and the struggle to free the petit bourgeois from the corruption caused by the bourgeoisie' (Babayev, 2002: 155), which is told in this poem with a reference to India, can also be seen in Turkey and elsewhere.

The poem introduces other characters (one of which is Roy Dranat) who used to be revolutionaries, but are not as committed to anti-imperialist struggle as Banerjee and Somedeva. These characters have become representatives of the petit bourgeois. Nâzım is critical of those who give in to the existing political structure or, in other words, have become traitors of the communist and anti-imperialist struggle. Those who have rather chosen compromises and co-operation with imperialists and the bourgeoisie in their efforts to transform society (whether it is India or Turkey) were the target of criticism in Nâzım's work.

Nâzım, on other occasions as well, for example, in the aforementioned *Demolishing the Idols* discussion, expressed the need for a transformation in the Turkish society (which he considered natural), which was from a feudal and semi-colonial system into a modern

one. But how this change was going to come about and what kind of society it would be is where communists like Nâzım and others like his ‘traitor’ friend Şevket Süreyya and certainly the Kemalist elite, parted. Nâzım valued and praised some of the Kemalist movements’ introductions and methods. He took a clear stance on the liberation war. He valued it as an anti-imperialist struggle in line with most of the leftists in Turkey. Besides giving credit to Kemalists for some of their actions, he was still able to criticise the *Kadro* movement for being close to the Ankara government because Nâzım believed that the anti-imperialist element of Kemalism ended with the end of the war. Turkey became a country with a liberal, free-market economy, allying with what Nâzım would consider imperialist countries of the West and, what is more, Turkish foreign policy of the time was sympathetic towards fascist countries like Germany and Italy.

*Why did Banerjee kill himself?* is again a complex work that made references to many issues. It tried to be the voice of colonies, expressing the fact that the struggle for liberation had to be fought against the local bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie as well as against imperial powers. In this work Nâzım raised the question of what was the best way to serve the communist struggle and whether suicide could be a choice.

### **5.7. *Taranta-Babu’ya Mektuplar (Letters to Taranta-Babu)***

*Letters to Taranta-Babu*<sup>44</sup> (1945) was a long political poem written in the form of letters from an Ethiopian art student in Rome to his wife in Ethiopia, whose main conflict is the brutality of fascism in the context of Italian invasion of Abyssinia. *Letters to Taranta-*

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<sup>44</sup> The original title of this poem was *An Ethiopian in Italy* but it was changed to avoid censorship.

*Babu* was published in an atmosphere when the right-wing press was writing in support of the invasion and when criticism of Italy was banned by the government (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 123).

The Ethiopian in Italy expresses his disappointment in seeing fascism prevail in Italy; a country that he thought had a rich cultural heritage. There are references to the artistic achievements of Italian artists of the Renaissance in lines like 'no more do the great masters cut the marble like a silk fabric' (Hikmet, 2002b: 191). Names like Dante and Verdi are directly mentioned as icons of Italian culture. However, these are now being replaced by the brutality of fascism and 'one dark, one blood-stained shadow' (Ibid: 195). In the final letter, the protagonist informs his wife that both will be shot. The poem involves references to violence and death brought by imperialists and fascists. It was important that Nâzım was trying to draw attention to the violence ordinary people faced because of fascism 'when people were still extolling Mussolini's magnificent social reforms, not to mention his civilising mission in Africa' (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 126).

Besides the brutality in Ethiopia, the inequalities that fascism had caused in Italy itself were also mentioned. It depicts poverty in *Cartieri Popolari* where the Italian working class lives (Babayev, 2002:172). While the working class suffers, Fascism serves the wealthy bourgeoisie and ruling classes. It is bankers and the Vatican that fund Mussolini. The reality of fascism in the form which he tries to convey is a system where the rich and powerful exploit the poor for their own interests. Fascism is created with the support of rich landowners, the bankers of Rome and the Pope (Kurdakul, 2002: 24). The Italian working class, 'Sicilian fisherman' and 'the plumber of Turin' are not in favour of attacking innocent Ethiopians but they are being used by the fascist leaders (Babayev,

2002: 174). The poet reflects his underlying belief that the masses are 'pure'. As will be seen later, he creates a pure image of the people in *Human Landscapes* as well, and he reproduces the belief that locates the evil with the elite – the bourgeoisie and the papacy in the case of Italy and the bourgeoisie in the case of Turkey.

In expressing an affinity with the people of Italy and Ethiopia, Nâzım also reproduced his commitment to internationalism, which he would later describe in a poem, saying: 'Do not mind, I am blond / I am an Asian / Do not mind my eyes are blue / I am an African (*Asya-Afrika Yazarlarına-To the Writers of Asia and Africa*, 2002d [1962]: 117-8). In his newspaper articles and later poems he would take on the duty of directing attention to suppression, violence, colonialism and war in a variety of places in the globe. In that period he wrote about the rise of fascism in Italy and in Spain, fervently calling for an internationally organised opposition, which became more obvious in 1937, when a rumour spread in intellectual circles that Nâzım had joined the Spanish Civil War (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 134). In the previous sections we have seen that he voiced criticism against oppression in India and China. His commitment to internationalism never faded away as he would write many poems about the WWII and the Korean War in 1950s, which told the story of devastation caused by war in the eyes of Japanese, Turkish, and Korean people. But in 1935, more specifically in the *Letters to Taranta-Babu*, his main concern was fascism.

Fascism was not the concern of only Western Europe but sympathy for fascist policies was prevalent among the right-wing intellectuals of Turkey at the time. *Letters to Taranta-Babu* emerged in an atmosphere when the right-wing press in Turkey published articles in support of the invasion (Fuat, 2001: 175). A government-imposed ban on

criticism of Italy justified by the diplomatic alliance between the two countries was also implemented as mentioned by Göksu; Timms (1999: 123) and Babayev (2002: 171). Even though these writers inform us about the affinity some Turkish elite felt to German and Italian fascisms, only Babayev refers to how *Letters to Taranta-Babu* involved a criticism of the right-wing intellectual movement in Turkey that was masked by contextualising the story in Italy. Babayev claims that the sixth letter of the poem, which talks about the degeneration of art and literature in Italy, is actually a critique of the Turkish literary scene. Nâzım implicitly questions those columnists and writers who support the German and Italian state and even call upon the Turks to join them (Babayev, 2002: 177).

A parallel interest in race was prevalent in Turkey at the time, not only among the intellectuals, but at the state level as well. As we have seen in a previous chapter under the section 'Race in Turkish Nationalism', the belief that Turks were a superior race that had contributed to the enhancement of humankind – an imagination created by the Turkish History Thesis – was a main element of the discourse of nationalism in the 1930s. State nationalist discourse had defined race as a main criterion defining who a Turk was in that period. The right-wing press had adopted this state discourse. Unsurprisingly, the same writers who believed in 'the superiority of the Turkish race' were those who supported Hitler and Mussolini (Fuat, 2001: 175). Moreover, opposition in any form, but especially based on Marxist premises, was banned in the country by several laws<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> More on the authoritarian policies to silence communist opposition in 1930s can be found in the chapter: 'Turkish Left and Kemalism' under the section 'The Repression of the Left: 1925-1960'.

*Letters to Taranta-Babu* was used as evidence in the 1938 Army and Navy Trials<sup>46</sup> (Babayev, 2002: 177). Coşkun, who has written a detailed analysis of each of Nâzım's trials (without reference to this work), also claims that the anti-fascist movement that the poet led was the main reason behind the 1938 accusations and trials. He draws attention to the 'fascist and racist propaganda' used by the press (2002: 145) and argues that the Army Trial was a planned blow to the 'progressive' and 'communist movement' (Ibid: 142).

Nâzım's poem, while creating awareness about the tools of militarism and oppression in the hands of fascists, the self-seeking bourgeoisie, the Papacy and certainly Mussolini, was also an attack on militarism and oppression in Turkey, which probably led to his imprisonment in the following years. In the light of the parallels that can be drawn between state policies and the belief system of right-wing intellectuals as well as between fascist European countries and Turkey, Nâzım's work can easily be interpreted not only as an international concern for righteousness but an attack on the rise of nationalism, militarism and, indeed, racism in Turkey.

### **5.8. German Fascism and Racism<sup>47</sup>**

Nâzım Hikmet's struggle with fascism was not limited to *Letters to Taranta-Babu* or to his poetry. He also published a pamphlet called *German Fascism and Racism* (1936). The first part of the pamphlet places racism in historical perspective, starting with how human

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<sup>46</sup> Details of these trials can be found in the next chapter.

<sup>47</sup> This pamphlet was edited from Théodor Balk's *Races Mythe et Vérité*, Ernst Henry's *Hitler over Europe* and B.M. Bernadiner's *Filosofia Nietzsche I Fascism* (Hikmet, 1995:258).

beings treated weaker people during the hunter-gatherer period. The next stage of human evolution, he lays out was Ancient Athens and Rome, where slavery was justified by nature. The barbarians were regarded as natural slaves for the Athenians and Romans.

When the New World was discovered, Spaniards thought that the native peoples of the Americas were so primitive that they could not believe them to be human. This time the justification to enslave the 'primitive' people was found in Christianity. Spaniards saw themselves as being given a duty to 'civilise' these pagan people through the teachings of Christianity and having the right to 'deprive these "lesser-humans" of their rights, lands and, of course, their gold' (Hikmet, 1995: 264).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the scientific justification of higher and lower races and slavery emerged. The earliest anthropological studies claimed African Blacks to be 'a kind of animal between apes and human beings' (Ibid: 268). Methods to prove a hierarchy among people would change through time but the core argument that there was a superior race and inferior races would remain intact. The superior were not Romans or Christians anymore but whites, who were thought of having the right to rule over the inferior blacks of Africa and enslave them. These arguments were in fact formulated to help 'big colonising capital holders and slave merchants' (Ibid.).

Nâzım then talks about how the theory of Charles Darwin was interpreted to show that the survival of the fittest was natural and that it applied to human beings as well (ibid. 269-70). Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' was transformed into 'might is right'. It was the right of those who were powerful to rule and that was only natural. The English were regarded as having the right to expand and rule over India.



The article eventually turns its attention to the rise of the German Empire and capitalism parallel to the development of racial theories and its so-called explanation of scientific evolution. Germany resorts to 'racism that was backed up by biology, anthropology, philosophy, ethnology, and sociology'. The world was seen to be divided among black, yellow and white races while the white race was defined with all positive characteristics of body and mind (Ibid: 274). The other important divide introduced was the one between Aryan and Semitic races. These arguments about race, according to Nâzım, were tools in the hands of capitalists and political leaders to control the oppressed classes. Nâzım argued in many countries, 'especially in Germany and Austria, "national capitalism" used anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiments to draw popular frustration, caused by the impoverishment of the bourgeoisie, towards the Jewish capitalists' (Ibid: 275, my translation).

Nâzım explains racism through a historical perspective and as an outcome of the material forces of a given era. The modes of production change but human beings always find a way to justify their oppression by what they regard as inferior. When it comes to German racism and fascism, it is certainly neither a matter of nature explained by the racists themselves that the Aryan race is superior, nor concerned with any ideology. It is the outcome of the material needs of German capitalists and imperialists to rule over anyone who is not of Aryan race and to regard them as inferior. The German bourgeoisie resorts to the racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric to mobilise the masses.

He sets out the material and historical conditions under which the bourgeois imperialism would be transformed into fascism and mentions the indecisiveness of capitalist relations, the existence of huge amounts of *déclassé* social elements, the impoverishment of the

urban petit-bourgeoisie and intellectuals, the discontent of village petit bourgeois, and the threat of a mass movement by the proletariat.

Moreover, he develops the argument that the foreign policy of Hitler is supported by the steel and coal industry, his policies being even shaped in order to serve the interests of the “Thyssen” group (Ibid: 306). The need for both steel and coal in that period and the fact that necessary sources of steel in Lorraine were owned by the ‘Comité des Forges’ cartel were the determinants of German foreign policy. Under these circumstances, the only way out for Thyssen was to take over Lorraine. Thus, the first target of German expansionism was France, followed by Britain and the USA, which were posing a global threat to German capitalism (Ibid: 307). ‘The foreign policy of fascism is war’ (Ibid: 324).

Both the content and the methodology of the article are shaped by Marxism. Certainly, Nâzım here has tried to increase awareness about Fascism and racism. He makes an attempt to analyse both of these ‘ideologies’ throughout history with a materialist approach. He uses the materialist methodology in the criticism of racist essentialism, arguing that the same social conditions would cause a similar intellectual mindset in various races. ‘Ideological preferences have nothing to do with race but are shaped by society one lives in, the mode of production of that society and the social class one is a member of’ (Ibid: 299). ‘Marx’ Nâzım argues, would not have been ‘Marxist in the age of prophets, not would Muhammad have been Muhammad in the age of Lenin’ (Ibid.). One is shaped not by their race or some natural, essential characteristics but by the social conditions one experiences.

In his newspaper articles in 1937 as well, Nâzım dealt with the rise of Fascism in Germany and Italy. In his article ‘Why has Fascism been successful in Germany?’ he argues that Social Democrats allied with the bourgeoisie. The rise of Fascism and military dictatorship is again explained as a tool that capitalists employed to deal with the negative effects of capitalism on the economy and the people. Capitalists needed the dictatorship as a response to the economic devastation in Germany after the World War I (WWI) and the Versailles Treaty so that they could ‘implement laws for more working hours and lesser wages’ to improve the economy without resistance from the masses (Nâzım, 1993: 98).

As for the rise of fascism in Italy, he makes a similar analysis. The economy of Italy was weakened in WWI and the working class was uncomfortable with their economic conditions; thus, there was a popular support for the unified Socialist and Communist Parties in 1919 (Ibid: 96). The government under the leadership of Ciolitti backed up fascists in order to avoid a mass movement that would lead to Socialist Party rule. In both cases, in Germany and Italy, Nâzım gives weight to the lack of resistance and strong opposition on the part of socialist and social democratic parties (Nâzım, 1993: 97; 100). On the other hand, in France it was the fascists who did not have popular support and ‘the conditions for a revolution did not exist’; therefore, fascists could not have been successful (Ibid: 91).

During 1936 and 1937, Nâzım wrote extensively on the Spanish Civil War and about the coming Second World War that seemed certain as fascism and militarism was on the rise, the arms-race was taking place, and expansionism was occurring in Europe as well as in the Far East. The main theme of the newspaper articles he wrote in *Tan* or *Akşam* was a

call for peace, anti-Fascism, and an explanation of war as a capitalist tool as the need of capitalists for the expansion to new markets arose.

In March 1937, he wrote 'This is a Good Cause for a Fight', making references to the declarations of German diplomats and the British Foreign Secretary, arguing how all big powers justify their need for colonies. 'Colonies provide new markets, military bases, cheap labour and secure discrepancies in the mainland' (Ibid: 19). Again in March, the article, 'War is a Profitable Business' talks about how war benefits the weapon industry while ordinary people starve and young generations die in the wars. 'National expenditures will raise together with starvation, misery, death...but at the end of the day, the weapons industry will be sharing the profits...in return for human blood. Mind you, war is a profitable business' (Ibid: 39-40, my translation).

The last years before his imprisonment, Nâzım was mainly engaged in an effort to contribute to the awareness of the brutality of war and fascism. He wrote extensively on these issues not only as a humanist or an advocate of international peace but also as a Marxist. He used historical materialism as the main tool for analysing history and the rise of militarism, racism and fascism in that period. Alongside his political commitment to anti-fascism, Nâzım produced one of his most significant works, *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin*, which is also a great example of how he combined local traditions with Marxist ideology.

### **5.9. *Simavne Kadısı Oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı (The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin) and its Epilogue Milli Gurur (National Pride)***

Talat Halman, who regards this *Epic* (1936) as Nâzım's masterpiece provides a precise summary of the plot:

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sheikh Bedreddin propagated a quasi-republic, or at least a commune, based on the principles of equality, fraternity, and social justice, where not only Muslims but also adherents of other faiths would constitute a classless society. Each individual would exercise freedom of conscience and ideas, yet fully enjoy collective ownership of property, and share all assets and products, all land and crops: everything except wives (2006: 89).

The appeal of the story of Sheikh Bedreddin for Nâzım was that the Sheikh aimed to establish a society in line with the principles of communism as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This story also narrates the reaction of the Ottoman authority to this autonomous society. The Ottoman military suppressed the movement and executed its leader Sheikh Bedreddin and two of his disciples, Börklüce Mustafa and Torlak Kemal, as well as thousands of rebels. The struggle for communism and its suppression is vivid in the following lines:

Ten thousand gave eight thousand of their men,  
So they might all together sing their songs,  
and all together haul the nets from the waters,  
and all together work the iron like embroidery,  
and all together plough the earth,  
all together eat the honeyed figs,  
and all together say they share everything,

everywhere,  
except for their beloved's cheek (Hikmet, 2002: 64).

Mustafa had organised the revolt and managed to gather the support of

Turkish peasants of Aydın,  
Greek sailors from Chios  
Jewish tradesman (Ibid.).

The stress on togetherness is such that the Bedreddin movement earns a life as a call for unification and fraternity among 'different social groups, religions and races' (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 129).

Besides the emphasis on these ideals, the importance of the *Epic* from the point of view of communism is that it also explains the story as a class struggle between poor peasants and the Ottoman elite. One of the main arguments of Kemalism prevalent in the years this work was written was that the state was representing a classless society. Nâzım 'wrote about how the ones in power are actually protecting the interests of certain social classes instead of fulfilling their duty towards the whole community' (Gürsel, 1992: 202). In that sense, the *Epic* challenged the official narrative of the current and historical society of Asia Minor. It introduced a Marxist analysis of the historical event – the Sheikh Bedreddin movement. It basically argued that there had been and there still were social classes in 1936, like in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and that history was shaped by their conflict.

For Nâzım, the Bedreddin movement is an early example of a peasant revolution. It is the revolution of the peasants of Asia Minor who love and respect land and want to own the land they are working on. The movement is a class movement of the peasants against the landowners and the Ottoman elite. The relationship between the peasants and their land is

emphasised and Earth is personified as the ‘most beautiful woman... soon to give birth’ (Hikmet, 2002: 62). However, when the revolution was harshly repressed, the earth also laid wasted (Gürsel, 1992: 244). Here, Nâzım tries to show how oppression has violated the natural course of the dependent relationship between the land and the ones who worked on it. Peasants are also depicted as the genuine owners of land even if they are not the material/legal ones.

It is clear that Marxist arguments and methodology were the main sources of Nâzım’s understanding of history and his work. He even felt the need to explain what he understood a Marxist to be in a footnote in the *Epic*. In the body of the text he wrote that his mind knew and believed that the defeat of the rebels was ‘a result of historical, social and economic conditions’ but his heart still hurt for the dead. The footnote is meant as a reply to those Marxists who would criticise him for separating his mind and heart and imply that they would mock him for feeling sorrow even though he should be a realist and know that it was those mentioned conditions which led to that result. Thus, Nâzım claims a ‘Marxist is not a “mechanical man” or a robot, but a concrete, historical, social human being with flesh and blood, nerves, a head and a heart’ (Hikmet, 2002: 247; Göksu; Timms, 1999: 130). Mehmet Fuat argues that this footnote was targeting the active members of the *TKP*, since ‘Nâzım was suspended from the party with the argument that he was anti-Stalinist’ (Fuat, 2001: 197).

Another more explicit reply to the criticism from the left was the epilogue Nâzım added as a separate pamphlet, *National Pride*. The *Epic* was regarded as too ‘emotional and nationalistic’ by communist readers (Göksu; Timms, 1999:131). Nâzım declared that he felt a national pride. ‘Any conscious proletariat of any nation which was able to have an

epic like that of the Bedreddin movement would feel pride' (Hikmet, 2002b: 270). He justifies the argument that internationalism and patriotism do not necessarily contradict each other by quoting 'Lenin's 35<sup>th</sup> Article of "Social Democrat" written in 1914' that takes pride in the Russian nation for having created a revolutionary, socialist class (Ibid: 271-2).

Nâzım in this prologue constructs his own reading of the past that is reshaped around the complexity of communist ideals and patriotic feelings which is, as it is the case in many of his works, articulated through his own linguistic and stylistic contributions. He contributes to the construction of patriotism as a concept distinct from nationalism and containing Marxist analysis, as it was generally articulated by the Turkish left and even Lenin. As has been seen, the Turkish left was under the influence of Leninist interpretations of nationalism and anti-imperialism. By narrating this story as a combination of patriotism and communism, he establishes his place as a figure of leftist discourses and cultural productivity, which led to his being, treated as a heretic by the state. On the other hand, from our perspective, it should also be noticed that he indeed constructed a grey area by references to patriotism, mainly through the recurrent theme of local cultural ties that indeed becomes a tool of the colonisation of Nâzım himself and the Turkish left in general, which he represented.

Halman, Gürsel, Göksu, and Timms give weight to different interpretations of the work. However, it can be argued that the common reference point is that Nâzım regarded Sheikh Bedreddin movement as an example of a primitive communist society. He was moved by Bedreddin's ideal of a classless society in which everyone, regardless of their religion, would be equal. In fact, in his interview with Mehmet Emin Yalman, published



in the daily *Vatan* in 1949, Nâzım praises Bedreddin for having idealised ‘fraternity among human beings long before Marx’ (Yalman, 1996: 42). One of the facts that make this work important for our discussion is that it tells the story of the possibility of a communist society. It also shows how the movement to create the commune was suppressed and its leaders were executed by the Ottoman State. Parallels can be drawn between the means the state employs to deal with the opposition in the time of Bedreddin and Nâzım. The establishment used force to silence and prevent the taking over of power by the revolutionaries. Class conflict between people in the small towns of Aydın and the military serving the state is another theme. Nâzım tries to be the voice of the people against the holders of power. All these themes and purposes of the poem support the argument that communism shaped Nâzım’s mindset and was reflected in his work.

In the analysis of this work we are again faced with the influence of communism, on the one hand, and patriotism, on the other. Nâzım, by his complex use of language and style, had shaped a historic story in order to reflect his vision of the folk and communism. He once again constructed his own vision of history. This epic was also a good example of how he made use of the cultural heritage of his country. It is mostly the structural nature of the work that shows us the links Nâzım established with the local. The *Epic* opens with an introductory prose in which the main character is reading the story of Sheikh Bedreddin in jail and is called on by Mustafa to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first part where his journey through time takes place, Ottoman words are preferred to form a poem that has the sound of Divan poetry (Fuat, 2001: 191). In the tenth part, Nâzım uses pieces of peasant poetry but writes a modern poem with free verse (Ibid: 198-9). He even directly quotes three historians of the time, Neşrî, Şükrullah bin Şihabiddin and Âşıkpaşazâde

(Gürsel, 1992: 252). Traditional material on the Sheikh Bedreddin Rebellion, either as a historical document or a folk song is used in Nâzım's Epic, creating ties with the modern and the local but making an argument for the communist cause.

The structure as a combination of free verse, traditional poetry and prose as well as a mixture of literary types such as poetry, tale and even fairy tale is regarded as a step towards *Landscapes*. Nâzım said years later that this work was a challenge to use 'the different styles he had experienced before. It was after this book, and especially in prison, that the problematic of structure was clear to me' (Hikmet quoted in Fuat, 2001: 203). In *Human Landscapes*, as we will see, Hikmet aimed to use different styles again to make sure it expressed the complexity of the characters, events, and history shaping the work. In *Landscapes*, as he wrote to Kemal Tahir, he aimed to tell the story of 'Turkey in a specific time period through concrete stories of people of various classes' (Hikmet, 1968: 139). *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* can be argued to be a depiction of social conditions in a specific historical period, reflecting the class conflict between the peasants of Aydın and the Ottoman military and land-owning elite (Gürsel, 202).

#### **5.10. *Human Landscapes from My Country***

*Human Landscapes from My Country* is regarded as Nâzım Hikmet's 'magnum opus' (Halman, 1996: 9). It is also his work that has been one of the hundred recommended books by the Ministry of Education for middle school education since 2004. It is a highly

acclaimed work, as it combines different styles and a structured chaos of characters, stories, and historical events. The five books composing *Human Landscapes from My Country* reflect the peak of the poet's artistic evolution.

The plot of the first book takes place in a third-class carriage of a train going from Istanbul to Asia Minor, and its characters are peasants and prisoners. The second book, in contrast, tells the story of members of the bourgeoisie and takes place in a more luxurious train, the Anatolia Express. In *Book Three* there are scenes from a prison and a hospital in Asia Minor where some of the prisoners from the first book are serving time. *Book Four*, which was influenced by the time the work was being formulated, talks about World War II, especially the resistance of the Soviets against German invasion. *Book Five* gives the impression that it was not finished<sup>48</sup> and does not have a specific theme.

Besides its literary successes, one of the significant characteristics of the work was that it expressed the formulation of modernity designed in the mind of Nâzım Hikmet. Nâzım used the train as a symbol of the modernising efforts of the state – ‘the railway was a public space structured by the state’ (Aguiar, 2007: 112). Moreover, the two trains moving in opposite directions could be interpreted as a symbol of the challenges posed to the Kemalist project ‘in a dynamic space in which modernity might be explored and re-conceptualized’ (Ibid.) Nâzım's alternative, challenging the conception of the modernisation of Turkey and the nation, reached its maturity in this work. The following pages will try to show the places where he came close to the Kemalist project and where he proposed an alternative worldview through the complexity of the *Epic*. From the start,

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<sup>48</sup> It is known that many parts of the book were either lost or destroyed to avoid confiscation by the police (Babayev, 2002: 202).

it could be projected that *Human Landscapes* would be a complex work, as we can see from the plan Nâzım had confided to his friend Kemal Tahir in one of his letters.

1. I want the reader after reading 12000 lines to feel as if he/she travelled through a complex arena of people
2. I want this arena of people to describe the social conditions in Turkey through the stories of people from different social classes in a definite period of time
3. I want the global context – in a definite period of time – to be understood in the background
4. I want to answer the question of where we are coming from, what we have achieved and where we are heading to in the best way possible within the limits of my profession... (Hikmet, 1968: 139-40, my translation)<sup>49</sup>.

*Human Landscapes* was initially planned as *Encyclopaedia of Famous People*. Nâzım aimed to depict the lives of ordinary people, the actual masses rather than the well-known great men one would find in common Encyclopaedias. In fact this was not a totally new mission for Nâzım as he wrote about ordinary peasants making a difference in *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* or the rise of Fascism in Italy through the eyes of an African student in *Letters to Taranta-Babu*. Nâzım had always been interested in expressing the sentiments and troubles of the masses.

In his story, he was inspired by real characters and also created fictional ones. As he had done in *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?*, he mixed fiction with reality. In Book One, four prisoners, Halil, Fuat, Süleyman and Melahat were transported to the prisons in various

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<sup>49</sup> In the last point Nâzım actually uses the passive voice but it has not been possible to translate it directly. My understanding is that it is possible to think of 'we' as humanity. Since it follows the third point about the global context, we can guess that he aims to write a general story about humanity expressed by the war and post-war experiences of the people of Turkey. In a few sentences before citing these points, he said he is writing about war because 'as of 1941 and since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the experiences of the Italian and Balkan wars, World War One and the National Liberation war, war has been the main topic of concern' (Hikmet, 1968:139).

towns of Asia Minor. These characters, as Emin Karaca argued, might well be reflections of communists like Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, Fatma Nudiye Yalçı, Emine Alev and Nâzım Hikmet himself, who were all given prison sentences in the same trial as Nâzım – the 1938 Navy Trial (1992: 11-35).

It was not only communists that appeared in the *Human Landscapes*, but Nâzım's old friend and later rival Peyami Safa, also takes his place in the Epic. At the beginning of Book Two, we are introduced to the character Hasan Şevket, who is suffering from poverty and talking to his conscience in the form of 'a thumb-size man' (Hikmet, 1982:69-72). He sees his old friend Nuri Cemil from a distance who was about to take a first-class train. Both of these characters are columnists. Hasan Şevket faces his poverty and asks himself whether he could have done as Nuri Cemil; that is, give up his ideals to work for the bourgeoisie and even support fascism in his articles. This is clearly a criticism of those old friends of Nâzım who shifted their ideological preferences in time as we had seen in *Banerjee*. This time the target of criticism is Peyami Safa, (under the name Nuri Cemil) who was party to a debate<sup>50</sup> mentioned earlier not long before Nâzım was imprisoned. Nuri Cemil is described as a drunken orphan who changed his political views in different periods (Karaca, 1992: 47). Until '1933 he was an individualist and a liberal democrat', he 'opposed the regime till 935[sic] for not being democratic' but 'dropped democracy like an old hat', he was now under the rule of newspaper owners and he wrote articles in support of fascism and German capitalists like 'Krupp' (Hikmet, 1982: 74-5).

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<sup>50</sup> As seen earlier Peyami Safa had become one of those nationalist columnists targeting Nâzım Hikmet for being a communist.

Besides these underlying minor criticisms the main aim of the *Human Landscapes* was, however, to depict class divisions and criticise imperialism and war through the stories of ‘small people’. He aimed to write the history of Turkey and the world from the viewpoint of peasants, workers, and prisoners, in opposition to the bourgeoisie, especially in *Human Landscapes*.

The class division in Turkey was most explicitly symbolised in the work through the use of two different trains; the one in the first book being third class and the other an express with a first class dining car. As Nâzım wrote to Kemal Tahir, he designed ‘Book One to portray the proletariat and petit bourgeois’ and ‘Book Two to portray the bourgeoisie and bourgeois classes’ (Hikmet, 1968: 140). In the second book, the scenes from the dining car depicts class division between the customers who are sipping their wine and praise the military successes of Nazi Germany while the waiters and the cook read parts from *The Epic of the Liberation War* (Hikmet, 1982: 109-111). Despite the success in the liberation war, the people of Anatolia were still poor and the imperial bourgeoisie travelled in the first-class wagons (Aguiar: 2007:112). Thus Nâzım emphasised the ongoing imperialism and social gap in Turkey.

*Moscow Symphony*, like the rest of the *Epic*, is centred on war and resistance but this time during World War II and the setting is Russia instead of Turkey. It is told from the eyes of ordinary people active in the battlefield. There is no praise for leaders or in particular to Stalin (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 231). It is the story of twenty-eight infantrymen dying as they fought against the German tanks with bare hands and the eighteen-year-old Russian girl Zoe/Tanya, who was hanged by the Germans for supporting the partisans (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 230).

Mutlu Konuk, the translator of the *Epic*, argues that ‘the only political message of *Landscapes*’ is that ‘human beings have the power to make and change human life’ (Hikmet, introduction, xvi). People make their own history, as Marx claimed, in Nâzım’s work but certainly not in the conditions of their own making be it the independence struggle of the people of Anatolia in 1919 or the Russians in 1941. As has been mentioned before, the poet had a vision of the masses as progressive agents and this argument is mostly clear in this work. Particularly, in *The Epic of the Liberation War*, the emphasis on the role of the people in making history, fighting for liberty against imperialism is most clear.

#### **5.10.1 *Kurtuluş Savaşı Destanı (The Epic of the Liberation War)*<sup>51</sup>**

*The Epic of the Liberation War/ Kuvayi Milliye (National Militia)* is an important part of the *Human Landscapes* deserving attention. The importance of it is, in fact, that it is a symbolic work reflecting Nâzım’s patriotism hand in hand with his interpretation of the war from a Marxist-Leninist point of view, perceiving it as an anti-imperialist battle on the part of the common people. Nâzım in his analysis of the liberation war constructs his own vision of the complex discursive elements of both communism and patriotism. He contributes to a social construction that the people are equipped with emancipatory potential, as he had done in his previous work where he narrated the struggles of certain revolutionary individuals. In the *Epic*, the liberation war has been narrated from the point of view of the masses. Its introduction gives us the clue;

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<sup>51</sup> Some parts of it were published in 1946 and the section called the Black Snake in 1943 (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 225). Nâzım prepared it for publication in chronological order under the title *Kuvayi Milliye (National Militia)* after his release but it was not until the 1960s that it actually was published as such.

They who are numberless

like ants in the earth

fish in the sea

birds in the air,

....

and who destroy

and create,

our epic tells only of their adventures.

...

and about them

it was said

‘they have nothing to lose but their chains’ (Hikmet, 1982:111-2).

‘They’ here refers to the ‘nameless heroes of the war’ (Fişekçi, 2002: 11). A quotation from Marx points out that ‘they’ are the oppressed masses who had actually made history during the liberation war.

The first part of *The Epic of the Liberation War* is the story *Black Snake*, which is an ordinary peasant revolt against the French occupation of Antep after the end of World War I. The young peasant is described as a scared thin boy who was later called Black Snake and led a revolt. ‘He lived on the earth like a field mouse, scared as a field mouse’ (Hikmet, 1982: 115). As he was so scared, ‘Black Snake didn’t really care if the heathens held Antep till doomsday’ (Ibid). However, he witnessed a bullet blowing off a black snake’s head. This incident shook him and made him think there was no escape from death. He finally left all his fears behind and became a brave leader.

The significance of the tale *Black Snake* for us is that it is an example of Nâzım’s alternative narrative of the liberation war. Nâzım’s Epic in general, as illustrated in this short story, involves the implication that inhabitants of Asia Minor did not perceive the



war as a way to protect the national homeland but rather, as a struggle to protect their own land and property. This view is contradictory to the narrative reproduced by the national curriculum. The liberation war was supposed to be a national liberation movement fought by a nation against the invasion of imperialists.<sup>52</sup> The existence of alternative narratives of the same history, along with and, indeed, due to the formation of various groups forming a 'nation', actually also runs parallel to the social constructivist approach of this thesis towards nations and nationalism. It has been pointed out that through the social constructivist lenses, nations are not viewed as unities with one eternal history but as constructs reproduced and contested constantly and continuously by various groups within the same society. This work of Nâzım, written with a Marxist narrative of the war emphasising the role of the masses, the complexity of the social arena and clashing class interests, again shows the relevance of Nâzım's narratives to the general approach of this thesis.

*The Epic of the Liberation War* entails many of the characteristics that make it a good example of the arguments of this thesis. The fact that Nâzım told the story of the liberation war from the viewpoint of the common people was a novelty. Moreover, those people were not depicted as a unified nation but as members of social classes with personal and class interests. He intended to draw attention to the class divisions in society and how their interests clashed during the war. It was claimed that most of the landowners and wealthy elite allied with the enemy. There is reference to the bourgeoisie and the Sultan, who sold the country to the Germans and left as soon as they did not feel secure anymore, while 'the people, hurt and poor', stayed and 'fought against powerful enemies in order not to be enslaved twice and robbed twice' (Hikmet, 2008). People

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<sup>52</sup> As mentioned in chapter on the literary canon, Kemal Tahir also narrated the war in similar lines.

pursued a war both against the national bourgeois and the imperialists. In 1936 in a newspaper article he wrote that,

national liberation movements, especially in the twentieth century, have two important characteristics:

1. The national liberation movement is a war fought with swords against the occupying imperialists or the forces they use.
2. The national liberation movement is a fight against... the local agents of imperialism... (Hikmet, 1995: 254).

We can detect a similarity in the way that both the *Epic* and the official narrative blamed the sultan for helping the enemies and drew a picture of the sultan and Ottoman elite as self-centred traitors. Even though there is a parallel with the official narrative of the war, the depiction of the war also as a class conflict as well and valuing the masses more than the elite was a challenge to the official history. Nâzım interpreted it as an anti-imperialist struggle like most of the left in Turkey did. As we have seen in previous chapters, the left sympathised with Mustafa Kemal and his ‘achievements’ during the liberation war as they saw it parallel to the Leninist articulation of nationalist movements as anti-imperialist ones. Such movements were to be supported for their progressive character and war was regarded as a path to the freedom of oppressed/colonised nations. Nâzım had written about this war, even before starting to work on the *Epic*, in his newspaper columns, which revealed an anti-imperialist characteristic. In 1936, in *Akşam*, writing a criticism on a film shown in Istanbul that praised imperialism, he argued that ‘one of the main characteristics of Turkey is that it has fought an anti-imperialist war at a certain period in its history’ (Hikmet, 1995:167).

*The Epic of the Liberation War* not only has the potential to be interpreted as a work written with patriotic feelings but one that is based also on a Marxist, maybe even a Marxist-Leninist conception of the world, history and the dynamics of societies. Nâzım had written in *National Pride*, the epilogue to *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* that he did not consider patriotism and Marxism as two opposing views. In *The Epic of the Liberation War*, it might be argued that he proved that he could rewrite a patriotic story through the lenses of Marxist interpretation and methodology and created a concrete example of his earlier claim.

We can detect patriotism and a tribute to Mustafa Kemal's military achievements as well as being the voice of the unknown heroes of the war throughout the *Epic*. For example, in *Part Two*, the Sivas and Erzurum Congresses<sup>53</sup> were central. Minutes from the congresses and quotes from Mustafa Kemal formed the basis of this part. Nâzım also took the opportunity to criticise the elite in Istanbul who argued Turkey should become an American mandate while the people of Asia Minor did not settle for anything less than total freedom. Mustafa Kemal was then quoted declaring 'either freedom or death!'

*Part Two* can be seen as a eulogy to Mustafa Kemal and the course of the liberation movement. Criticism towards the advocates of mandate was again another common point with Nâzım's and the official narrative of the era of the struggle. A small but important difference is that in the common state narrative, it was Mustafa Kemal who totally rejected any ideas or agreements other than total freedom and sovereignty. His personality cult was prevalent in the account of the period of national liberation movement. Mustafa Kemal was given the family name Atatürk (Father Turk) given in

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<sup>53</sup> These two conferences are regarded in Turkish history as the arena where the liberation movement was initiated and decision of the establishment of a separate 'National Assembly' in Ankara was taken which finally led to the formation of the Republic of Turkey

1934 to symbolise that he had been 'presented as the father of the nation, its saviour, its teacher' (Zürcher, 1993: 190). On the other hand, Nâzım valued him as the leader of the people who represented and fought for the true interests of the masses while Sultan and bourgeois classes were only concerned with their own interests and survival. In Nâzım's work, it was the brave people of Erzurum who decided in the congress that they would fight for freedom and rejected offers about mandate.

Nâzım drew a pure image of the people leading to an image where the enemy was externalised. He reproduced his own vision that people were pure and full of potential, which were social constructions, as well as the concept of the folk or nation. Such an approach contributed to imaging 'us', that is, the Turkish people, versus 'them', who were the imperialists and their domestic allies. The formulation of the 'us vs. them' conceptualisation is certainly not unique to Nâzım. In fact it is one of those areas where the lines between leftist and nationalists approaches are blurred. In the context of Turkey and elsewhere, the use of 'us', referring to the exploited can easily refer to and actually has referred to a nation. Similar trends of imagining the nation as pure have also been common to other parts of the world. For example, 'the idea that the evil is outside the nation' has been 'a recurrent theme in Brazilian populism' (Rowe; Schelling, 1991: 165). Another significant chapter of the *Epic* was *Part Four*, written as a letter by the character Nurettin Eşfak, involving the poem *Turkish Peasant*. Nurettin Eşfak wrote in Ankara to inform his friend that he had resigned his teaching job in order to go to the front<sup>54</sup>. Turkish was claimed to be 'one of the liveliest, freshest languages in the world' by Eşfak.

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<sup>54</sup> Eşfak can be argued to be Nâzım himself, as he had gone to Ankara to join the liberation movement. He was not sent to the front but appointed as a teacher in Bolu instead. The fiction is probably a reflection of his resentment that he could not take part in the war more actively.

It was a line that had the potential to be used by those who emphasised Nâzım's patriotism and his love for the Turkish language.

This short part involved another point that was characteristic of Nâzım's work; he was inspired by folk culture and used them in his work. Similar to *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin*, Nâzım used parts of folk songs in Eşfak's letter; '*Look at Ankara's stones/Look at the tears in my eyes...*' (Hikmet, 2002: 78). The poem *Turkish Peasant* made references to many folk heroes and other characters such as Nasreddin Hodja, Ferhad, Kerem, Keloğlan, Yunus Emre's and again quoted directly from folk songs, especially Yunus Emre (Hikmet, 2002: 79). Gürsel argued that 'folk songs had been one of the main sources of Nâzım's poetry, especially from 1938-1950' (1992: 127).

*Parts Five and Six* were mainly about the occupation of Istanbul and similar stories of 'small people' fighting against imperialist occupiers, with battle scenes from Sakarya. Here, Nâzım drew on Mustafa Kemal's depiction of the war in his Great Speech, published in 1938, and used the same term 'grandiose battle of Sakarya' to describe the battle (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 220).

*Part Seven* praised the victory in August, which in a way marked the ending of the war, and again included the struggle of uncommon actors; this time it was the women of Asia Minor.

... the women,  
our women,  
with their terrible, blessed hands,  
    their little wasted chins, and huge eyes,  
        our mothers, our wives, our loves  
dying as if they'd hardly lived,  
their turn always after the oxen

when it comes to eating;  
and for carrying them off to the mountains we get thrown into  
prison,  
hitched to the plough, they work with the crops, the tobacco,  
Firewood in the market... (Hikmet, 2002: 80).

Nâzım narrated the active part people had taken in the battlefield, this time through a reference to the involvement of women in the war. The last part was important in a few ways. It involved an implicit reference to Mustafa Kemal. There was a description of a general who ‘looked like a blond wolf with glittering blue eyes’. Nurettin Eşfak appeared here once more. This time he criticised the lyrics of the National Anthem, written by Mehmed Akif. In the Anthem, it says ‘the days promised by God are soon’ but Eşfak argued ‘there was something wrong’ in that. The bright days were not god-sent, but we the people earned them, and we made those days possible (Hikmet, 1998: 230).

*The Epic of the Liberation War* ended with the following lines that were a combination of patriotism and communism. Nâzım described Turkey and owns it but wished for independence and fraternity for all;

To live free and single like a tree  
and in fraternity like a forest;  
this longing is ours (Hikmet, 2002a: 82).

Nâzım’s combination of communist and patriotic discursive elements conveyed in his complex and original style, as was most apparent in the *Epic* as well as works such as *Like Kerem* and *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin*, ensured his place as a symbolic figure of the Turkish left. He not only expressed themes of communism, such as class divisions

and anti-imperialism through the insertion of dialectic materialism, but also reproduced the concept of patriotism as did the Turkish left. His position as an articulator of left's communist and nationalist-patriotic themes, in other words an articulator of counter narratives to the official state discourse, made him the target of antagonistic strategies. On the other hand, it was those patriotic discursive elements in his work that are now being read selectively and singled out to represent him as a Turkish poet in the current discourse about him.

#### **5.11. Nâzım Hikmet's poetry in exile**

After his release in 1950, Nâzım fled to Russia and lived there until his death in 1963. In his last years he had the chance to experience real socialism and visit socialist countries around the world like Romania, Bulgaria and Cuba. The main issues he dealt with were peace, devastation caused by nuclear weapons, humanism and longing for his country and family.

The peace movement was characteristic of Nâzım's life in the early 1950s. He travelled to Paris, Vienna and Berlin, alongside international socialist intellectuals such as Pablo Neruda, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Louis Aragon, to cite a few. They worked to draw international attention to the dangers of war and, especially weapons of mass destruction, in an era of the intensified antagonism of the Cold War. In fact, the Korean War had broken out in 1950, which was one of the incidents that marked the beginning of the Cold War era, as it so explicitly signified the rivalry between US and USSR. The Korean War was not only significant in the history of Cold War but also for the history of the foreign

and domestic policies of Turkey. The Turkish government sent troops to fight alongside the Americans in Korea in order to show its commitment to its allies.

Nâzım being against war and American imperialism criticised the Turkish government for taking part in the Korean War. For him, the Menderes government was risking the lives of young Turkish workers in a war far away from Turkey, only to serve American interests (Göksu; Timms: 266). In his satiric poem, *Kore'de Ölen Bir Yedek Subayımızın Menderes'e Söyledikleri* (*What One of Our Reserves Officers Who Died in Korea said to Menderes-1959*) he was the voice of a young soldier who used to be a university student but lost his eyes, his hands, legs and finally his life in Korea (Hikmet, 2002d: 14-5). However, Adnan Menderes – the prime minister at the time – still had his eyes, hands and legs and was in co-operation with capitalists and imperialists. Again, in 1959, he produced a poem in which he asked whether there was anything more precious on earth than one's country and asked how they could sell the country (2002d: 12). Patriotism and communism were combined in this overt criticism of imperialism and the Turkish bourgeoisie and politicians. Like his previous work, Nâzım, here once again, reproduced his own concept of patriotism as it was defined by the Turkish left. In his criticism of government policies, there was an implicit form of nationalism, as was standard to the Turkish left claiming his analysis and the socio-political system he idealised would serve Turkey better. Even though these criticisms had made him a traitor in the official discourse and led to his exile and loss of citizenship at the time, it was the combined existence of a claim of patriotism in his discourse and that of the Turkish left that made it possible for the incorporation or colonisation of those groups at certain periods. Nâzım's position could easily be read as a form of nationalism and as an expression of loyalty to



Turkey even if he had criticised the government of the time, since his rhetoric in this poem for example, was that he would want to halt the war so that Turkish youngsters would not die in the service of the US. Nâzım had reproduced patriotic elements nevertheless he had also been one of the few Turkish communists who had been sensitive to international concerns.

Earlier, he had written about the devastating results of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima told by a girl killed in the bombing in *Kız Çocuğu* (*Little Girl*- 1956) (Nesin, 1998: 31).

I come and stand at every door  
...  
I knock and yet remain unseen,  
for I am dead, for I am dead  
I'm only seven although I died  
in Hiroshima long ago  
...

(Hikmet, 2002c: 97).

*Japanese Fisherman* was written as a tribute to the fisherman on a Japanese fishing boat who were exposed to radioactivity during the first hydrogen bomb tests in 1954 by the American government, was another strong anti-nuclear statement (Babayev: 2002: 330). In *Japanese Fisherman*, the fisherman declared both the fish and himself deadly (Hikmet, 2002c: 95). Those poems can be seen as evidence of his humanism and international commitment to peace.

Besides his active involvement in the international peace movement and the firm stance he developed against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, another important and controversial issue about this period of time in the Soviet Union was his position vis-à-vis

Stalin. As we have seen earlier, especially apparent in the example of *Human Landscapes*, Nâzım Hikmet had been in opposition to personality cult. His heroes were the working people who earned their freedom, not leaders such as Mustafa Kemal or Stalin. He wrote a poem mocking the statues of Stalin all around the communist world (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 275). He had openly made remarks about his displeasure with the personality cult and, after Stalin's death, his play *Did Ivan Ivanovich exist or not?* (premiered in Moscow in 1957), which was based on this criticism, was staged on Russian theatres (Ibid: 1999: 288). As it will be seen in the next chapter, anecdotes reveal that it was also possible to argue that Nâzım did not cease to be a controversial figure in Stalinist Russia either. He advocated the rights of the revolutionary artist and criticised those who contributed to the creation of personality cults.

Another theme of Nâzım's work in exile that also had great relevance to the two different articulations about him, was his longing for his country coupled with the love of those he had to leave behind. He produced several poems with the same theme, either written to his son or his wife. Among the poems expressing his longing for his country was *Vasiyet* (*The Will* – 1953) that stood out in voicing his patriotism. In *The Will*, Nâzım expressed his desire to be buried under a maple tree 'in a peasant cemetery in Anatolia' (Hikmet, 2002c: 33-34), which had become the most quoted poem in discussions about transferring his grave from Moscow to Turkey.

## 5.12. Conclusion

This chapter started with the poem *Traitor*, which is believed here to be a precise depiction of the two main influences of Nâzım Hikmet's creativity; patriotism and communism. His work can be argued to be the perfect synthesis of the dialectic between the clashing values of patriotism and communism. Sentiments, problems and the interests of both the domestic and the international community were the core problematic for the poet. The folk traditions of Turkey formed the basis of his work, which gained a modern structure and Marxist content via Nâzım Hikmet's words. Through the use of complex issues and his own linguistic style, he constructed his narrative of the folk and his relationship with them, as well as the place of patriotism and communism in his work.

The influence of the folk tradition on his work is one of the main elements that can lead to a reading of Nâzım's work as patriotic. It has been argued throughout that he imagined himself as a product of the land and the culture he was born into. The local literary and linguistic traditions of Asia Minor had been a cradle of creativity for him. He believed in the purity and genuineness of the people, which led him to perceive the people not only as separate from the polity but also superior to state policies in various areas, which were certainly a construction as well.

For example, on the issue of reforms in the Turkish language, he argued that local traditions should form the basis of language reform. In his newspaper articles and through the active use of everyday language, he advocated a position arguing for the superiority of the preferences of the folk in language use and criticised top-down attempts of the state for a fast track reform in language and other areas.

His analysis of the liberation war that formed the main outline of his greatest work, *Human Landscapes* again stood as a case that could, on the one hand, support the patriotic image of the poet but, on the other hand, exemplify the distinguishing characteristics of his work. His interpretation of the war can easily be distinguished from that of the bourgeois Turk or the Kemalist state. As seen, *Human Landscapes* and, especially, its part *The Epic of the Liberation War*, has been the work that has been given a special emphasis in the current discourse about the poet adopted by the State. The *Epic* has been interpreted as the ultimate expression of his patriotic feelings in state officials' speeches, as will be seen in more detail in the following chapter. The *Epic* has been called the best work telling the story of the 'national' struggle and this approach culminated in *Human Landscapes* being included in the Turkish national canon. With occasional praises of Mustafa Kemal and the independence struggle he led, this epic paved the way for this patriotic articulation. On the other hand, the use of dialectic materialism, the bigger role the masses played in the struggle in Nâzım's narration, the emphasis on emancipation coupled with a criticism of the old (Ottoman) and new (Kemalist Republic) socio-political structures, could all be interpreted as the traces of a Marxist analysis of the war and its aftermath. Through the Marxist lenses used by Nâzım, Ottoman rule was an imperialist and feudal system based on deep class differences while the Kemalist Republic, even though it had attempted to revolutionise society into a secular modern one, had failed to erase those class divisions. In *Human Landscapes*, an underlying argument that the imperialism of developed countries over Turkey and of the Turkish bourgeoisie over the masses was still at work, could be found together with a criticism of the strategy of the Kemalist state. The elitist and top-down strategy of

modernisation was challenged by the elements of emancipation woven into the work. Nâzım's *Human Landscapes* thus appeared as a source both for the patriotic and communist modes of articulation. To generalise, based on the analysis of his work in the previous pages, Nâzım's work has the potential to provide the grounds for the discourse that emphasise his literary side and his patriotism to be formulated.

So far, what Nâzım would have thought about being labelled either as a communist or a patriot or about the attempts to strip his work of their ideological context (which is analysed in more detail in the next chapter), has deliberately not been mentioned for the purposes of this thesis. The way he was perceived and the fact that he made both representations possible are considered more relevant here. However, we have information that would point out that he was critical of attempts to disregard the impact of his ideological commitment to his art.

One such example can be found in one of his letters to Kemal Tahir. Halide Edip had given an interview in which she expressed her view that Nâzım could be called a genius, if his more ideological works were isolated from the discussion. In response, Nâzım claimed 'I am a successful artist and I owe this to my ideology more than anything' (Hikmet, 1968: 141). From his position on the debate on whether art should have a purpose, we have seen that he had a firm position that perceived art as a way to serve ideology and society. Similar thoughts had been expressed in the aforementioned letter. The links between ideological commitment and artistic production were direct and clear in his mind.

Another example in which he was critical of the actors who sympathised with him but had no respect for his ideology were the lines written as a reply to Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı's

poem *Bir Şey (One Thing – 1947)*. Nâzım's poem *1947*, which was intended as a reply reads, 'The one you love is a communist' but followed by the lines 'He is rooted in this land/carries a burden like Bedreddin' (Karaca, 2002: 241-2). There again he referred to the inspiration he received from the local culture, which was open to be interpreted as his loyalty to Turkish culture. It should be pointed out that there is no search for 'the original' Nâzım Hikmet position in this dissertation but an attempt to analyse the discourses about him and their possible sources.

The main argument of this chapter is that if Nâzım were articulated as a Turkish patriotic poet or as a communist, both interpretations would be based on his work. His work has been a dialectical combination of both the influences of patriotism and communism. If the state articulates him as a Turkish poet, which it does, there are works of Nâzım that stand as data to support this assertion. He has placed the story of the struggle of the Turkish people for independence in his magnum opus – *Human Landscapes*. He praised Mustafa Kemal and his fight against imperialism in this work and on other occasions. He wrote works based on folk stories as in *Like Kerem* and *Ferhad and Sirin*.

Nâzım Hikmet's worldview probably lied in the following lines from *Invitation*<sup>55</sup>, which advocated liberty and fraternity for all but followed by a romantic picture of Turkey;

Galloping full-tilt from furthest Asia,  
craning its mare's head to reach the Mediterranean;  
this land is ours.

...

Never again let labour be enforced,  
let no man exploit another;  
this cry is ours.

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<sup>55</sup> This poem was used in the posters of the film–*Mavi Gözlü Dev* (2007)–sponsored by the Ministry of Culture.

To live free and single like a tree  
and in fraternity like a forest;  
this longing is ours (Hikmet, 2002a: 82).

## 6. NÂZIM HİKMET'S LIFE AS AN AREA OF CLASHING REPRESENTATIONS

‘[T]he most influential Turkish Communist ever was not a statesman or a sociologist or a journalist, but the poet Nazım Hikmet’ (Halman, 2006: xi).

Communism and, in fact, the left in general, has been an ‘other’ of the Turkish State and communists have been defined as outsiders to Turkish national identity. Leftist movements were considered treacherous and in the service of the interests of the USSR and punished as such, which makes sense from the viewpoint of Kemalists who seek absolute loyalty to the strategic interests of Turkey rather than another state (Somay, 2007: 650). Nâzım Hikmet, in this picture, was a symbolic figure of the ‘other’. It is going to be seen that he was punished by the state for his ideological commitment during his life and for many years to follow.

An example of the symbolic role he played, in the perception of the state, could be the way he was referred to during a closed session of the General Assembly, where the laws to fight communism were discussed, on 19.11. 1951. Nâzım Hikmet was mentioned several times during the speech given to inform the Assembly of the ‘evils’ of communism (Öztürk, 1998: 2262). He was portrayed as a devoted communist, who served it not only by his political participation in Communist Party activities (Ibid: 2292) but also by spreading communist thoughts throughout his poetry (Ibid: 2275) and his plays (Ibid: 2307).

The Turkish state had mostly adopted a strategy that was antagonistic to almost all forms of leftist movements, thus, it was no surprise that Nâzım was punished for being a communist. However, the fact that he was a productive literary figure who had a critical



approach and created alternative narratives about the collective memory of the nation made him even more of a target. The state strategy to deal with him was a classical example of the *logic of equivalence*. He was seen as reproducing a discourse that was a pure negation of the Kemalist one adopted by the state. He was a figure of communism in opposition to nationalism. However, this rigid binary relationship has been blurred since the early 1990s. State discourse has shifted from articulating him as a communist to a literary figure and even a patriot. It will also be argued here that he has been reproduced as a member of the literary canon of Turkish literature.

Nâzım Hikmet was a writer who produced different forms of literature as a poet, playwright and a columnist, which relate his case to the previous discussion on the relationship of literature and national identity. In an earlier chapter, it was argued that literary works have had a significant place in the formation and reproduction of nationality. Moreover, literature does not only employ or is not merely used in nationalist discourse but can be a source of contestation, contributing to the impossibility of closure of national identity. For example, there are always different versions of a national history, or an alternative understanding of the social structure may be articulated in literary works, and their inclusion and exclusion is yet another open-ended process.

In the case of Nâzım, he indeed envisaged an alternative socio-political system for Turkey. He studied Turkish society from a Marxist point of view. His mere expression of the existence of social classes with clashing interests was unacceptable from the Kemalist point of view, which envisaged Turkish society as a nation unified, and imposed this view. Kemalism carried progressive elements, which were respected by Nâzım and the Turkish left in general. However, the policy of modernisation was problematic in the eyes

of the poet. In opposition to the top-down Westernisation model adopted by the Turkish State, he had an alternative model of modernisation that imagined the people at the centre. His works carried a discourse of emancipatory charge for the masses as opposed to an elitist model. Thus, the inclusion and exclusion of Nâzım's work as part of the Turkish literary tradition or, more generally him as part of the Turkish national identity as reproduced by state discourse is not simply related to the logic of the end of the Cold War. The change in state discourse, whose details will be given later, signifies that, in fact, the alternative narratives developed by Nâzım have somehow now been incorporated into the national identity.

Nâzım Hikmet's relationship to the state ideology/official discourse constitutes a prime example of the argument that national identity, like other identities, is not a closure. It takes different meanings and, in our study, the state can define certain parameters that fall inside or outside its definition of identity. Certainly, state policies are not the only determinants of national identity formation, but here we are only concerned with the way state policies have contributed to who is regarded as part of Turkishness and who is not. Nâzım Hikmet, even though he was Turkish by nationality, was excluded and even punished due to his ideology. Communism was treated through his case as a negation of Turkishness. Being a communist poet made him a target but, in the process of the change in discourse, his being a poet gained importance. Nâzım's contributions to literature can now be considered to be contributions to Turkish literature and language. Besides the emphasis on his identity as a literary figure, his Turkishness, his particular comments, activities and works of his that involved patriotic discourse, are pointed to by the state. Today, Nâzım is not excluded; however, his incorporation is conditioned on his loyalty to

the Turkish nation. Only after reproducing a de-politicised image of him and *interpellating* him as a patriot does the state accept him. The state strategy has shifted from a rigid exclusion shaped by the logic of equivalence to the application of the logic of difference, which can be seen as a new strategy of the Turkish state to deal with its other.

So far, a short introduction to the change in state discourse and policy has been provided, but it is also important to point out that his hybridity and the ambiguities in Nâzım's life and works have made it possible for these discourses to be formulated. Patriotism and communism were indeed the two main influences on Nâzım. He did not problematize this fact, which brought him close to both the Turkish left and Kemalism. The Turkish left also did not distance itself from Kemalism and definitely not from patriotism. Patriotism or at least having strong ties with the local instead of a propagation of radical internationalism has been a definitive characteristic of the Turkish left.

This chapter aims to summarise the different and clashing discourses on Nâzım Hikmet and show the sources of inspiration in his life. Also, the shift in state discourse will be analysed. First, we will see that the two representations were not only adopted by the state, but also by various other groups in different periods. After identifying the main elements of each representation, some relevant periods in Nâzım's life will be studied in light of these arguments in chronological order. The events mentioned are presented in chronological order but the periods are studied in terms of issues that relate to either of the two representations. This part is not a typical biographical insight into who Nâzım Hikmet was, but a narrative of his life that accentuates the parallel existence of the sources of the clashing representations. Thus, some periods and many instances are

omitted and replaced by an interpretation of his life as an arena of these clashing representations. This structure is also reflective of the social constructivist approach of this thesis. This thesis is not an attempt to produce the final word about whether Nâzım Hikmet is a Turk, communist, political activist or just a poet. This approach has implicitly shaped the entire thesis and we have seen in the previous chapters that there is not a single unified definition of who a Turk is, what the Turkish left and its position on Kemalism is, and what a literary canon is. In a similar vein, in that chapter it is argued that there is not only one Nâzım Hikmet. On the contrary, it is the hybridity of even the personal identity of Nâzım that makes him the case study of this work.

The second part of this chapter deals with the re-articulation that has been taking place openly since 1993. The state has been able to find the relevant data to support their narrative of Nâzım as a patriotic intellectual in his life and in his work (as studied in the previous chapter). The argument is carried further in this part; it is the aforementioned hybridity of Nâzım that has made his being represented as both a communist and a member of the Turkish canon. Indeed, that literary canon, the fact that national identity is a non-closure and the dynamic relationship of the left and state, together with the culmination of all these factors in the case of Nâzım Hikmet, has made him the symbolic figure of the Turkish left and a case symbolising the non-closure of Turkish national identity.

## **6.1. Part I**

### **6.1.1. The two representations summarised**

Nâzım Hikmet is one of the most celebrated Turkish poets. There are a large number<sup>56</sup> of works about his life, poems, political ideologies and even his wives. Through this flurry of activity and intense interest in Nâzım Hikmet, two common discourses about him emerge from the analysis of these works and other oral representations<sup>57</sup>. One representation of Nâzım Hikmet is that he is a devoted communist poet, stressing his politics. The alternative discourse carries another view, in which his being communist is not of central importance while other elements of his life history and his work have received more attention.

Nâzım was certainly a poet, communist and Turkish but for a certain group of figures, who have expressed opinions about him, communism is the heart of the issue; Nâzım is a communist person more than anything else. On the other hand, for some other figures the fact that he was a communist does not matter. The adjective 'communist' seems to give us trivial information, as his political activism is not emphasised if ever mentioned.

The first set of representations emphasises his ideological preference and political activism. Thus, the political character of such narratives is easily observable. It is rather interesting that it is both the extreme left and the extreme right wing that hold this position but with different opinions about it. For example, the Turkish Communist Party

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<sup>56</sup> It is possible to identify over ninety books, almost two hundred articles, six dissertations, two movies (one being in production), five documentaries, one exhibition, two cultural centres and two education centres that have studied some aspect of Nâzım Hikmet.

<sup>57</sup> A similar analysis about the existence of two discourses on Nâzım Hikmet has been made by Başak Ergil, who studied the representation of Nâzım in 'Anglo-American literary system' (2005).

(TKP) argues 'Nâzım is one of the few symbols of communist struggle who was able to reach the masses' (Anon. 'SOL', 2002: 14). On the other hand, for a nationalist journalist Nâzım 'had sown the seeds of communism that caused deep suffering for our people between the 1960s and the 1980s' (Kaftancı quoted in Coskun, 1988: 90).

A list of arguments and discourses that emanate from the view that communism was central to Nâzım's life and works can be identified as follows:

1. First and foremost, Nâzım Hikmet was a poet who dedicated his life to the cause of communism.
2. He was a symbolic figure of communism and probably a role model for the Turkish left. (For the right-wing this is the reason why his work was a threat to the Turkish nation while for the left, he was a figure who was looked up to).
3. He was actively involved in the communist political movement. He was a member of the Turkish Communist Party.
4. He led an opposition movement in the TKP and argued that communist activity in Turkey should be more active and effective.
5. He also resorted to legal means to spread the communist ideology in the country. He worked in legal newspapers and magazines to serve this purpose.
6. He wrote poems, stories and plays that carried communist messages such as *Why did Banerjee Kill Himself?* and *Like Kerem*.
7. More importantly, his work, ideology and life were a unified whole that fed each other and it is not possible to envisage his work in isolation from the impact of his political commitment. Attempts to separate politics from his work would not pay him the respect he deserves. On the contrary, it would render him meaningless.

Examples of actors who have reproduced the above discourses about Nâzım have been,

1. Various members of the left in Turkey, such as the current *TKP*;
2. Nationalists such as Peyami Safa and Hamdullah Suphi<sup>58</sup>, İlhan Darendelioglu (1978) and Mehmet Gül (2003)<sup>59</sup>;
3. The Turkish state until 1993.

The opposing articulation of Nâzım Hikmet is equally complex and can be summarised as such:

1. It is possible and necessary to make a distinction between his literary success and his political activism.
2. The fact that Nâzım was a communist is irrelevant in comparison to the fact that he was a great Turkish poet. The influence of communist ideology on his life and works can be disregarded since he made great contributions to the development of Turkish literature and language.
3. He was a dedicated poet of the Turkish language. He was a prominent executor of the language.
4. Nâzım praised Mustafa Kemal and his achievements especially during the liberation war. He wrote an exemplary work depicting the liberation war, namely, *The Epic of the Liberation War*.
5. He harboured a great love for Turkey. When he was in exile, even though he was deprived of his Turkish citizenship, his response was poems that described his longing for his country.

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<sup>58</sup> There is going to be more information on Safa and Suphi in the following pages.

<sup>59</sup> Mehmet Gül was a former MP of the Nationalist Action Party and İlhan Darendelioglu was one of the presidents of the Association to Fight Communism.

6. As a combination of the above-listed points four and five, it is also commonly implied that he was a patriot.

7. He was a humanist.

8. He was known as a great Turkish poet internationally and loved by the masses in Turkey, thus, he should get the respect he deserves from the state as well.

The above discourses reflect an image of Nâzım as a romantic poet, and as a person who was away from his country unwillingly. He had a human side; he was not a hard-hearted activist. Moreover, he was a patriot.

The actors who made the above statements are:

1. His friends, family and people in the arts.
2. The most prominent actor can be said to be the Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation that was established in 1991 by the poet's sister. The aim of this foundation is 'to build a centre which will house a collection of books, periodicals, articles, and other published works by and about Nâzım Hikmet...; to research and publicise his works; to make a contribution to the advancement of art, culture and education in Turkey...' (Anon. 2009). They openly argue that his work and the fact that it should be known in Turkey are more important than his being known as a communist.
3. The Turkish State since 1993, since he has been mostly articulated in the discourses of the Ministers of Culture and the Ministers of Education.

Disagreements between actors that make the above antagonistic set of arguments can be observed. The discourse that characterises the second set is that it is possible to compartmentalise Nâzım's life and the influences on it while for others, his life, work and political preferences are interrelated and inseparable. He has been articulated as either



Nâzım the poet or the communist (Kurtuluş, 2007: 316). The significant difference between the two clashing views arises from the aims of each group of actors. Those who claim that Nâzım's being a communist can be trivialised, aim to change the negative image of him, where his work was banned and he was not a citizen of his beloved country. They do not aim to prove that Nâzım was not a communist but that, besides being a communist, he was also a very patriotic person. Moreover, they emphasise his poems, which, for example, praise Mustafa Kemal, in my opinion not to argue that he was actually nationalist but to make it easier for him to be welcomed. The portrayal of Nâzım mostly adopted by the Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation and the state aims to increase sympathy for him by showing his romantic, patriotic and literary sides, rather than his political preferences. This also relates to the discussion about who Nâzım belongs to. Their claim is that Nâzım Hikmet does not belong to the communists but he is someone that the whole nation should know and appreciate. Nâzım does not belong to a certain group in Turkey but to the whole nation. On the other hand, nationalists who are still critical of Nâzım and actors like the *TKP* make the argument that his identity as a communist has been the most defining one shaping his life and works.

A change in the state discourse can be noticed as time passes. Until the 1990s, Nâzım was marginalised and lumped together with a movement that was perceived as a threat to the unity of the Turkish nation, namely communism. For the state, he was a prominent communist poet and he needed to be punished as such in various ways such as sentencing him to imprisonment, preventing his work from being published, and depriving him from citizenship. However, now the state discourse of Nâzım has become more complicated as it attempts to compartmentalise Nâzım's life and work and is one that separates ideology

from literary success and patriotism. In this way, it emphasises his contribution to the Turkish national literary canon and his patriotism. Thus, we see the attempts to canonise him as a Turkish poet who has contributed to the development of Turkish language and literature. His works have entered the national curriculum but actually his works have not been embraced in their entirety. A process of selection has undoubtedly taken place to ensure that only works that have been deemed to be patriotic have entered the national curriculum as well as curricula in higher education. Since he has been a controversial figure for so long, the strategy that is used to make him accepted is built upon a de-politicised image of him. A similar change of discourse can be seen in the way Nâzım is represented in the English translations and literary criticisms of his work published in English, defined by Ergil.

It seems that Hikmet's life and works were regarded as inseparable when they were first introduced into English and were considered to be important mainly for the "communist" ideology underlying them. After the late 1970s...both his works and his life seem to be presented as "lyrical" and his socialist deeds seems either to have been ignored or regarded to be separate from his poetry (Ergil: 2005: 120-1).

A 'de-politicised, Turkish Nâzım' is more acceptable than a communist one but this also points to another question of what the criterion to be part of the Turkish national identity as understood by the state is. As Nâzım's case signifies, being born a Turk is not satisfactory but as, Mesut Yeğen has claimed in relation to the Kurdish question, 'there was always a superior, super-ideal that needed to be fulfilled to be part of Turkishness: loyalty' (Yeğen, 2006: 113). His loyalty to the Turkish nation and the state were

questioned due his commitment to communism, which was understood as being in the service of the USSR.

Today, Nâzım is accepted and even praised by the state but the similar influence of super-ideal loyalty is still sought. He is represented as a patriot to justify the acceptance. The policy of Nâzım's rehabilitation is marked by the discourse that claims he was indeed loyal to the Turkish nation and its language. Our argument needs to be remembered: Nâzım's particular declarations, works and some instances in his life have created the grounds for the argument that he was a patriot and a communist to be validly formulated. The following pages will try to narrate some periods of his life from the viewpoint of the above arguments.

#### **6.1.2. The Turkish liberation war**

There are two main areas Nâzım's relation to the liberation war is an arena where two clashing views are operating. One is the fact that he wanted to take part in it and that he actually went to Ankara to join Mustafa Kemal's rebellion. The other is that he wrote an epic poem based on the liberation war as part of one of his biggest works – *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları (Human Landscapes of my Country)*. The *Epic* on the liberation war called *Kuvayi Milliye Destanı (The Epic of the National Militia)* was part of *Human Landscape*<sup>60</sup>. This is a piece of work that has been given as an example of Nâzım's patriotism but it has also been interpreted as a Marxist interpretation of the liberation war.

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<sup>60</sup> More detailed studies of these works are to be provided in the following chapter.

Nâzım Hikmet was seventeen years old when Mustafa Kemal started a counter attack in Asia Minor after the occupation of Ottoman territory in 1919. At the end of the World War I, the Ottoman Empire had been defeated by the Allies and its territory was occupied. Nâzım not only published patriotic poems attacking imperialists and called upon the youth to join Mustafa Kemal but also went to Ankara to act upon his ideal. However, it was also during his travels through Asia Minor that he encountered socialist ideology.

A good example of the first set of representations summarised above – the one that articulates an inseparable bond between his communism and his literary identity – is drawn by Kuzulugil in *Gelenek*<sup>61</sup>, based on Nâzım Hikmet's vision and narrative of the War of Liberation. This article was about a campaign run by the *TKP* to gather support for a petition demanding Nâzım's re-naturalisation as a Turkish citizen. It celebrated the success of the campaign that had gathered five hundred thousand signatures. Kuzulugil argues that for Nâzım, the liberation war was the struggle of people for their freedom from imperialism more than an attempt to form a nation-state. 'What we are emphasising here is that Nâzım (being a communist) views the liberation war from the perspective of working people rather than a 'nationalist' revival' (Kuzulugil, 2000: 110).

*The Epic of the National Militia* is probably the best place to search for Nâzım's opinions on the war. As will be seen in more detail later, he wrote about the war as a struggle of the 'little people'. He regarded the people as capable of making change. His anti-imperialist stance was clear in the text that drew a picture of the war where the evil is situated outside the people. Being the voice of the masses is supposed to be a

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<sup>61</sup> A monthly journal published by Turkish Communist Party.

characteristic of the left internationally. Thus, Nâzım's narration of the war from the point of view of the masses made it a reference point for a leftist journal.

Another commonality between Nâzım's narration of the liberation war and that of the Turkish left in general is that both study it as an anti-imperialist struggle. From the standpoint of the Turkish left, Mustafa Kemal's struggle was merely an anti-imperialist one. As studied in the earlier chapter anti-imperialism has been the common element in Kemalism and the ideology of the left, especially in the eyes of the many groups on the Turkish left. More precisely, the Turkish left has valued and, at that time supported the war as an anti-imperialist one, whether it was or not. Thus, a common ground between leftist ideology and that of the state, Kemalism, has been formulated. Nâzım's interpretation of the liberation war becomes an arena where these two ideologies operate peacefully together, even though at certain times they have had an antagonistic relationship. From this perspective, the Turkish left can and has found Marxist elements in the analysis and participation of Nâzım in the war.

Another argument is made by Kuzulugil in the same article. In his analysis of Nâzım's trip through Asia Minor to Russia, he argues that Nâzım had the capacity to understand that 'only a totally new system could replace the wrongs and decays' of the Ottoman Empire and that is why he went to Russia— a representation of him that clashes with the 'naïve' Nâzım of Vâ-nû. The argument of Kuzulugil is that Nâzım certainly cared for Asia Minor and its people but he thought communism would be the best solution to the problems. He writes as if Nâzım was determined and made a conscious decision to adopt communism. A similar interpretation of his involvement in the war has been made by Akif Kurtuluş, who adopts the discourse that Nâzım's works, life and ideology are

inseparable. He claims that Nâzım had made a deliberate choice at the time in favour of an ideology that aimed at the ‘salvation of humanity’ but his practice was rooted in the reality of his land (Kurtuluş, 2007: 317).

In contradiction, Vâlâ Nureddin Vâ-nû – who was the person that took the journey with Nâzım Hikmet through Asia Minor – gives us a different picture of their experience. Besides being a primary source of the era, it also includes the discourse where Nâzım’s political activism is deliberately not emphasised.

Vâ-nû’s book provides a narrative in which a patriotic poet at the beginning of the journey is moved by the situation of his country and is also willing to help in the struggle for independence. Two processes take place at the same time. On the one hand, he is disappointed by the situation in Ankara and the fact that he is given a trivial role in the struggle and, on the other hand, he meets a group of socialists called Spartacists. Nâzım learns about socialist ideology from them and he develops a certain curiosity towards the revolution, taking place in Russia at the time. In 1921, they travelled to Baku and later to Moscow where Nâzım stayed until 1924 and studied at the Department of Economics and Social Studies in the University of Moscow.

Vâ-nû’s representation of the whole process, of what can be called replacing nationalism with envy for learning about socialism, can be defined as ‘naïve.’ He talks of them as ‘ignorant’, young idealists (1999: 68). They were only interested in witnessing a revolution; it was such a shame they had missed the French one! (1999: 141). According to this book, they had a very idealist picture of Soviet Russia in their minds. For example, they thought that money was not used anymore and they spent almost all their money before arriving in Russia (Ibid: 179-182).

In this narrative, socialism is not a matter of political choice but a matter of curiosity and something that can create the hope of a better future for the people that the Kemalist struggle could not give. Even though Vâ-Nû was also a socialist, he does not idealise the era or their involvement. Probably it is the reflection of the fact that it is written as a memoir that helps to create a more human image of Nâzım rather than a political one. We do not find all of the arguments that distinguish Nâzım's political and ideological commitment from his life and works in Vâ-Nû's work. However, it is still a good example of the kind of reading of Nâzım that is more naïve, romantic and human in general, a picture that could enhance the possibility of his rehabilitation.

In fact, during the liberation war, nationalism and socialism were not necessarily in conflict. Mustafa Kemal himself developed close ties with Russia. The driving force of the two 'revolutions' was anti-imperialism, which brought Moscow and Ankara together. Russia had given financial support to Turkey both during and after the war. If it is considered that the Turkish left sympathised or, in fact, supported the war as an anti-imperialist struggle as just mentioned, in addition to the pragmatic strategy on the part of Mustafa Kemal, it is not very surprising that Nâzım had been supportive of the struggle.

Besides Nâzım's involvement in the struggle itself, his work on the war – *The Epic of the Liberation War* – has been the subject of both representations. As just mentioned in the example of the *TKP*, those who interpret his work to be shaped profoundly by communism analyse this work as a story of the struggles of the oppressed masses of Asia Minor.

*The Epic of the Liberation War* has also been used as an example of Nâzım's patriotism during his life, especially in the campaign for his release from jail and still today it carries

these labels of being evidence of Nâzım's patriotism. For groups that aim to define Nâzım as a poet rather than as a communist, this poem can be said to provide those grounds. It is also amenable to fit the argument that he was a patriotic person. The same work has been perceived and presented by those adopting the discourse that Nâzım was a great poet inspired by Turkish history. *The Epic of the Liberation War*, when selectively read, becomes a narration of the national struggle of the Turkish people filled with patriotic passages. This line of argument was used by the journalist and lawyer who took an active part in the campaign for the poet's release.

Nâzım was jailed in 1938 and, after having been in jail for twelve years, a massive campaign was launched for his release, as will be seen in the next section. Many people of different political and professional backgrounds took part. One of the leading figures was actually an anti-Communist journalist, Ahmet Emin Yalman. Having founded the newspaper *Vatan* in 1940, Yalman wrote numerous articles in favour of Nazım's release. His attitude was shaped by his worry for the international reputation of Turkey and also by an opportunistic political strategy. These were the times when the opposition Democrat Party was formed and a multiparty election was to take place for the first time in the country. The Democrat Party, on various issues, presented itself as an alternative to the repressive, single party policies of the *CHP* in the election campaign. Yalman also had the hope of 'winning him [Nâzım Hikmet] over for the Turkish nation' (Yalman, 1970: 187). What is important here is that non communists had already seen the potential of co-opting Nâzım. They had already engaged in the selective reading of his life and works. People like Yalman and Sebük had identified compatibilities in what Nâzım wrote



and the political discourse they were developing. In order to do so, though, Nâzım was referred to as a patriot or a potential convert from communism.

Besides Yalman, a lawyer who was a member of the Democrat Party, Mehmet Ali Sebük, also made Nazım's case public by proving the illegality of the case in newspapers. He was also a nationalist who was interested in justice, rather than sympathetic to the poet as a fellow communist. Both Yalman and Sebük used rhetoric that represented Nâzım as 'one of the distinguished writers of the modern generation who has used Turkish language skilfully', in their appeal for the attention of the people and, especially, the government (Ibid: 189). They would read 'patriotic passages from Nâzım's 'The Epic of the Liberation War' to gain public sympathy' in press conferences (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 209).

In the 1940s, this work was used to emphasise alternative inspirations of Nâzım besides communism. It was the main subject of discourses that claimed he is a patriot. The same discourses were used by nationalists of the time to disregard his communism and today it has been taken up by the state. This work is a common reference point of Nâzım's patriotism and the quality of his literary work. Indeed, it is arguable that it is territory for both readings because it entails both patriotic and communist elements like many of Nâzım's works.

The same work was narrated as a patriotic document by Emin and Sebük but it was interpreted to reflect communist ideology in 1965. This case can cast light on how the same work can be both read as a patriotic piece and as a threat to national unity, which are indeed both selective interpretations of his work. In 1 July 1965, parts of the poem that had been missing from the original publication were published in the magazine

*Eylem* and the publisher and author of the article were taken to court. The claim was that in this poem Nâzım Hikmet emphasised the efforts of the villagers and people who did not belong to the ruling class, coupled with the argument that the ruling elite was in co-operation with the enemy. This narration of Nâzım identified social classes and their clashing interests. The allegation was that Nâzım had talked about a society that was formed of different classes rather than being a unified nation. He had argued that the struggle for independence was not an action of the whole of the nation and thus, created an antagonism between different classes of the nation. Therefore, the publication of such a poem had to be punished.

The representation of Nâzım as a communist poet is obvious in these arguments. He is accused of envisaging the Turkish nation made up of different classes where the bourgeoisie clashes with the workers and there is antagonism between these classes. However, the Turkish nation is a unified entity without any such distinctions of class or ethnicity. The official state line has been that the Turkish nation is a unity without linguistic, racial, ethnic or class divisions. As early as 1935, Recep Peker had declared that ‘in Turkey, there are no classes... no privileges’ (Parla, 1995:126), on the other hand, there was Nâzım’s argument that there were different social classes and there was a conflict between them. Ironically, though, it was this point of view that caused the court to decide in favour of the accused because, by law, such classes referred to in the poem did not exist in Turkey anymore (Yetkin, 1970:77-83).

This work is still a common reference point in the discussions on Nâzım Hikmet. When we look at the contemporary stance of the state we see that this poem has been one of the vital tools in the re-articulation of Nâzım. The current Ministry of Education included

*Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları (Human Landscapes)* as one of the hundred recommended books to be read by school children. The similar act of de-politicising Nâzım or, choosing works that emphasise his patriotism, is seen here as well.

### **6.1.3. Nâzım Hikmet's imprisonment and release**

Nâzım was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment in March 1938 with the claim that he attempted a revolt in the Army. Six months later he was accused of the same charge, this time in the Navy and was sentenced to twenty-eight years and four months in total (Coşkun, 2002:123). The Army Trial was based on the fact that a student in Army School was impressed by Nâzım Hikmet's work and tried to meet him on two occasions and talk to him about socialism in general. On both occasions, Nâzım refused to talk to him in detail and even thought that the student was an undercover police officer (Fuat, 2001: 222-3). The Army found out that this student and a few of his friends read Nâzım's work and arrested them and the poet as well. There was no evidence of him giving these military students advice on a revolt. The only 'evidence' was that they read his books, which were available in any bookshop at the time. Similar arguments were made in the Navy Trial as well. The fact that a few students had been found reading Nâzım's work was enough reason for the military courts to sentence him.

Nâzım's imprisonment was never only a case of law but also had political repercussions. The political effects became more and more obvious once his lawyer – Mehmet Ali Sebük – proved that there was no legal reason that could lead to a sentence. Sebük had made it clear that what he was accused of was not a criminal act under Military

Jurisdiction at the time of his court appearance (Cemgil, 1993: 49). Petitions, Nâzım's hunger strike and the *Çiçek Palas* meeting were the most influential parts in the campaign. Two petitions were prepared and sent to the General Assembly and the president (Karaca, 2002: 244). The one that was sent to president İnönü was signed by many people who were not necessarily communist and included figures such as Halide Edip Adivar<sup>62</sup>.

Nâzım Hikmet's release campaign was mostly shaped by the discourse that isolated communism. The fact that various actors, including Nâzım's mother, nationalists writers such as Ahmet Emin Yalman, Halide Edip and the involvement of international literary figures such as Louis Aragon and Tristan Tzara made the campaign a arena which was dominated by this discourse. Even though the international leg of the campaign was run by a group related to the *TKP* (Karaca, 2002: 243), international interest in Nâzım's release gave precedence for the argument that he was a well-known and respected poet world-wide and that he should receive the same appreciation in his own country. His lawyer had gathered enough information to prove his innocence but the release campaign used the rhetoric that brought forth his personality as a poet rather than his political preferences or innocence. As it was mentioned in the previous section on his relationship to the liberation war, the discourse was not limited to the emphasis on Nâzım's poetry and international prestige but would include the claim that Nâzım was a patriot as well.

The *Çiçek Palas* meeting brought different groups together, even though it was organised by the Youth Association of Istanbul Higher Education<sup>63</sup> on 15 May, 1950. It was

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<sup>62</sup> Halide Edip Adivar (1884-1964) was a famous female writer. She had written extensively about the period of the liberation war and had taken an active role beside Mustafa Kemal at the time (Özkırımlı, 2004, 28-9).

<sup>63</sup> A student organisation related to *TKP*.

important for its appeal for Nâzım's release but also to display the general atmosphere in the country in relation to communism. In this thesis, the relationship of the state adopting the nationalist discourse and the Turkish left has been studied through the analysis of Nâzım Hikmet. It has been argued that the clash over the hegemony of communism and nationalism occupied a fair amount of the history of Republican Turkey but, as seen in the case of Nâzım, this relationship has taken a more moderate character even though the struggle for hegemony is not totally eradicated. The intense clash between the communist and nationalist 'camps' that took a violent turn in *Çiçek Palas* and, how the state apparatus has protected the nationalist 'camp', shows us this antagonism as well as the state preference for the nationalist discourse.

When the meeting was taking place, there were undercover police at the venue and a group of young nationalists had gathered there as well. Nationalists shouted out anti-Communist slogans and attacked the building, smashing its windows out and some of them also entered the room where the meeting was taking place. The meeting was basically being sabotaged by the nationalists and the police did not prevent the attacks. The mayor of Istanbul arrived at *Çiçek Palas* but the way he dealt with the situation showed he was not neutral. He called upon the 'Turkish youth who bear the love of the nation in their heart' to help the police of the country to do their job properly (Fuat, 2001: 543). It was a chaotic situation not only at the venue but the tension had also spread around the neighbourhood and many nationalists were gathered. Police forces had to help the people organising the meeting to run away but this did not mean that they were not arrested. (Ibid: 542-544). Even though the state apparatus treated all the participants of the release campaign as communists and even arrested some of them, different groups

had gathered in this meeting and the prevalent discourse was that Nâzım was an internationally acclaimed poet who was in prison unlawfully.

As mentioned in the previous section, Mehmet Emin Yalman, a right-wing columnist, was active in Nâzım's release campaign. His rhetoric portrayed Nâzım as a young, bright poet who in fact loved his country and was not loyal to Moscow more than his own roots. Yalman expressed these arguments in his columns at the time, and then published his memoirs. In the memoirs, he cited his interview with Nâzım where he asked Nâzım implicitly about his allegiance to Moscow. After having described the general nationalist understanding of a communist at the time as 'someone who thinks dogmatically and fanatically in line with Moscow', Yalman asked Nâzım whether he perceived Moscow as his Mecca. Nâzım's reply was; 'my Mecca is my country and my love for this nation' (Yalman, 1970: 189). Nâzım's statements that refer to a nation and his love of the nation certainly are the kind of ground that the patriot representation of him has been rooted in. Another basis on which he expressed his commitment and loyalty to Turkish State was the letter he wrote to Mustafa Kemal soon after his appearance in Court in 1938. If one were ever to draw a patriotic representation of Nâzım, this letter would be the greatest expression of his nationalism, which includes lines such as:

...

I am accused of "encouraging a revolt" in the Turkish Navy.  
I swear on the Turkish Revolution and you that I am innocent.

...

I am not blind and I have a mind that can appreciate every giant step you take  
for progress and I have a loving heart for my country.

...

I am not a traitor of either the revolution or the country...

...

I am a poet of Turkish language, which is your creation.

...

You are the greatest revolutionary leader I can apply to [for my release].

I am requesting justice from Kemalism and you (Karaca, 2002: 219, my translation).

Nâzım declares his respect and loyalty to Mustafa Kemal and the reforms led by him. This letter is a great piece of evidence that summarises the way the Turkish left has interpreted Mustafa Kemal and Kemalism. Nâzım explicitly calls Kemalism a revolution and defines it to be progressive. It has been identified that the Turkish left interpreted Kemalism as a progressive movement for its time and, especially, as an anti-imperialist movement. The letter to Atatürk is a direct expression of this attitude of the Turkish left towards Kemalism and can be argued to be an open declaration of commitment to Kemalism by Nâzım Hikmet. Such moves by Nâzım prepared the ground for the discourse that talk about him as a patriot and a lover and great executor of Turkish language. On the other hand, whatever he would say or do, for some groups he was nothing more than a communist and he needed to be punished for that.

Nâzım was being punished for his political ideas. This was again obvious in the discussion in the General Assembly on whether to pass an Amnesty that would set him free. Many MPs used derogatory words to describe him. Nâzım was called ‘a red dog that was looking forward to biting the Turkish nation’ (Fuat, 2001: 548). The discourse that emphasised his communism dominated the debate. Communism was understood by those MPs as service to Moscow. After intense discussions, the General Amnesty was passed and he was set free on 15 July 1950 (Karaca, 2002: 244).

Nâzım’s imprisonment without any legal grounds was in itself the peak of his representation as a communist poet who needed to be punished. The argument made for the trials – that army and navy students read his books and would organise a revolt –

reflected an image of Nâzım as the symbol of communism and the predominant poet in contributing to its spread. Even though he was already expelled from the *TKP* when he was arrested due to the opposition he had organised in the party and, even though he used to work in the movie business and for legal magazines, the state still regarded his writings as communist propaganda. As just seen, this understanding was also prevalent in the discussions of MPs for the general amnesty that would lead to his release. On the other hand, the campaign for his release was predominantly shaped by the opposing discourse that dwelt on the world-wide appreciation of his work; his health problems; and the need for justice that would persuade Nâzım to be loyal to the state rather than the communist cause.

#### **6.1.4. Nâzım Hikmet in the Soviet Union without Turkish citizenship**

In 1950 Nâzım Hikmet was a free man again and was back in Istanbul. However, the political context of Turkey at the time he was released was not much different from the single party period in relation to communism. As seen in previous chapters, after a short period of pragmatic alliance with Russia during the liberation war and relative tolerance of socialist activity until 1925 and for a short interval in 1945-1946, anti-communism was a core element of nationalism in Turkey, shaping state policy towards leftist movements. Turkish national identity was defined as a negation of Communism. Nâzım Hikmet was still a communist poet in a country ruled by a government with strong anti-communist stereotypes, policies and laws.

The unrest in society caused by his release casted a shadow over his freedom. The most obvious example of the intense unrest was an attack on one of his friend's house. Police



monitored Nâzım and his family all day long (Karaveli, 2002: 242). Basically, it was not a real atmosphere of freedom for him but the situation got unbearable when he was called to military duty, which is obligatory for all males over eighteen years of age in Turkey.

At the time, he was forty-nine years old and had severe health problems which, under normal circumstances, should have been enough reason to exempt him from military service. However, Nâzım could not get a medical report to change the decision. The fact that he had been a student in the Navy school had not helped to change it either. The obvious reasons that he did not want to serve his military duty were his age and illness, but there was another suspected reason as well. He thought that military service was a trap and he expressed this view in a personal recording. He claimed to have concrete evidence that he would be killed and the Menderes government would claim that he 'tried to flee his military service and was shot while on the run' (Hikmet, 1996: 46).

It is not possible to know if his worries had solid ground since he did not do this military service. Instead, he managed to run away to Russia via Romania. Nâzım Hikmet lived in Moscow until his death on 3 June 1963. As this work is not meant to be a biography of Nâzım, the details of his life in the Soviet Union are not within the scope of this chapter. However, the period of 1950-1963 is significant since it involved symbolic moments and actions that give grounds to both representations that "prove" he was a communist traitor or a patriot.

Nâzım's escape was the event for nationalists and the state at the time that proved his disloyalty to the country and treason. It was perceived that he not only attempted to mobilise an uprising in the military but also escaped from serving in the military. Moreover, the place where he escaped to was one of the biggest 'others' of the Turkish

nation, Soviet Russia. The military in Turkey is regarded as the most prestigious institution that is always there to protect the nation from internal and external enemies<sup>64</sup>. Thus, serving in the military is a matter of honour as well as the ultimate national duty. It makes families proud when their sons are in the military.

Anti-communism went hand in hand with anti-Russian sentiment in Turkey, similar to McCarthyism in the USA during the Cold War. Communism was perceived as an excuse for Russian imperialism. This view was declared in the General Assembly in 1951 during the discussions about a law in the criminal code to fight communism (Öztürk, 1998: 2263). Thus, communists were treated as Russian spies within the nation and the prevalent discourse of the state was that communists were traitors. Nâzım was treated with antagonism or at least suspension because of his communism not only by the state but also by nationalists.

Some newspapers tried to create the impression that Nâzım was an agent of the Soviet Union after his release from prison. In Nâzım's own words, 'a campaign was launched against him', propagating claims like Nâzım 'was an agent paid by Russia' and that 'all his works were published by Russians' (Hikmet in Tunçay, 2007: 19). In this political context, when Nâzım went to Russia, it was the ultimate proof that he had been working for Russian interests in the eyes of the nationalists as expressed in many newspaper articles about his escape. Again, it was in the newspapers of the time that the discourse that he was a Russian agent was reproduced. They were full of stories on his escape and speculated that he got help from the Soviet Union (Fuat, 2001: 566-571). Those articles were only speculation because the actual story of how he escaped and, whether he had

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<sup>64</sup> It is common for public opinion polls to reveal that the military is the most trusted organisation in the eyes of the Turkish people. One such research indicated that 84.38 % are of this opinion (Anon.: 2008).

any help from foreign countries, were unknown at the time<sup>65</sup>. It is only possible to conclude that information in support of both discourses – either he always served communist interests or he was critical of some policies of communist regimes and he even worked to foster Turkish culture – can also be found in the actions, speeches and works of Nâzım during this period. Nâzım's attitude towards Stalin and his involvement in the situation of the Turkish community in Bulgaria can be given as examples of such ground of ambiguity where both arguments find their sources.

Those representations of Nâzım and his escape deliberately selected the elements of his discourse in order to exclude him and his influence. These commentators selectively composed an image of the poet that was treacherous, according to their belief system. This treatment of him undoubtedly involved an underlying argument that this image of Nâzım as a communist traitor was the true and ultimate one.

On his arrival in the Soviet Union on 30 June 1951, Nâzım Hikmet gave a speech that has been taken to support the argument that his loyalty was to this country and Stalin rather than to Turkey:

... I am so content. I owe my whole life to this monumental city. I am a child of the Soviet Union. I am returning to this big country, my real country after 24 years. Stalin is very important to me...He is the source of my ideas. He made me who I am...I owe him everything. He is not only the greatest man on earth but he is also my main source of light (Coşkun, 1988: 85, my translation).

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<sup>65</sup> A recording by Nâzım, telling the story of his escape, found in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History was published in 2007. It is only in this account that we learn Nâzım had received the financial aid necessary to organise his escape from World Peace Committee, with the help of Sabiha Sertel and an anonymous female *TKP* member living in Paris.

This short speech not only expressed an allegiance to Stalin and Russia but also stated that his source of inspiration was Stalin. Thus, it supports the argument that his work and ideology constitutes a unity, rather than consisting of two representations of Nâzım, which is generally discussed. It would be possible to argue that he wrote as a communist with the aim of spreading this ideology to the masses through his poetry, plays or newspaper columns, based on this speech.

On the other hand, Nâzım's view of Stalin has been another contested area where opposing representations of him can be based. It is also cited that, having lived in the USSR, Nâzım became critical of Stalin's policies, especially those vis-à-vis opposition and art. What was most shocking in terms of art in the Stalinist era was the ban on the works of Mayakovski and Meyerhold. The ban was so strict that there was no mention of their names, as if they never existed. They had been the main figures of revolutionary art during the formation of socialist Russia, which also happened to be the time when Nâzım was a student in Moscow. After Stalin's death, he would participate in an effort to re-introduce the works of both Meyerhold<sup>66</sup> and Mayakovski<sup>67</sup> into the Soviet art scene (Fuat, 2001: 666).

The personality cult that developed around Stalin was also bothersome for Nâzım and he did not refrain from expressing his discomfort. Shortly after his arrival in Moscow, he criticised the plays on the theatre scene at the time. He said he had seen 'ten plays... actually it was the same play each time with different titles – all of them in praise of

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<sup>66</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) was the auteur of the Revolution's first professional theatre production. He was the Head of the Theatre Department of Narkompros (a kind of Bolshevik Culture Ministry) during 1920-1921. He was however, executed in 1940 for getting involved in anti-government political activity (Anon, 'Vsevolod Meyerhold': 2008).

<sup>67</sup> Vladimir Mayakovski (1893-1930) was a Russian poet and playwright, among the representatives of Russian futurism (Anon, 'Vladimir Mayakovsky': 2008).

Stalin' (Göksu; Timms, 1999: 260). As we will see in the section on Nâzım's work, he expressed his criticisms via poetry and plays. His criticism of Stalinist policies can easily form the basis of an argument against the one that he devoted all his works and actions in the service of Stalin, the USSR and communism.

In the period between 1950 and 1963, Nâzım's trip to Bulgaria and his involvement in the question of the Turkish minority in that country can be another instance that is open to clashing interpretations. Bulgaria hosted a large minority population of Turkish-speaking Muslims who were unhappy with the communist regime (Karaca, 2002: 255). The Bulgarian authorities' first reaction to the discontent of the minority was allowing them to immigrate to Turkey. However, when they realised that large numbers of the Turkish-speaking population intended to leave, Bulgaria decided to prevent their emigration as it was worried about losing such a huge amount of its labour force. Nâzım went to Bulgaria in the autumn of 1951 and was asked by Bulgarian authorities to appeal to the minority and persuade them to stay.

His visit to Bulgaria and his involvement with the plight of the Turkish minority is another case that has been subject to a selective reading of his life. According to Göksu and Timms, Hikmet was persuasive and some of the people who even had their visas ready decided to stay. He warned the Turkish people about American propaganda against the communist regime in Bulgaria and 'warned them that life in Turkey might prove even worse' (Göksu; Timms, 1990: 264). In Turkish newspapers of the time, this trip was reported as Nâzım propagating socialism to Turkish-speaking Muslims and discouraging them from immigrating to Turkey (Ibid). On the other hand, Nâzım told his close friends that he informed the Bulgarian authorities about the minority's demands to increase its

cultural autonomy. Mehmet Fuat cites Nâzım writing to the Bulgarian Communist Party that if they wanted to make Turks stay they should,

- a) respect their religion and language;
- b) launch Turkish-speaking schools;
- c) educate teachers to work in these schools;
- d) allow the publication of books, magazines, newspapers in Turkish;
- e) launch a radio station broadcasting in Turkish (2001: 587).

Nâzım's trip and mission in Bulgaria can and has been subject to clashing interpretations. One interpretation mentioned that Nâzım worked as an agent of foreign countries advocating communism to Turkish Muslims, who were oppressed by Bulgarian Communist Party. On the other hand, it can also be argued that he sided with the people against the authorities. He was the voice of the oppressed masses once again, as he had tried to be in his works. Moreover, he tried to earn some respect and rights for Turkish people in a communist country. He advocated the use of the Turkish language and respect for religion in opposition to propagating to the Turks that they should obey the communist regime and be assimilated.

During Hikmet's life in Russia, the most important development in the relationship between him and the Turkish state took place: The Council of Ministers voted to strip Nâzım Hikmet of his Turkish citizenship. The decision declared on 25 July 1951 is as follows:

The Council of Ministers has decided that the well-known communist Nâzım Hikmet Ran, who fled to Moscow via Romania without a passport and gave a speech against his own country in Moscow airport and is performing the duty of spreading communism assigned to him by the Soviet government through the large propaganda campaign he started against the

polity and leaders of Turkey in subsequent radio broadcasts. And since it is known that a warning to quit this duty would not make a difference...will be deprived of Turkish citizenship (Anon., *Cumhuriyet*: 1993, my translation).

Memet Fuat cites Nâzım's reaction to the decision of the Council of Ministers: 'So, I was deprived of Turkish citizenship. No one can undo the fact that I am Turkish or that I am a child of my people, or break the eternal ties between me and my nation' (quoted in Fuat, 2001: 581, my translation). This reply is significant in showing what Nâzım taught about his being a Turk. He associates nationality with the people, not the polity. When he claims he is a child of his people, he is referring to the ties he has with Turkish folk culture, as his works do. As will be seen on the section on his works, he was fed by the local cultural heritage. It could be easily claimed that he is or his works are a product of the land he grew up in as well as the historical conditions of his time.

In the contemporary period between 1993 and 2009, which is the era of interest for this thesis, Nâzım Hikmet's citizenship is still one of the main objects of discussions. Again, the two sets of representations are prevalent in the arguments for or against his citizenship. It is still the Turkish left and nationalists that implement the discourse that bring forth communism as the most important influence on Nâzım and, that it is not possible to isolate this fact from his literary production. Efforts by Nâzım's family and the state on citizenship are predominantly shaped by the opposing discourse.

In 2000, while The Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation organised a petition for the re-instatement of his citizenship – details will be given later – the Turkish Communist Party organised an alternative petition and collected five hundred thousand signatures. The campaign aimed to re-naturalize Nâzım. The discourse of the state was challenged

during this campaign since it was organised by the *TKP*. The *TKP* has been critical about the new articulation of the poet that draws on an apolitical image of him. Thus, in their petition campaign they openly declared what they believed was the most important characteristic of Nâzım. The name of the campaign speaks for itself; ‘Citizenship for Communist Nâzım!’ The *TKP* clearly stresses that Nâzım is a communist, a poet, Turkish and a patriot, all at the same time. Accordingly, it is not possible to say that he was a great poet without considering his political commitments. This campaign stated, as put in *Sol*, that ‘Nâzım was who he was because he was a communist’ and also that ‘The communist Nâzım is a matter of pride for this country’ (2001: 55).

Ironically, the same argument that Nâzım was a communist and his identity as such have been the biggest influences on his life and works has been the reason why nationalists oppose efforts of the state and others for his citizenship and the transfer of his grave. For example, in 2000 when state efforts about Nâzım’s citizenship gained pace, a series of articles were published in a nationalist journal – *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi* (Turkish World Journal of History) – that were marked by the above discourse (Sepetçioğlu, 2000).

The first part of this chapter aimed to describe the two main sets of representations associated with our case study, Nâzım Hikmet, and analysed the poet’s life in terms of these two discourses. Throughout the thesis, from a social constructivist lenses, it has been argued and identified that none of the material studied here, national identity, political affiliation, literary canon, artistic inspirations or even personal life are static closures. From this perspective, this chapter has so far presented the two representations about the poet and tried to show that even Nâzım’s own life, with its ambiguities, makes



both of these discourses possible to be produced, reproduced and implemented. For the purposes of this thesis it is now important to see how the Turkish State reproduces and implements a new discourse on Nâzım.

As demonstrated before, the Turkish state punished Nâzım for his political commitment by bans, imprisonment and forced exile but we can see a change in this attitude in parallel to a new discourse starting in 1993. The current official state discourse on Nâzım is being shaped by the argument that his being a communist can be and should be trivialised, as will be seen in the following pages. The second part of this chapter will provide details of the official discourse. The period under study is between 1993 and 2009, but the actions and rhetoric of all actors will not be provided. The details of the discourse adopted by all the actors mentioned in the period under study will not be provided since this thesis is solely interested in the change in the official discourse about Nâzım Hikmet. It needs to be mentioned that this choice is not made without respect to the fact that there are other influential actors at play and that there is support and opposition to the official line. However their discourses and actions do not fall under the interests of this study. This thesis has aimed to study the strategy of the Turkish state vis-à-vis its 'other', communism, through an analysis of the strategy of the Turkish state vis-à-vis a Turkish communist, Nâzım Hikmet. Accordingly, the interest of this work is the official discourse on Nâzım and the evolution it has gone through over the years.

## **6.2. Part II**

### **6.2.1. The shift from a communist propagandist to Turkish literary figure: The official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet**

Over the years, the two representations about Nâzım Hikmet have been expressed by different groups. When we come to the contemporary period – since 1993 – an important change in the way the state represents and deals with Nâzım can be observed. Until the 1990s, the state and right wing media had created an image of Nâzım as a traitor in the service of one of the ‘biggest enemies’ of the Turkish nation – the Russians. Nâzım was perceived to be propagating communism to the Turkish people through his works, and was considered to be undermining the Kemalist regime. In this context, he was accused of conspiring to organise a mutiny in the navy and the army. In addition, his patriotic credentials were questioned through accusations of escaping to Russia in order to avoid military service. As a person without citizenship, exiled, Nâzım was featured as the non-patriotic communist intellectual.

However, it has nowadays become almost ordinary that ministers of the cabinet, political party leaders or the president talk highly of Nâzım Hikmet. This recognition was part of many processes, some were the dynamics of Turkish politics, and some had to do with the international recognition that Nâzım Hikmet had acquired as an important Turkish poet. What is important is that all these changes converged into an increasing recognition of the need to incorporate Nâzım’s reputation and work into the national body politic. The process leading to the re-naturalisation of Nâzım in 2009 will be studied through the discourse of state officials in the following pages.

The Ministers of Culture and Tourism of various governments have been especially active in the rehabilitation of Nâzım and his work. Since the early 1990s, more specifically since 1993, there have been several attempts to make him a Turkish citizen again by government officials of the same state that had decided to deprive him of citizenship. The process of rehabilitation of Nâzım finally led to the signing of a new decree by the Council of Government that annulled the 1950 decision on 5 January 2009, as a result of which Nâzım Hikmet was re-naturalised posthumously. The citizenship question and the transfer of Nâzım's grave have been the two most important issues in the discussions about the poet. It is argued here that re-naturalisation has been made possible as a result of a process based on a change in the discourse deliberately aiming to create an apolitical, patriotic image of Nâzım Hikmet. In the following pages, we will be going through this period in order to analyse the discourse of state officials.

The change in the discourse and attitude of the state vis-à-vis Nâzım Hikmet can be traced to various speeches over the years of MPs and Ministers who belong to a wide range of political parties<sup>68</sup>. A changed state discourse of Nâzım Hikmet emerged in 1993. This was a shift from the discourse emphasising Nâzım's communism to the other one that assumed a separation between his political commitment and his literary success. In analysing the official discourse, our guide will be the two representations identified earlier in this chapter. In the previous part, we established that there were two representations about Nâzım Hikmet, one as a communist political activist and the other as a successful, internationally acclaimed poet whose political involvement was irrelevant to his work. Both of these were based on a selective reading of his life and works. While

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<sup>68</sup> Ten different cabinets were formed between 1990 and 2008, including coalitions of center-right, Islamist and social democratic parties.

the discourse that represented Nâzım as a communist, selected elements from his life and works that would enhance the argument that he was first and foremost a communist, the other apolitical image was formed by drawing more attention to his humanism and patriotism, based, again on a selective reading of his life story and his work.

The official discourse is argued to have shifted from the one representing Nâzım as a communist and punishing him to the one that draws an apolitical image. Thus, we should discuss this second representation. The core argument of the latter is that there can be a separation between politics and literature, thus making it possible that Nâzım be articulated as an apolitical poet shaped by humanism, internationalism and even patriotism. It can also be noticed that this discourse, indeed, involves two interrelated processes; one that separates Nâzım from his political affiliation to communism and then re-defines him within the context of the hegemony of Turkish nationalism. The attempt to hegemonise the space to which Nâzım belongs – the symbolic figure of the ‘other’ – is argued here to be the aim of the newly adopted state discourse. It was previously mentioned that there are actors other than the state who reproduce a non-communist image of the poet. They are concerned with whether Nâzım Hikmet is known in Turkey and whether he is given respect for his literary productions. Their view can be summarised as an effort to prevent Nâzım Hikmet’s literature being de-valued because of his communism. This state effort, which is our object of analysis, however, is argued here to be a deliberate choice of strategy to deal with the challenges of an ‘other’. The ‘other’ in question is communism and the case of Nâzım Hikmet is studied as a case representing the dynamic, un-closed relationship between the state and its ‘other’.

This thesis argues that the discourse of nationalism is constantly contested by alternative discourses and that national identity attains a changing definition due to its being shaped by the power relations of the challenges. Nâzım as a communist poet produced an influential challenge to the Kemalist discourse in Turkey. The fact that he was rejected signifies a clear antagonism between the discourses of nationalism and communism. The ban on his work, his imprisonments, and exile were functions of the *logic of equivalence*, which was the main strategy of the state. Nevertheless, this strategy of the state in its dealing with the challenge coming from the communist area of meaning via Nâzım Hikmet has changed in 1990s, starting in 1993. Nâzım is now represented both as a poet and as a successful Turkish poet. The actions and efforts of mainly the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education emerged as a process of rehabilitation, eventually leading to Nâzım Hikmet's re-naturalisation; however, one that is conditioned upon a re-articulation of him. He is defined as a great contributor to the advancement of the Turkish language and literature, and his work as part of the national heritage.

A relevant question emerges at this point; why would the state care to rehabilitate Nâzım Hikmet especially? One possible answer, as I have already suggested, is that he is an internationally recognised poet and he is famous as a Turkish poet worldwide. He is already considered to be among the members of the Turkish canon. Similarly, it can also be argued that Nâzım has always already been considered a part of the canon in Turkey which might have led to a popular demand for his acceptance in the country. Another answer is more to do with the strategic international context, which is obviously the demise of the USSR. Communism which we study as an 'other' of the Turkish state is no longer a real threat. For us, the change in the discourse is a way to deal with communism

but these factors have helped in the rehabilitation process. The demise of the USSR makes it easier for such a challenging figure to be represented as part of the Turkish canon and the reality of his international reputation becomes a tool to justify his importance.

We have tried to show that the two arguments can find their support both in his life experience and in his work. The main points of interest for this thesis are how these 'realities' are perceived, how they are read selectively, and especially the change of perception in the eyes of the state and the reason for it. In the current official discourse, Nâzım's communism is attempted to be replaced by an image of a poet who has written a patriotic epic of 'national liberation'. A new perception of Nâzım Hikmet is emerging. Nâzım's work is being dissected and subject to a selective reading process. This process helps to nurture the new image of Nâzım as 'the patriot', 'the best articulator of language', and 'the humanist'. These are some of the elements of the current discourse that draw a different image of the poet. The most obvious example of the selective reading that is taking place is the emphasis on *The Epic of the Liberation War*, which depicts the liberation war of 1919-1923. This work is articulated as his 'patriotic' work and references to it appear constantly in the period under study, as will be shown. *The Epic of the Liberation War*, which is part of *Human Landscapes*, is the work of Nâzım's that is mostly referred to in the current rhetoric, staged as plays by the State Theatres and finding its place in the national curricula. Nâzım's work, after years of being banned, has become part of the Turkish canon because it is the one that could be argued to be patriotic and has accordingly been selected as part of the rehabilitation process.

In the following pages, the official discourse will be presented in order to show which selective reading of Nâzım has emerged. A description of the situation will be provided together with an embedded the argument that this new representation of Nâzım is a new state strategy towards communism. This strategy aims to hegemonise the space of Nazım as a communist by neglecting it and then articulating him as Turkish. Therefore, it is concluded here that Nâzım or a communist or an alternative discourse could be part of the Turkish canon – which is representative of Turkish national identity – but this challenge is first marginalised and attempted to be contained by the hegemony of the nationalist discourse. Alternative narrations are subject to the struggle of hegemony that is attempted to be achieved by different strategies. The marginalisation or the *logic of equivalence* changed into a strategy of containment by the *logic of difference* in this case study, and both are attempts to hegemonise what Nâzım represents – a contestation of Turkish nationalist discourse from a Marxist point of view. The trajectory of the speeches and actions of state officials can guide us into understanding the development of the new discourse which is formulated mainly by the study of news on the subject and the records of the General Assembly.

News about the relationship of Nâzım and the state has been studied in the context of the following questions:

1. What are the circumstances of the news? (Nâzım Hikmet's birthday and the anniversary of his death are the two main dates when news about him can be found.)
2. Is there a state involvement at any level? If yes, who (Ministers, Prime Minister, MPs, President) is representing the state?

3. What are the main points highlighted in the speeches of the state officials? Are those points the ones identified as the main elements selected by the discourse that the state is argued to adopt, such as humanism, success in literature, international fame, and patriotism?

4. Is the rhetoric supported by actions? Were there any attempts to transfer his grave or for his re-naturalisation? (Those are the main discussion points about Nâzım and the demands of his family, friends, leftist groups and parties.)

5. Can continuity be traced in the discourse and actions of members of all governments since 1990?

In addition to the analysis of the news, the records of General Assembly corresponding to the same period (1993-2009) have been studied in the light of the following research questions:

1. Is Nâzım Hikmet mentioned in the Assembly? If yes, in which context was he referred to?

2. Can we detect the same discourse – aiming to rehabilitate him via his articulation as a Turkish poet, a contributor to Turkish literature and a patriot – identified in the study of the news, in the discussions directly about him or in other contexts in which he was referred to?

3. Was there any opposition in the Assembly when the discourse praising Nâzım Hikmet was used?

As a result of the analysis of the rhetoric used by state officials, we can identify a number of elements that characterise the current discourse. Nâzım's international reputation as a Turkish poet, the ownership of Nâzım as a product and representative of Turkish culture,



his humanism, love and longing for Turkey, and his successful articulation of the Turkish language and patriotism are the elements that have emerged in the various speeches that will be given as examples in the following pages. It should also be added that all of these elements are expressed as a result of a selective reading of Nâzım's life and works. The findings of the study of the news and the Assembly records, respectively, will be provided in the following pages, with examples which are believed to represent the arguments made here.

#### **6.2.2. Study of the official state declarations on Nâzım Hikmet since 1993**

1988 was a critical year in the creation of a welcoming milieu concerning Nâzım Hikmet after many years of a rigid rejection of him and his work. Nâzım Hikmet was commemorated in meetings and conferences that, however, were organised by his friends and family (Coşkun, 1988: 59). Even though some prominent politicians supported these initiatives, it is not possible to talk about a deliberate involvement of the state<sup>69</sup>.

The first attempts to change the decision that deprived Nâzım Hikmet of any rights to citizenship were made by his sister Samiye Yaltırım<sup>70</sup> in 1988. After a conference and several meetings, Yaltırım's lawyers made an application to the Council of Ministers for the annulment of the 1951 decision on 03 June 1988. The Council of Ministers did not reply to this application, which paved the way for litigation. The lawsuit was finalised in 1993 with the decision of the Council of State refusing the application for citizenship. The justification for the verdict was that citizenship is an individual right; thus, only the

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<sup>69</sup>For example, the leader of the SHP, Erdal İnönü sent a telegram where he praised Nâzım at one of the events organised to discuss Nâzım's citizenship (Coşkun, 1988: 63).

<sup>70</sup> Samiye Yaltırım is the founder of the Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation.

individual concerned – in this case the deceased Nâzım Hikmet – could make an appeal and his sister did not possess such a right (Çoşkun, 2008). It was after the announcement of the decision of the Council of State, that for first time, a Minister of the government made comments praising Nâzım. The Minister of Culture of the time, Fikri Sağlar gave a speech stating that Nâzım Hikmet was accepted as a Turkish poet all around the world and emphasised the popular demand in Turkey for the same acceptance (Anon., *Cumhuriyet*: 1993). Here, we see the international reputation argument for the first time and this will continuously emerge in the following years.

We take this speech as the starting point of a period that is marked by a process of rehabilitation of Nâzım, which is the period of this study. In 1993, the efforts of the Foundation requesting citizenship gained pace with the launching of a petition. It was an appeal to the Prime Ministry and was signed by a hundred thousand participants (Çoşkun, ‘Yurttaş Nâzım Hikmet’: 2008). The legal path of the petition did not lead to a solution about the citizenship until the current government’s (2007-2009) initiative and decision to annul the 1950 Council Ministers decision in 2009. However, starting in 1993 successive governments had a change of attitude towards Nâzım.

It was again Fikri Sağlar who expressed his opinion about the poet in 1994 by saying, ‘what we have done to Nâzım Hikmet is one of the biggest sources of shame in our society... Nâzım Hikmet is one of the biggest creations of this society’ (quoted in Anon., *Sabah*: 1994). This declaration was a first in that a state official would argue the state had done wrong and praised Nâzım, instead of making accusations about his disloyalty to the country. In this instance, we can identify that the ownership of Nâzım as a Turkish product, which is one of the elements of the current discourse, has been brought forth.

Sağlar's successors in office would following his footsteps and strive to make the necessary changes in law or government decisions to increase respect for Nâzım, transfer his grave to Turkey and, above all, grant him Turkish citizenship, examples of which will be provided in the following pages.

Another Minister of Culture, Timurçin Savaş, took office at the end of 1994. The same discourse about Nâzım was adopted by him as well. In a press conference, he declared that he had contacted Russian officials asking for their co-operation to transfer Nâzım's grave. In this press conference the representation of Nâzım as a world-renowned poet and a Turkish patriot was prevalent. In the words of the Minister, 'His [Nâzım Hikmet's] patriotism cannot be questioned anymore. His greatness is known to all, not only in Turkey but also around the world. How could we discriminate against a person that the world accepts?' (quoted in Anon., *Sabah*: 1994). Here, the Minister tries to justify the change in the state attitude towards the poet by adopting two of the main elements of the current discourse, which are Nâzım's patriotism and his international reputation as a Turkish poet.

The transfer of his grave, together with his naturalisation, has been the main issue of interest surrounding the case of Nâzım Hikmet. The Minister's attempt to transfer the grave was, once more, an important sign of state efforts to rehabilitate Nâzım. The place of the grave would signify who Nâzım belonged to. Again, we have seen in the first part of this chapter that the two representations on the poet embody a claim about the ownership of Nâzım; is he a poet of communism or the Turkish nation? In this sense, the transfer of his grave from the former capital of socialism, Moscow, to Turkey would mean formation of hegemony over the body and his symbolic role on the part of the

Turkish state. This declaration by a state official can be read as part of the process leading to the re-naturalisation of Nâzım. The Minister used international reputation and the element of patriotism to paint the current situation – Nâzım being buried in Moscow – as an artificial separation. This speech opened up the possibility of a reunification at some point and introduced this possibility to the domestic audience formed not only of those feeling ideological kinship with Nâzım. The transfer of the grave would also be a form of ‘reunification’ of Nâzım with his land, putting an end to this somewhat artificial separation. We can identify a general interest in the official line for the transfer of the grave and efforts or rhetoric on this issue emerged from time to time in the period under study. However unlike the citizenship question, this issue has not been resolved for the time being. Nâzım Hikmet is still buried in Moscow. It should also be noted that the common rhetoric on the grave issue is that, the decision to transfer is up to Nâzım’s family.

In 1995, Ağâh Oktay Güner, the new minister, who was an MP of the Nationalist Action Party, also claimed he would have Nâzım’s grave transferred (Anon., *Cumhuriyet*: 1995). Güner tried to legitimise his stance, especially to persuade the political party he was a member of, by being selective of the issues and making Nâzım acceptable. Güner used these words to describe him; ‘Nâzım is our poet. He was loyal to Turkish’ and praised his use of Turkish (quoted in Anon., *Son Havadis*: 1995). He claimed that Nâzım regretted Marxist propaganda and died with longing for his country. There is an open claim over Nâzım in this example. Moreover, the element emphasising Nâzım’s successful articulation of the Turkish language is used as a justification as well. This minister was a member of an openly nationalist political party, which is important in showing the

continuity in the use of this discourse by state officials. Even though governments and parties in power have changed, the discourse about Nâzım, which has been based on a selective representation of his work and life history has remained the same.

By June 1995, there was a change in the cabinet and a new Minister of Culture was appointed. It was Ercan Karakaş – a social democrat – who did more than giving speeches and took an initiative in the parliament for Nâzım’s naturalisation. Ercan Karakaş applied to the Prime Ministry to sign a new declaration by the Council of Ministers to denounce the one passed by the government in 1951 (Anon., *Hürses*: 1995). His arguments constitute a good example of the kind of representations of Nâzım identified here, which emphasise the universal appeal of him as a Turkish poet; ‘Nowadays everybody says they read and enjoy Nâzım’s work. Other parties have claimed so as well. Thus, there is no need to fear Nâzım Hikmet. Today, we need tolerance. Everyone agrees he is a great Turkish poet’ (quoted in Ağacık, *Milliyet*: 1995). Besides trying to appeal people by arguing Nâzım was not a communist threat but a Turkish poet he also based his argument on the illegality of the declaration. Karakaş’s definition of Nâzım was a very clear case of the new representation of him as a Turkish poet that involved an emphasis on both Nâzım’s success as a poet and the ownership of him by the state. The declaration passed by the Council of Ministers of the time did not follow the constitutional regulations on loss of citizenship (Anon., *Global*: 1995). The efforts of Karakaş did not, however, lead to a change in Nâzım Hikmet’s citizenship status. Karakaş also declared his second aim regarding Nâzım, which was the transfer of his grave. He, however, made the point that Nâzım’s family should make the decision

and the application for the transfer but, if there were to be any bureaucratic problems faced, the Ministry would help the family (Ibid.).

At the end of 1995, Fikri Sağlar took over the office of Ministry of Culture again and carried out a policy where symbolic gestures were at stake. A statue of Nâzım was erected in front of the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Ankara. The fact of having a statue of Nâzım Hikmet erected by a state official was symbolic enough. Moreover, the statue was wrapped up in a Turkish flag in the opening made by Sağlar (Anon., *Sabah*: 1995). The flag wrapped around the statue of Nâzım could be interpreted as one of the peak moments of the process that rehabilitated him but through a re-articulation of him as Turkish. This statue was an articulation of a welcome to the familiar hegemonic area of nationalism. Through the social constructivist lenses adopted in this thesis, nationalism is argued to be in a constant search of hegemony, although at the same time, it is challenged by other discourses and their attempts to hegemonise social meaning. In the case of Nâzım the main antagonism has been between the communist and nationalist discourses. If Nâzım is defined as a Turkish patriotic poet this would be an expression of a hegemonisation of the space that Nâzım represents. The flag here vividly marks the territory of the poet as Turkish and is symbolic of the hegemony of the nationalist discourse, which is based on a selective reading and leaves out the communist representation. There is no respect for his being communist; it is simply ignored. Selectivity is a continuous strategy. The rehabilitation of the poet is conditioned upon the ability to contain him within the nationalist area of meaning or, in other words, to define him as part of Turkish national identity. Being part of Turkish national identity can only be secured by him being a patriotic poet.

Another step was taken towards the rehabilitation or the transformation of the poet into national identity, in 1996. After having been banned for years, one of Nâzım Hikmet's plays was staged by Ankara State Theatre and the gala was organised by the Minister who was once again Güner (Anon., *Siyahbeyaz*: 1996). The removal of the ban on his work would be a crucial step in the normalization of the relationship between the poet and the state on its own, even if the play was staged by a private theatre company. The intensity of the change in the approach towards Nâzım can be seen in this case by the fact that it was the state theatre that had taken up the duty of staging his play. This initiative was undoubtedly supported by the government; hence, the gala by the Minister. This instance appears once more as an area supporting our arguments; one of them being the change in state attitude towards Nâzım Hikmet, the other, the conditionality of the rehabilitation on a selective representation of him. The play staged by the State Theatre with such support from state officials was *Kuvay-i Milliye* – a play based on *The Epic of the Liberation War*. This work of Nâzım's narrates the liberation war and is the one that is highlighted in the discourse used by the state. The *Epic* is presented as the culmination of patriotic feelings of the poet and is used to enhance the representation of the poet as a Turkish patriot.

Reference to this work is one of the core points of the discourse of the state that has been made by various state officials. This work plays a crucial role in the redefinition of Nâzım, not as a communist but as a Turkish patriot. The emphasis on this work in the official discourse coupled with a neglect of his other works that could more easily be associated with the influence of communism, shapes the space containing Nâzım as a part of the Turkish canon and away from his other political affiliation. This emphasis also

represents the fact that Nâzım's place in the national canon is not earned only by the production of successful literary works but by the production of those that have patriotic elements which would then be brought forward in the state discourse. As mentioned before, Nâzım being part of the Turkish canon is conditioned on his articulation as a Turkish poet who has served to enhance Turkish culture and its representation at the international level. This work has most certainly taken its place in the current discourse by being articulated as a work telling the story of the national liberation movement. *Kuvay-i Milliye* is also the part of *Human Landscapes* that has been introduced to the national curricula, as will be talked about in the following pages.

The state rehabilitation of Nâzım reached its peak, which went hand in hand with the apolitical and patriotic representation of the poet, during the Ministry of İstemihan Talay (1997-2002). In 2000, we see that for the first time, Turkish state officials participated in the commemorations of Nâzım. Turkey was officially represented by the Ambassador in Moscow and the under-secretary of Ministry of Culture in the commemoration of Nâzım in the thirty-seventh year of his death (Hacıoğlu, *Hürriyet*: 2000; Anon., *Hürriyet*: 2000).

### **6.2.3. 2002: The Year of Nâzım Hikmet**

In 2000, Talay announced that the Ministry of Culture was planning to apply to UNESCO, requesting 2002 to be year of Nâzım Hikmet, which was done the following year. In his letter of application and his announcement, there was an emphasis on the cosmopolitanism of Nâzım and the respect he had around the world (Erbil, *Milliyet*: 2001). The international reputation element once again played a crucial role in the



discourse. This element is especially important in this instance, since it was meant to praise and raise respect for Nâzım internationally. Indeed, Nâzım already had an international reputation as a Turkish poet. The active involvement of the Turkish state in this event can be seen as an attempt to reproduce the same reputation in Turkey. To gain this respect, the fact that he was already known as a Turkish poet by the international audience has been underlined, which is a common method of justification in Turkish politics. The minister also argued that ‘the majority of the population wishes to see Nâzım Hikmet given citizenship rights again’ (Hızlan, *Hürriyet*: 2001; Koç, *Sabah*: 2001). However, it would be in 2002 when Nâzım was celebrated all over Turkey and around the world as that year was declared to be the year of Nâzım Hikmet by UNESCO, following Turkey’s application.

2002 was marked by celebrations in Turkey and internationally as the year of Nâzım Hikmet. The two actors who have been identified in this thesis as drawing out the apolitical representation of the poet, namely the Turkish state and the Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Art Foundation, collaborated to organise concerts, exhibitions, plays, and film screenings, as well as commemorative meetings.

One of the most spectacular events of the celebrations bears a special meaning for our discussion, which was that the state had requested internationally renowned pianist Fazıl Say to compose an oratorio for Nâzım. The Oratorio for piano, voice, chorus and orchestra called *Nâzım*, played by the Presidential Symphony Orchestra, premiered in Ankara on October 2001 (Altuğ, *Radikal*: 2001). The Turkish State sponsored the composition and exhibition of the oratorio and the audience in the premiere involved the President of the time, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who was reported to congratulate Say (Ibid.).

State involvement in commemorating Nâzım Hikmet was significant and lucid in this case.

There is, however, a detail about the oratorio that supports the argument that the state rehabilitation of Nâzım was not free of amendments to make him acceptable<sup>71</sup>. A new representation of Nâzım was needed. Even though among the sixteen poems composed there was the one that screamed out ‘I am a communist’, another poem *Hapisten Çıktıktan Sonra* (*After My Release from Prison*) but with the title *Akşam Gezintisi* (*Promenade in the Afternoon*), is included with a significant omission to the lines that refer to the Armenian Massacres of 1915 (Düzgören, 2003). The original poem describes a promenade the poet took with his newly-pregnant wife in their neighbourhood, shortly after his release from prison. He draws a picture of their street with references to the neighbours and shopkeepers. The corner shop owner Karabet is mentioned, together with his view of 1915. The following lines of the poem have been deleted in the composed version;

This Armenian did not forget that  
his father was beheaded in the Kurdish mountains  
but he loves you because you have not forgiven  
those who put this heavy burden on the Turkish people either (Hikmet,  
1996: 203, my translation).

There are still certain taboos in Turkey such as the Armenian Massacres or the Kurdish minority, and Nâzım has touched upon both of these in such a short space. It is a striking expression of the Armenian issue, immediately transforming the reader’s imagination from a peaceful afternoon to a disturbingly violent picture with the use of a single word, ‘beheaded’. In the same sentence the existence of a Kurdish population is also implied, a

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<sup>71</sup> Special thanks to Necmiye Alpay for drawing attention to this amendment.

fact denied by the state at the time<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, the clear break Nâzım imagined between the ‘people’ and the ‘polity’ is also felt here. Nâzım draws a pure picture of the masses, which is a common element in his work and will be talked about more in the next chapter. The burden is created by the polity but the people suffer from it in his narrative, as is clear from the choice of words again; ‘the Turkish people’ instead of, for instance Turkey. People, regardless of their background – Turkish, Armenian or Greek<sup>73</sup> – live peacefully in the same neighbourhood but the policies of the state are a burden on them. These lines are an example of the opposition and the critical stance of the poet. He implicitly criticises state policies regarding the Armenian and Kurdish questions. The poem not only contains political nuances but indeed critical political statements. Those are characteristics of Nâzım and his work, which have been suppressed by the recent discourse adopted by the state. He is no longer pictured as a radical, fervent advocate of communism or a critic of the practices of the Kemalist Republic. The censored version of the poem is much more in line with the newly created representation of him. Consequently, *Akşam Gezintisi* becomes a poem accentuating the new representation that can easily be part of an artwork sponsored by the state.

The Minister of Culture Talay’s policies about Nâzım Hikmet were not limited to symbolic gestures and international commemoration of the poet. He took a concrete step in making Nâzım a Turkish citizen on his one hundredth birthday. Talay initiated a campaign to pass a new decision by the Council of Ministers to change Nâzım’s citizenship status and the first person to sign it was the prime minister at the time, Bülent Ecevit. The justification given for this initiative was that the Hikmet was deprived of

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<sup>72</sup> The nationalist discourse adopted by the state on the Kurdish question has been mentioned in the chapter on the ‘others’.

<sup>73</sup> Milkman Yorgi, who is probably Greek, is a character in the poem as well.

citizenship rights due to statues 141 and 142 of the Turkish Criminal Code, which stated communism to be a crime. However, those laws had been changed in 1991 (Tayyar, Sabah: 2001). The same discourse that pictured Nâzım as a patriot was adopted in the Minister's application. He talked about the changing international and domestic political context and defined Nâzım as a poet who wrote the epic of 'our national struggle using pure Turkish' (Ibid.). It has been mentioned before that reference to *The Epic of the Liberation War* and Nâzım's ability in using the national language have been common to the discourse that has been continuously used by state officials since the 1990s.

The Council of Ministers of that government could not pass a decision to change the citizenship status of Nâzım, due to the opposition of Ministers belonging to the Nationalist Action Party (*MHP*).<sup>74</sup> The *DSP* was the major component but the *MHP* still had to give its consent to the proposal to re-naturalise Nâzım Hikmet. This was not an easy compromise for most nationalists, who have long believed Nâzım to be one of the biggest traitors of the country. The *MHP* raised the main opposition to the renaturalisation of Nâzım.

The Nationalist Action Party also questioned the commemoration of 2002 as the year of Nâzım Hikmet in the National Assembly. MP Mükremin Taşkın requested information from the Minister of Culture about the expenditures of the organisations planning to commemorate Nâzım Hikmet. His letter was again a typical example of the discourse that singled out Nâzım's communism and, as such, mentioned the common reference to his words 'Stalin made me who I am'<sup>75</sup> (Anon., 2002: 408). Their opposition signifies the

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<sup>74</sup> At the time there was a coalition government of ANAP (Mainland Party), DSP (Democratic Left Party) and MHP (Nationalist Action Party).

<sup>75</sup> The MPs letter argues that Nâzım declared 'Lenin made me who I am', but in fact, Nâzım had said Stalin.

contestation over Nâzım and national identity between the hegemonic discourses of communism and nationalism. For right-wing nationalists, the integration of a symbol of communism and the canonisation of his work as part of the national identity is still seen as unacceptable. The antagonistic approach assuming binary relations between communist and nationalist camps still shapes the attitude of some of the right-wing politicians. On the other hand, the founder of the *MHP*, Alparslan Türkeş, used one of Nâzım's poems in a party conference before his death, and this instance is cited as an example of the universal appeal of Nâzım's poetry (Korkmaz, *Hürriyet*: 2001).

Despite occasional contestation, by nationalists, the state line continued to be in favour of rehabilitation through an emphasis on the selected Turkish elements, that is, the use of the Turkish language and contribution to Turkish literature. The Cultural Minister, in reply to the nationalist MP's questions about the expenditures, argued that his ideological commitments were irrelevant but what made him valuable are 'his contributions to Turkish poetry, Turkish language and Turkish literature' (Anon, 2002: 410). The Minister's words summarised the state discourse precisely. Literary and political identities of Nâzım are seen as separable and his contributions to literature and language, and therefore, national culture, as well as, his international fame, are what matters in the new official discourse.

#### **6.2.4. *A Gift to Nâzım on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday***

In the 2002 general elections, The Justice and Development Party (*AKP*) took office. To date, the *AKP* has been the ruling party and it can be said that its approach to Nâzım is

consistent with the policies of Turkish governments identified here. During the *AKP*'s first government, the Ministry of Culture published a collection of essays on Nâzım in a book entitled, *A Gift to Nâzım on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday*<sup>76</sup> (Karabağlı, *Akşam*: 2003). Publication of this collection was initiated when İstemihan Talay was still the Minister but the new government followed the legacy of the previous government. Government officials have since given similar speeches that are characterised by the neglect of Nâzım's political identity. The Minister – Hüseyin Çelik – during whose time in office the book was published openly said he inspected the articles to see if they were ideological (Ibid.)

This collection, *A Gift to Nâzım on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, can be studied as an example of the growing emphasis on Nâzım's poetry and his place in the Turkish national identity through his contributions to the Turkish language and literature, as articulated in the state discourse. The preface by the editor, Alpay Kabacalı, reflected the stance of the state vis-à-vis Nâzım Hikmet. Nâzım was articulated as the 'great poet of Turkish' and he acknowledged the fact that Nâzım was banned and neglected. The definition of the poet as an expert in using the Turkish language is a continuous element of the newly adapted official discourse and it was once more adopted in the book, this time published by the state.

Kabacalı praised the efforts of the Ministers of Culture, who had worked in the campaign for Nâzım's citizenship rights and, in the preparation of this volume as contributors to Turkish literature, Nâzım is defined as the great poet of Turkish a second time in the text (2002: ix). We can see that a tribute to Nâzım is considered to be a tribute to Turkish

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<sup>76</sup> Another work on Nâzım's plays – Şener, Sevdâ (2002) *Nâzım Hikmet'in Oyun Yazarlığı* – has also been published by Ministry of Culture Publications. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism also sponsored the movie 'Mavi Gözlü Dev: Nâzım Hikmet' (2007) based on his time in Bursa prison (Anon.: 2007).

literature. In this sense, this work by the Ministry of Culture once again, explicitly places Nâzım in the context of the Turkish literary canon and Turkish national identity.

*The Preface* defined Nâzım as an important contributor to Turkish language and literature. We have argued that this new positioning of Nâzım as a Turkish poet comes as part of a discourse that neglects his political affiliations and emphasises his literary greatness. Looking at the content of this work shows that the same discourse is carried out here as well. Most of the articles are about Nâzım's work written with a distant attitude and only their literary merits are analysed. There is an article on each of his artistic productions including, his poetry – studied in one article as a description of his poems in a chronological order and studied thematically in another article – prose, novels, plays, films and screenplays, his paintings and his views on architecture.

*Human Landscapes* and *The Epic of the Liberation War* are two of Nâzım's works that have been analysed in detail in two separate articles. We have seen that these two works – indeed the *Epic* is part of *Landscapes* – have a special place in the current discourse on Nâzım. *The Epic of the Liberation War* is articulated as a patriotic work of the poet, in the current discourse, enhancing his new image as a poet of the Turkish language instead of the old one as the poet of communism. A similar attitude can be found in the article on the *Epic* in this book as well. The article indeed starts off with an explicit interpretation of history and the world system through the lenses of the nationalist discourse. The author, Onaran, talks about the formation of nations through national struggles and wars fought against both 'external and internal enemies'. He situates *The Epic of the Liberation War* as a work that tells the story of such a national struggle in the Turkish case. He claims that Nâzım gave special emphasis to singling out the struggle as one

against ‘internal enemies’ (Onaran, 2000: 157). This article also places Nâzım in the national canon by talking about the relationship between national epics and national history. Epics are identified as works that remind people of their national struggles and this is what makes nations strong (Ibid: 158). On the other hand, it would be fair to say that the article also talks about the importance Nâzım places on the people at large. We have seen in our previous analysis of *The Epic of the Liberation War* that Nâzım tells the story of the people of Anatolia and perceives them as the real heroes in line with his general belief in the emancipatory power of the folk. This article acknowledges this aim of Nâzım’s and analyses the minor characters in the *Epic* in separate sections (Ibid: 168-175).

Most of the other articles in this book do not mention Nâzım’s political affiliations at all and go straight to the descriptive study of his work. However, the article by Özel, entitled ‘The Language of Nâzım Hikmet, the poet who made the world listen to the music of Turkish’ openly refers to the fact that Nâzım had been criticised and punished for his politics by the state authorities. ‘Certainly, the worldview of any artist is considered to be parallel to his/her art...however, in the case of Nâzım Hikmet his ideas have always been the main criteria of interpretation and he has been subject to questioning and accusations by political authorities’ (Özel, 2002:187). It is important for the topic of this thesis to see that the author clearly states that the assessment of Nâzım has always been based on his commitment to communism by political authorities. It is the argument we have identified earlier that argues that ideology and artistic works could not be separated and Nâzım was therefore punished for being a poet of communism. Özel’s article is important in the context of this edited volume, as it is one of the few articles that do not ignore the



realities of Nâzım's life and the suffering he had experienced because of his ideological commitment. This article is important at another level for us because it encompasses the current discourse we have been studying. Özel draws a picture of Nâzım not only as a successful poet who worked with the Turkish language but also as an internationally-acclaimed Turkish poet. The two elements of the new discourse are at play here; the international success theme and the articulator of the Turkish language theme can both be found in this article. The argument of Özel is that, even though Nâzım was punished by the Turkish state, he did not give up introducing the beauties, in her words the 'music', of the Turkish language to an international audience. Thus, his use of language places him among the greatest executors of the Turkish language (ibid: 188). In this sense, Nâzım is implicitly argued to deserve a place in the literary canon because he is among the few of Turkish writers who represent Turkey with such success.

In *A Gift to Nâzım on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, there are also articles that emphasise the influence of Marxism on Nâzım's work, especially seen in his application of dialectic materialism, such as Feridun Andaç, Öner Yağcı and Ataol Behramoğlu's articles (Andaç, 293-306; Yağcı, 307-388; Behramoğlu, 269-292). Yağcı indeed made references to the way Nâzım had been treated as a traitor by the state and defined this as backwardness and, as an outcome of the atmosphere of paranoia during the Cold War (2002: 318).

### 6.2.5. Records of the General Assembly between 1993 and 2009

Besides the book by the Ministry of Culture and other speeches by various Ministers identified here, the discussions involving Nâzım Hikmet in the records of the General Assembly also show us that the same discourse is at play in the parliament as well. Every year now Nâzım is commemorated in the General Assembly. MPs not only cite his poetry to make their points on various occasions in the Assembly, but also give speeches every 15 January and 03 June, the anniversaries of his birth and death (Anon., 2004: 6-7; 2005,12; 2006,7-8).

In 1996 Atilla Sav and, in 1998, Mustafa Kul both asked for a written report from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Culture respectively, requesting support for the staging of Nâzım's plays by state and private theatres around the country (Anon., 1996: 142; 1998: 58).

Nâzım was cited by Avni Doğan in 2001 as among the contributors to Turkish culture who had emerged out of local traditions (Anon., 2001: 64-5). The discourse mostly prevalent in the General Assembly when Nâzım is mentioned, except for a few critical views expressed by nationalist MPs, reveal that he is perceived as a product of Turkish culture who not only contributed to it but had also been its international representative. The ownership of Nâzım, his contributions interpreted as beneficial to Turkish culture, and the international reputation elements are among the common themes identified earlier as part of the current discourse that defines the figure of Nâzım Hikmet. More and more he is part of mainstream discourse, which neglects his place in the communist one. These elements have emerged over the years in the records of General Assembly.

We have seen that Nâzım's naturalisation has been a core discussion over the years and that several Ministers of Culture have attempted to get back his citizenship rights. Analysis of the records of the Assembly show us that besides the ministers, some other MPs have also made requests in this line, such as the one by Ali Arabacı in 2002 (Anon. 2002: 16). In his speech, Arabacı used the element of the current discourse that emphasised Nâzım's successful articulation of the Turkish language contributing to the enhancement of the new image of the poet.

Another example of the place of Nâzım in a more mainstream nationalist discourse is the fact that during the celebrations of the eighty-fifth anniversary of the Turkish National Assembly, Istanbul State Theatre staged a play by Nâzım Hikmet. The play was once more *Kuvayi Milliye* (Anon., *Radikal*: 2005), showing us not only that Nâzım is now claimed by the Turkish state as part and parcel of the national culture but also that this new image and place of the poet is a result of a selective reading of his life and works. It is always the work which is most open to be interpreted as a patriotic one, that is, *The Epic of the Liberation War* that finds a central place in the official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet. He is no longer treated as a symbol of communism but part of the canon of Turkish literature and thus, culture. Discourse on Nâzım Hikmet has become more inclusive than exclusive but with the condition that he is articulated as a patriotic, successful poet rather than a communist.

#### 6.2.6. Nâzım Hikmet's works in the national curricula

Besides the above rhetoric praising the poet and efforts such as the book commemorating him, one of the important steps towards incorporating Nâzım Hikmet into the national culture has been taken by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has taken a few steps to include Nâzım's work in the national curriculum. This signifies the change towards him and can easily be interpreted as Nâzım taking his place among the members of the Turkish literary canon, as part of the process of his articulation, away from communism and towards a more mainstream discourse. It should also be noted that canon formation is not only in the hands of the state. Other institutions help to create a national canon from the perspective taken in the way canon formation has been studied in this thesis. However, this thesis is only interested in the discourse and actions of the Turkish state in rearticulating Nâzım Hikmet. Thus, the actions of the Ministry of Education, in order to include Nâzım as a member of the Turkish literary canon – which it does mainly by suggesting a selective number of his works to pupils – will be studied here.

Since 2004, the Ministry of Education has put together a list of a hundred books of national and international writers and recommended those to be taught in the national curriculum for middle schools. Nâzım Hikmet's *Human Landscapes* has been included in the '100 Main Works' list (Anon. '100 Temel Eser': 2005). The following year the Ministry of Education extended this project and made another list for primary schools. Nâzım Hikmet's work (this time *Sevda'lı Bulut – Clouds in Love*) again appears as part of the list (Anon. 'İlköğretim İçin 100 Temel Eser': 2008). The Ministry of Education has contributed to the inclusion of Nâzım Hikmet in the national canon by another list as

well. The Ministry has made a list of a hundred Turkish writers and made short sound recordings of each to be used as a supplementary document in education (Anon, '100 Türk Edebiyatçısı': 2009). Nâzım Hikmet has taken his place among those 'Turkish writers'. Not all one hundred can be analysed here but suffice it to say that besides Nâzım, among the names on the list, the only anti-establishment writer that stands out is Aziz Nesin (1915-1995).

Nesin was an influential satirist who was a controversial figure, challenging the political and socio-economic structures of Turkey in his many short stories and plays. 'Nesin provided a strong indictment of the oppression and brutalization of the common man. He satirized bureaucracy and exposed economic inequities in stories that effectively combined local colour and universal truths' (Anon. 'Aziz Nesin': 2009). Like Nâzım, he was also subject to intimidation by the state and served time in prison.

Another point that can be noticed about the 'One Hundred Turkish Writers' list is that the author of international bestsellers and the Nobel Prize for Literature winner Orhan Pamuk (1952-) is not included. Pamuk received the award in 2006. In 2005 he had been prosecuted for insulting the Turkish Republic and the Turkish nation. A criminal case against him was opened following his interview with a Swiss publication *Das Magazin* where he stated that 'Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians. And almost nobody dares to mention that. So I do' (Anon. 'Orhan Pamuk': 2009). Even though the case has been dropped, this statement made him the target of criticism and not only by ultranationalists. The President of the time showed his discomfort with Pamuk by not congratulating him on his Nobel Prize which was certainly a symbolic rejection of Pamuk, due to his political statements and despite his domestic

and international popularity. The fact that Pamuk was not included in the aforementioned list may be interpreted as a continuity of this stance by the state. A similarity with the case of Nâzım can easily be drawn; both writers have been subject to the *logic of equivalence* that rejects the challenging discourse of the writers and reacts by antagonism, but the difference is that Nâzım has been re-articulated as part of the national canon.

The fifteen-minute recording on Nâzım available at the internet site of the ‘One Hundred Turkish Writers’ is in line with the arguments of this thesis. Analysis of the recording shows us that there is no reference to Nâzım’s communism, politics, his imprisonment or exile. The fact that he had gone to Asia Minor with Vâ-Nû to join the liberation war is referred to, followed by lines read from *The Epic of the Liberation War*. The part that has been selected is the one that describes Mustafa Kemal in the war theatre. The chronological introduction of Nâzım in the recording skips his years in Moscow and talks about his journalism in legal daily papers and magazines. *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* is praised as a work written in a modern form, combining *Divan* and folk poetry. Then *Human Landscapes* is defined as his masterpiece, again followed by lines from this work depicting the independence war. It is openly claimed that ‘love of country’ is a prevalent theme in his poetry. The poem read after this statement enhances this argument, as it talks about the natural beauty and the greatness of the people of the country. The last part of the recording mentions his love of children and again reads a relevant poem (Anon, ‘100 Türk Edebiyatçısı’: 2009).

The selective reading of the poet and his work can be traced in this recording, which aims to introduce Nâzım Hikmet to pupils. The writer encountered in this piece, as created by

the Minister of Education, is a poet who has joined the liberation war, written about it, praised the national leader, and also loves his country and children. All of these elements can be linked to the elements identified in this chapter as those of the discourse the state is argued to have adopted. Reference to his love of children paints a humanist image, which is one of the elements. The total absence of the communist influence on his life and works coupled with a selective inclusion of arguably his most patriotic works, articulates a non-communist patriotic Nâzım Hikmet.

Inclusion in a list by the Ministry of Education is another step in the inclusion of the poet in the national identity, through the canonisation of his work. Nâzım's work was not published in Turkey from 1936 to 1965 and, even after starting to be published, their editors would be sued (Fuat, 2002: 698). The poet's work, after being banned for years, is now being taught to primary school children. In addition to becoming part of the national curriculum and one of the top hundred Turkish writers, Nâzım has been defined as part of Turkey's national heritage by Members of the Parliament on several occasions as well.

It has been argued in this thesis that inclusion in the literary canon is a form of inclusion in the national identity. National identity has been understood here as a political process, and always in the making. In contradiction to the attempts by nation-states, national identity is not the emergence of a historical cultural heritage. Rather, from our perspective, identity is constructed and re-constructed by selection of what or who falls within the national boundaries. In this study, the deliberate effort of the Turkish state in choosing who a Turk is has been evaluated by its relation to a communist 'other'. Nâzım Hikmet as a communist poet had been defined as an 'other' and his work had been

excluded from the literary heritage, based mainly on his communism being considered as an expression of disloyalty to the Turkish nation and its state.

The argued canonisation of him is understood as a change in the strategy to one that involves Nâzım as part of national identity. These assertions are based on the idea of culture not seen as a singularity but on 'a plural idea of cultures which are governed by social determinants such as class, gender, race and ethnicity' (Weedon, 2006: 162). National canon is understood here not as a collection of works containing 'universally recognisable aesthetic values which would be apparent to the perceptive reader' (Ibid: 157), but as a contested area. The literary canon as a function of national identity is, thus, studied as an area of power relations among the narratives of different groups of class, gender, race, and ethnicity and, in Nâzım's case, political affiliations. This approach involves an underlying argument that, in this process of contestation, the definition of national literary canon has been altered (Ibid: 164). We have seen in a previous chapter with examples from North America, Britain, Japan and India that the canons of each of those countries have also been through a process and became more inclusive of the groups that have not been heard of.

In the case of Turkey, inclusion of a radical narrative such as Nâzım's, on the one hand, stands as an example of the existence and the dynamic relation of the different narratives of the people (narrated as a nation, a collection of social classes, and as a mixture of men and women or different ethnic groups) and enhances the idea that national identity is not a singularity. We need to also recognise that the power struggle is not a closure either. Thus, on the other hand, the hegemonic attempt of the nationalist discourse is still felt in this case. Nâzım being articulated as part of the national canon does not necessarily show



that the state accepts his anti-establishment narrative. His canonisation is conditional on a re-articulation that erases the influence of communism and replaces it with a selective reading that paints the picture of a patriotic poet. This strategy is most prevalent in the work that is canonised. In an earlier chapter on the literary canon, we have seen that canon formation is a selective process and not all works become part of the ‘national canon’. Those works that can in some way be parallel to the official discourse are selected (Eagleton, 1983:200). The discussion on the selective representation of Nâzım that is most apparent in relation to *Human Landscapes* and *The Epic of the Liberation War* has shown us that, indeed, the state discourse has highlighted the pieces of Nâzım’s life and works that are most in line with the official understanding of what a national canon is. He is part of the ‘national heritage’ as he was referred to by state officials, not as a communist but as a patriot and, consequently, his canonised work is the one which is most amenable to be represented as a patriotic work.

#### **6.2.7. Nâzım Hikmet’s re-naturalisation in 2009**

Mainly since 1993, the official discourse on Nâzım Hikmet has shifted from defining him as a communist, thus marginalising him, to defining him as a Turkish poet. It has taken over a decade and several steps to create this new representation of him. By 2009, Nâzım is no longer a banned, ignored communist but an internationally renowned, successful Turkish poet. On 5 January 2009, Nâzım Hikmet was re-naturalised posthumously by the decision of the *AKP* Council of Ministers. It is argued here that this decision was made possible by the formation of the aforementioned new representation of Nâzım Hikmet

through a process of articulation of the discourse analysed in the previous pages by the Turkish state. Moreover, it is also argued that this case of rehabilitation of Nâzım through a colonising discourse is not just the unique story of a poet but it is indeed the strategy of the Turkish state aiming to rehabilitate communism. In this sense, this thesis studies the case of Nâzım Hikmet as a case of the implementation of the *logic of difference* by the Turkish state to deal with an ‘other’, in this case communism.

Another aim of this thesis has been to study a case of the relationship of the Turkish state with its ‘other’ with the help of social constructivist tools. Therefore, the discussions over Nâzım Hikmet are claimed to be continuous and non-static. His re-naturalisation and the transfer of his grave continue to be discussed by actors in the Nâzım Hikmet discussion. Even though this thesis has only focused on the formation of the official discourse since 1993, it would also help just to have a glimpse into the current discussions from the point of view of other actors in order to enhance the claim of this study that the political will always be a place of hegemonic struggle. The symbolic space of Nâzım Hikmet, the place of the Turkish left in politics and national identity, and the Turkish national canon will continuously be re-defined by this struggle and this thesis aimed only to present one example from such a dynamic political arena. Looking at the reactions to the re-naturalisation of Nâzım can give us an idea of this dynamism and continuity.

Since the government declared that Nâzım is re-naturalised, alternative interpretations of it have been expressed. His family has focused on the injustice that has been caused over the years and said they are not fully content (Germen quoted in Anon, *Radikal*: 2009). The Nâzım Hikmet Culture and Arts Foundation pointed out that, even though it is a belated decision, it is still a significant step (Coşkun quoted in Anon, *Radikal*: 2009).

The declaration made by a government spokesperson can be seen as an expression of the state strategy identified here. Çiçek said: 'We hope that as a result [of his naturalisation], what has been a topic of discussion in Turkey will not occupy the agenda anymore' (Çiçek quoted in Anon, *Radikal*: 2009, my translation). A similar approach that presents the attempt to distance Nâzım from the influence of communism and position him as part of Turkishness can also be detected in the speech that an AKP member of parliament, Dağı, made in the Parliament following the government decision on Nâzım's citizenship. Dağı said 'the decision of the Council of Ministers is a joyous attempt as it will make it possible to free Nâzım by stripping him of the chains of ideology and to incorporate him as part of the unity and prosperity of Asia Minor' (in Anon. 2009: 5, my translation).

Interestingly enough, though in the same speech Dağı also articulated a line of thought similar to that of this study. We have tried to present the case of Turkish national identity as a power struggle between the hegemonic nationalist discourse of the state and the challenges posed to it. She recognised that the case of Nâzım represents the story of those who had an alternative vision and challenged the establishment of the state, which is a story of oppression and 'pain' (Ibid.). Accordingly, she identified the government initiative about the poet as part of the democratisation process and cited it alongside the launching of *TRT ŞEŞ*, the state TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish (Ibid.). On the one hand, she adopted the same strategy that stripped Nâzım of his political identity and colonised him and, on the other, she argued this was an incident that represented the democratisation of Turkey, which makes its political system open and welcoming to alternative narratives of the left, Kurds and others.

One of the main actors that has been mentioned in this study which has been active in the discussions on Nâzım Hikmet, his grave and citizenship is the *TKP* and the related Cultural Centre of Nâzım Hikmet. They have also made their stance about the citizenship decision known in their publication – ‘Sanat Cephesi’ (Art Front) which had dedicated its cover to this subject. The main position of the journal articles on this issue was characterised by a criticism of the government. This move was interpreted as a political manoeuvre of the government to gain sympathy for the then upcoming elections. Another point that can be noticed is that there was an emphasis on the struggle of the left (the main reference to it was made in the petition campaign of the *TKP*) for the recognition of Nâzım and that there was a need for this struggle to go on. The granting of citizenship was argued to be a bureaucratic initiative that appeared to be democratic but indeed did not reflect any deep belief in democracy on the part of the government. Thus, true democracy and a genuine welcome to Nâzım is one that involves practices that ensures fundamentals of his belief such as peace, freedom of speech and art, and equality are secured. Fırıncı asked whether Nâzım’s citizenship also meant that the state accepted that Turkey’s involvement in the Korean War or its arms trade with Israel was wrong and did it mean that Turkey would be a country that was not characterised by hunger and unemployment (2009: 2). Accordingly, there was a deeper message that demanded a struggle to make those changes happen and only then would Nâzım’s legacy be respected. We can clearly see that discussions on Nâzım will not cease to exist.

### 6.3. Conclusion

The analysis of the discourses of state officials in the press and collected from a study of the assembly records have produced a number of findings that support the argument that there is a change in the discourse that is consistently apparent in the speeches of MPs and Members of the Government in the period under question. Nâzım Hikmet has often been referred to as part of the cultural heritage of the Turkish nation. It is possible to conclude that the official policy is to try to rehabilitate him even though it has been received with opposition, especially from members of the Nationalist Action Party. We can see a general interest in the rehabilitation of Nâzım Hikmet. There have been several times when different MPs belonging to different political parties asked for a debate about the inclusion of his work in the national curriculum or asked if the government were supportive of the staging of his plays. They have basically requested the inclusion of his works as part of the national curriculum and government support for theatre groups that would like to stage his plays.

Having been treated as a villain and a traitor for many years, Nâzım Hikmet is commemorated by the Turkish state every year on the anniversary of both his birth and death since the 1990s. Commemorations take place not only in the assembly, but governments fund and attend events that are dedicated to him and pay visits to his grave. It can be concluded that the official policy is to incorporate him and is mostly supported by MPs but challenges from nationalists have also emerged. The argument that Nâzım Hikmet is no longer articulated by the state as a communist but as a great poet of Turkish and a patriot as well as that this discourse is based on the separation of his ideology and

his identity as a literary figure has been supported by the findings of the research of news and assembly records.

The Turkish State has identified Nâzım Hikmet as a Turkish poet with a significant patriotic production – *Human Landscapes*, mainly because of its part *The Epic of the Liberation War* – and his work as a canonical contribution to Turkish literature. The discourse on Nâzım adopted by the state shows us that communism is trivialised where as Turkishness is brought to the front.

This chapter aimed to identify the two representations of Nâzım Hikmet, in its first part, and then analysed the shift in the official discourse from one representation to the other. The second part was dedicated to the rhetoric and actions of state officials and the discourse of other actors have been left out of the analysis on purpose, since this thesis is only interested in the state actions vis-à-vis its ‘other’, communism.

It can be argued from a geopolitical stand point that communism is no longer a threat for Turkey as much as it was during the Cold War and this reflects on the discourse on Nâzım Hikmet. The end of the Cold War has probably made it possible that Nâzım can be articulated as more Turkish than communist, which was unimaginable in the Cold War era because the prevalent perception was that he had betrayed the nation to serve communism. Here, there is no search for a grand reason behind this change in discourse. The aim here is only to formulate a reading of the change in the state discourse. The reading formulated here is that this is a strategy developed to incorporate a symbolic figure of one of the ‘others’ of Turkish national identity as part of it, in a way that depoliticises and probably renders it less important. When a certain person, an act, or even an ideology is ‘normalised’, the antagonism fades and the division between the

polarities is pushed to the margins of society based on the arguments of Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

The Turkish state has adopted the *logic of difference* to deal with its 'others' on several occasions, as was seen in previous chapters. With the aim of having control over the influence of Islam in society, Islamic identity was incorporated in to the Turkish national identity, which led to discriminatory treatment of non-Muslims and the equating of all Muslims with Turks. Another case – which is probably more relevant to the case of Nâzım – has been the way Kemalist discourse incorporated some leftist elements, such as the *Kadro* movement. In that case it was the ideological proximity of the *Kadro* to Kemalists that made that relationship plausible. In the case of Nâzım, it is the fact that he was inspired by both the local and the international that led to the two representations of him as a patriot and a communist poet.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this study of Nâzım Hikmet's positioning within official Turkish cultural and political discourse, I have approached Turkish national identity not as something given and complete but as a state project that is never fully closed and mainly shaped by its relationship with its 'others'. In studying this relationship, the aim was to make it clear that the project of constructing Turkish national identity relied on a multitude of strategies. In this particular study, the most significant strategies observed were the *logic of equivalence*, where the hegemonic discourse is openly antagonistic towards its 'others' and the *logic of difference*, which aims to eliminate the challenge by rendering it less influential. In the case of this thesis, communism has been the 'other' in question and the relation of the state with communism has been studied through a symbolic figure, Nâzım Hikmet.

Nâzım Hikmet was a productive literary figure who contributed to the reproduction of alternative narratives about Turkish society and its modernization. He was an international and fervent representative of the communist ideology in Turkey. His communist affiliation was considered a challenge to the basic tenets of the republican project and, as a result, he became a target of antagonistic discourse and strategy, directed at communism. His exclusion and later inclusion in the Turkish national canon and the changing discourses and/or strategies has been treated here as a case that exemplifies the changing attempts at definition of national identity. His highly controversial and symbolic personality and career made him an ideal example of the argued challenges posed to the hegemonic state discourse by alternative discourses.



A related argument has emerged in this study. The combination of the factors of the ambiguity, hybridity and the impossibility of closure of the discourses and identities related to the subject of this study (national identity, literary canon, the relationship between the Turkish left and Kemalism and the identity and works of Nâzım Hikmet) have made it possible for the state to adopt the strategy where difference was colonised through the symbol of Nâzım Hikmet and thus, he has been incorporated into Turkish national identity through the change in the discourses of the state about him.

One of the aims of this study has been to pin down the fluid definition of the Turkish national identity by looking at how religion, race and the Turkish language have been the main determinants of who a Turk is and is not. It was concluded that which of these factors (religion, language or race) will be a main criteria of Turkishness changed in different periods and in relation to the group concerned. Besides, it was seen that, despite the Kemalist rhetoric that it was positioned in the same distance to all citizens despite their ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious identities, in practice, there has been a difference between a 'Turk' and a 'Turkish citizen'. Accordingly it was concluded that the state policies were based on some expectations: one can be a citizen but to be a Turk, one is expected to speak Turkish, be a Sunni-Muslim, sometimes be racially Turkish and, above all, be loyal to the Turkish nation-state.

Moving to the realm of political minoritization, I looked into the positioning of leftist movements in Turkey vis-à-vis the official state discourse, Kemalism. The main finding has been that the Turkish left has not been fundamentally critical of Kemalism. They have perceived it as an anti-imperialist struggle emanating from the strong ideological influence of Leninism on the Turkish left. The progressive elements of Kemalist reforms

have been emphasised by the left and the six constitutive elements – republicanism, nationalism, populism, secularism, etatism, and revolutionarism – have been articulated in a way that would make them compatible with socialism. At this point, the fact that these elements were open to articulation has also helped in the formation of a dynamic relationship between the Turkish left and Kemalism. The state strategy has mainly been based on antagonism but there have been times when the state incorporated, socialists<sup>77</sup> or ‘let them be’<sup>78</sup>. When elements of the left have been tolerated or incorporated it was due to the fact that the Turkish left articulated some Kemalist discourses and also nationalist ones but calling them ‘patriotic’.

Given the particular relationship of Nâzım Hikmet with the state and its cultural institutions, (which is his exclusion and later inclusion in the national literary canon) I have attempted to formulate a theoretical approach to understand the concept of the literary canon. As a result of a critical survey of the literature on the relationship between literature and nation-formation, it was found out that a literary canon is not a fixed list of literary works or writers. It is another contested space similar to the nationalist discourse it contributes to reproduce or challenge. Literary works can, on the one hand, contribute to the creation and salience of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ – as it was defined by Benedict Anderson (1983) – and, on the other, could produce counter-narratives about who constitutes the nation, how it is organized, and how its historical myths are formed. Moreover, the literary canon is a non-closure in the sense that who or which works are included in the canon is not fixed but is in a state of flux and subject to the power

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<sup>77</sup>The formation of the Turkish Communist Party by Mustafa Kemal’s initiative during the liberation war and the Kadro movement can be cited as an example of this strategy.

<sup>78</sup> The short periods when socialist activity was legal and socialist political parties were formed and active in the Turkish political scene, especially the Turkish Worker’s Party of the 1960s can be cited as examples.

relations of different groups in society. Thus, the inclusion and exclusion of Nâzım Hikmet as part of the national canon and the fact that he was a producer of counter-narratives, have been studied here as a case that points out a change in the definition of Turkish national identity.

Some of his works were analysed in the light of the argument that he was both a communist and a patriot, making him the subject of clashing representations. The works were chosen as samples that reflected the main issues Nâzım had dealt with.

The main argument that shaped the study of his life and works was that it has been possible for those different and opposing discourses to be formulated because of the ambiguities and the simultaneous existence of conflicts in his life and works. We can see for example that, on the one hand, he wrote about and took part in the liberation war but, on the other, developed an alternative narrative of it. As a modernist, he supported the progressive elements of the Kemalist reforms but criticised them for not being revolutionary enough, and also challenged the top-down modernisation model of Kemalism. As an internationalist, Nâzım Hikmet wrote about inequalities in many parts of the world but was mainly inspired by the local folk culture, which he had modernised by adding materialist and revolutionary narratives. It has been argued that the liminality of Nâzım and the fact that his works could be interpreted as patriotic has made his inclusion possible, which can be traced back to 1993.

In the 1950s and during the later periods of the Cold War, what has been seen lately in state discourse, for example, a Minister celebrating Nâzım's work or organising international commemorations of him would have been unimaginable. He was labelled simply as a communist traitor. The opposite discourse prevails today that separates his

ideology and literary productions and tries to articulate him now, not as a communist, but as part of Turkish cultural heritage. It is argued here that, as a result of the new image of the poet, he was finally made a Turkish citizen in 2009.

Secondary literature on Nâzım's life has been studied with a special reference to the state position about him. The two main groups of discourse on Nâzım Hikmet have been identified; one has mainly emphasised his strong political engagement and argued that his literary and political identities could not be analysed separately; the other argued that it was possible to distinguish between his contributions as a poet and his political commitments and emphasised his capacity as a literary figure, disregarding the influence of communism on the works. These discourses have been summarised, firstly in relation to his life in light of the issues and periods that contain a basis for clashing representations of him to be formulated. Secondly, the discourse adopted by the state in the period (1993-2009) where the change has occurred has been analysed.

In this part, a continuous discourse that rearticulated the poet as a patriotic humanist and, mainly as a literary figure of the Turkish nation, has been identified. An apolitical image of Nâzım has been drawn that was coupled with a picture of him as one of the greatest contributors to the Turkish language and literature. Moreover, the change in state discourse and strategy has been argued to be part of a hegemonic attempt to define the political as Turkish. It was argued that his inclusion in the Turkish literary canon and, as part of Turkish cultural heritage as a result of a change in the state discourse, was possible and/or conditioned upon the prevalence of the discourse that articulated an apolitical image of him only as a Turkish poet and ignored his identity as a communist. The alternative narrative reproduced by Nâzım has been ignored and attempted to be

colonised by replacement of it by a narrative that is compatible with the state discourse. Nâzım did indeed produce critical and patriotic pieces. The latter have been the main source of the new, emerging narrative of Nâzım, which is articulated by the state. In the analysis of the current relationship of the Turkish state and the poet, the aim here was to formulate a reading of the change in state discourse from a social constructivist point of view. The reading formulated here is that this is a strategy developed to incorporate a symbolic figure of one of the 'others' of Turkish national identity, as part of it in a way that de-politicises it and probably renders it less important. The fact that Nâzım's inclusion is conditioned on the articulation of him as Turkish, ignoring his communism has been regarded as the new strategy of the Kemalist state in its dealing with this challenge. The change of the strategy exemplified in the changing discourse on Nâzım, from antagonism to inclusion is interpreted here as a new attempt at hegemony.

This thesis positions itself alongside the social constructivist works on nationalism that reject 'grand narratives' and, instead, dwell upon the significance of case studies that cast light upon the impossibility of closure in the definition of national identity, coupled with the hegemonic attempts of nationalist discourses. From this perspective, what is interesting is that national discourses are never fully closed but are a continuous struggle for hegemony. The inclusion or exclusion of Nâzım Hikmet as part of Turkishness, as well as the boundaries of Turkish national identity, will continue to be contested and be in flux. The Turkish case, studied through Nâzım, is provided as a humble contribution to the studies of nationalism and aims to present an example of the change in the definition of national identity, shaped by the power struggles between hegemonic state narratives and the 'others', who provide alternative ones.

The power struggle is believed here to be continuous, thus, this study is only a picture of the present situation but the future of Turkish national identity, the Turkish literary canon or the relationship of the state with Nâzım Hikmet may be prone to change. Power relations among nationalists, communists, and those who isolate Nâzım's ideology to make him welcome, will continue: leading not to a final or static relationship but to a more interesting, on-going one that is open to further research.

Currently, Nâzım has become a Turkish citizen through his re-articulation as a Turkish poet. This fact can be argued to be a case where the state has established its hegemony and reached its goal of nationalising, in other words colonising, Nâzım's cultural space and what he represents. On the other hand, it can also be argued to be the end result of the struggles and resistances of all those groups – communists and others – that have worked for decades for his citizenship rights. Indeed, since the government declaration that Nâzım has been re-naturalised, alternative interpretations of it have been expressed.

The resistance from different groups will be felt on the political scene of Turkey not only on the issue of the poet but also on other issues of political debate such as the place of Islam, the Kurdish question, the rights of non-Muslims, and EU membership, to cite a few of them. The power struggles on these and other topics will shape who a Turk is. Moreover, changes, ambiguities and the liminality of Turkish or other national identities will be provide interesting cases for further studies, which will not necessarily be attempts at final words on nationalism or national identity. On the contrary, openness to possibilities, the adaptability of nationalist discourse, and the reliance on multiple resources make it clear that studies like these do not produce definitive answers but constitute glimpses into the intricacies and complexity of nationalism.

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