

## Modernization as State-led Social Transformation: Reflections on the Turkish Case †

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*This paper discusses some problematic consequences of Turkish modernization as an elitist, state-led process of social transformation. It is suggested that a locally imagined vision of modernity has not yet been observable in Turkey. The preference of the early Republican elite to undervalue local knowledge in designing the nation's future is interpretively analyzed with reference to two case studies: the movement to purify Turkish language of non-native linguistic elements, and the Village Institutes experiment intended as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus. The paper concludes with a call to radically question the status of the state as the overarching modernizer. A broad lesson is that interventionist state designs only add to the ambiguities, contradictions, and struggles already associated with unilinear imaginations of modernity.*

### Introduction

In the words of Marshall Berman, noted scholar of modernity,

“There is a mode of vital experience –experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils –that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this “modernity”. Modern environments and experience cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: In this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: It pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.” (Berman 1988, cited in Mirsepassi, Basu & Weaver, 2003, p. 11).

In speaking positively of Berman's approach to modernity, Mirsepassi et al. note that “[Marshall Berman] argues that modernity cannot be reduced either to modernization (a socioeconomic process) or to modernism (merely a cultural vision). For Berman, *modernity is the space that mediates between modernization and modernism* (italics added). Thus, one cannot speak of a universal modernity. Berman's approach to modernity leaves room for the possibility of a more “locally imagined” vision of modernization.” (Mirsepassi, Basu & Weaver, 2003, p.11). This paper will be dealing with why such a vision is absent in the case of Turkish modernization, and additionally, why attempts to develop such a vision have almost in their entirety been doomed to remain as acts of discipline, rather than as collective processes, or popular offers of contribution to a re-imagining of the social, economic, and political structuring of Turkish Republic since its very inception. More specifically, this paper will maintain that state-led modernization has turned out to be a major obstacle before a healthy appropriation of modernity by Turkish society. This is not to say, however, that all state-led modernization processes would inherently be unable to yield meaningful and comprehensible reformulations and internalizations of modernity, but it is to say that, following Berman's definition of modernity provided

above, where state-led meant dictated modernization, it is highly unlikely to observe any relationship between the two sides of which to mediate, that is, where both the process and the vision have fallen off track, modernity will not appear in locally sensible shapes, but rather like a garment unfit for the body it is supposed to embroider, as the cases I discuss below will exemplify.

Throughout, I reflect on two cases that I think are prototypical of the problematic consequences of Turkish modernization arising from the choice of Turkish Republic's founding elite to undervalue the importance of local practices and information: These are, first, the purification movement to ‘clean’ Turkish language and, next, the establishment of Village Institutes to disseminate the official ideology of the newly established Republic into the rural masses. The first, I suggest, was aimed to serve as grounds for the textual administration of social reality, and the next, for the installation of the utopian vision of an “authoritarian high-modernist” (Scott, 1998, pp.87-102) enterprise. Let me refer to this enterprise as “the conquest of public space”, which I elaborate later.

I look at the two cases as the manifest steps toward a relocation of minds as well bodies; as exercises in disciplinary power to not only keep individuals under surveillance but also to produce them, to sculpt them, or to engineer them so that they would fit the designs imposed upon them in an authorititative spirit. Each of the cases constituted, as Foucault would have said, a *discipline*, that is “...the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise.” (Foucault, 1978, p.170). The comprehensive state-led project as part of Turkish modernization to adulterate the linguistic accumulation of the Turkish collective memory is a striking example of vision transformation in which “The past is an impediment, a history that must be transcended; the present is the platform for launching plans for a [so-called] better future.” (Scott, 1998, p. 95). The Village Institutes experiment, on the other hand, sought to objectify the

society, to generate the new ‘Turk’, with its “[implication of] a truly radical break with history and tradition.” (1998, p. 93).

In addition, I interpret the two cases as exercises in creating new metaphors. Let me explain. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”, as noted by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.5). Manipulations over Turkish language and the experiment with Village Institutes were two systematic attempts to introduce new metaphors into the Turkish popular mindset by which new social realities would be created and old ones squeezed to extinction. They were projects to ground (by all means necessary) new metaphors like OLD IS DOWN, NEW IS UP in the social conceptual structure so that entailing social action would be performed as the ideologues of the new Republic saw fit. While elaborating the idea that metaphors are not simply ways of talking about things but are ways in which humans conceptualize certain phenomena, Lakoff and Johnson discuss the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor. Because “many of the things humans do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war” (1980, p.4) that metaphor goes beyond being just one way of talking about arguments, it gives shape to the conception of arguments and entailing behavior performed in arguing. Accordingly, I suggest that such was how the imposition of new metaphors upon the Turkish collective imagination led to what Scott appropriately calls the “discovery of society” (Scott, 1998, p.90), a society required to conceive of itself and to speak, act, appear, and be as the initiators of the new metaphors pleased.

### **I Speak Therefore I Am: Turkish Modernization and the Fate of Turkish Language**

The series of battles that get called the Independence War (1919-1923), fought in a number of fronts in and around modern-day Anatolia under Mustafa Kemal’s leadership, resulted in the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923. This date also marks the official collapse of the six-century old Ottoman Empire. More than thirty independent states now function on what was once Ottoman territory, and one of those states, Turkey, is historically considered, by all measures, the main inheritor of the Ottoman legacy. The founders of the Turkish state inherited not only imperial palaces, aqueducts, heavy debts to be paid, a war-torn nation, but also a ground on which some six centuries-wide communicative space rested: The Ottoman Turkish language.

Ottoman Turkish is a peculiar linguistic blend expressed in Arabic script. Historically, Turkish language has been expressed in a number of scripts, and the adoption of the Arabic script dates back to Turks’ contacts with Arabs in the early and late 8<sup>th</sup> century. Following Turks’ conversion to Islamic religion, their growing relations with the Mesopotomian peoples, in particular the Persians and the Arabs, resulted in an influx of foreign words into the Turkish language. The

intensification of contacts through commercial relations, marriages, travel, and conflicts was accompanied by a prorated mixing of Arabic and Persian words into Turkish, thereby enlarging its corpus and introducing new syntactic, morphological, semantic, and phonological characteristics into the language. In a sense, worlds met; words followed suit. When a gazi (holy warrior) by the name Uthman Beg succeeded in establishing the authority of his beylik (chiefdom) in what is today Turkey’s northwest, the fate of the language took a new twist when his descendants set out to form what came to be called, after him, the Ottoman Empire. Earlier expansions of the Empire were into the Balkans, which resulted in the entry of linguistic units available in the Balkans to what was thereafter called the Ottoman Turkish.

This process of mixing and merging continued as the Empire grew, finding its most elegant and artistic culmination in the *Divan* (Imperial/Classical) literature, a literary tradition that was able to maintain its original characteristics for many centuries. This was largely a poetic tradition with strict rules of rhyming, intonation, and so on. *Divan* poets, who wrote in Ottoman Turkish, used to enjoy appreciation by the highest ruling authority, the Ottoman Sultan, during the glorious (roughly from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) days of the Empire. In fact, many Ottoman sultans were themselves practitioners of the *Divan* poetry, which made this particular linguistic formation named Ottoman Turkish receive highest possible protection available at the time. The language did not exist in and through literature only, of course. All sorts of bureaucratic documents, administrative records, diplomatic correspondence, tax registers...were kept in this language. This is perhaps nothing unusual. The point, however, is the following: Such was how words and structures of foreign origin became settled and naturalized upon hundreds of years of linguistic practice of various sorts, constituting simultaneously a communicative universe within which intergenerational contact was already taking place, in which historical continuity was formed, and which was widening as the Empire was getting in contact with different lands, peoples, cultures et cetera.

As the Empire started to decline in power and lose substantial amounts of territory starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> and in particular after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman Turkish met with the influx of words from another language: French. To resuscitate the powers of an Empire decaying due to the growing influence of the Western world, Ottoman governing elite turned to France as a source (or, rather, *the source*<sup>1</sup>) of inspiration. This entailed an inevitable interest in French language, which in fact is the main reason why French literature was almost the exclusive source from which translations were made into Ottoman Turkish. Competence in the French language had by the end of the nineteenth century become a prestigious cultural capital that played itself out in the practices of the Ottoman literary and diplomatic circles of the day, as noted by Findley (Findley, 1980, p. 135).

## Speaking Like a State: Knots Untied

If Turkish modernization before the collapse of the Empire meant, fundamentally, the modernization of the army to heal the wounds of preceding centuries (consider the various reforms that were carried out by different sultans of the late Ottoman reign: the abolition of the janissary corps and the introduction of a new, Western style army; the establishment of new naval schools; granting of comprehensive civil rights to non-Muslims residing in the Ottoman territory through various *fermans* (official imperial decrees)..to name but a few), modernization after the collapse meant a completely different thing: It meant a cognitive rupture from the past, a restarting of the history afresh, an untying of any and every knot that had links to anything Ottoman. The founders of the Republic defined the new Turkish identity in outright opposition to Ottoman identity. They declared their desire “to be admitted as full members of Western society in order to escape from the terrible position of being its pariahs” (Toynbee 1925, cited in Robins, 1996, p. 65). The Kemalist elite adopted an irrevocable attitude toward the disavowal and denial of the Ottoman past. To that end, the Kemalist elite reproached the Ottoman past for its qualities representing, according to them, backwardness, and harshly criticized it for its religious nature. In that regard, for instance, Mustafa Kemal – Turkish revolutionary hero and founder of the Republic – maintained that “the new Turkey has no relationship to the old. The Ottoman government has passed into history. A new Turkey is born” (Robins, 1996, p.66).

In a series of revolutionary moves after 1923, first came the abolition of the Caliphate, a leadership post that had been assumed by the Ottomans after their conquest of the holy lands of Islam during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, on March 3, 1924. On the very same day, after Mustafa Kemal’s meeting with top-level commanders of the Independence War, the termination of the religious educational system, the unification of education in secular schools, the closing of the Ministry of Canon Law, the abolition of the Ministry of the General Staff and the establishment of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs followed suit.

But the delinking did not necessarily stop with administrative and educational reforms of various sorts. It spread to language, as well: Backed by the all-encompassing energies of the founding elite of the Republic, a movement was initiated under state auspices to purge words of Arabic and Persian origin (Lewis, 1999), following the adoption of the Latin script instead of the Arabic one in which Turkish language had been written, spoken and practiced over the last thousand years. Just as the new ‘Turk’ was to be different from the old one, the language that was -to put it in philosopher Martin Heidegger’s words- to be the house of his being, would be different. This difference related to the eradication from the language any existing elements that were reminiscent of the past. This radical attempt was called ‘Purificationism’. The Turkish Language

Association, founded under Kemal’s auspices (a decision he later regretted having made), set out to ‘create’ the new language, just as other newly established bodies of the Republic were busy completing the legal form whereby European law, in particular Italian penal law and Swiss civil law, was being appropriated not after being filtered through, or at least with a decent amount of respect to, a local vision but with mot-a-mot translation.

To see how Purificationism perplexed cultural experience, one may consider the following example: ‘Vefa’ and ‘sadat’ are two words of Arabic origin in Turkish. The former means ‘faithfulness’ and the latter ‘loyalty’. Both of them imply the sense of ‘honesty’ and ‘trust’. Purificationism gets rid of both, and in so doing, it robs the language of the fine distinction between the two, hence of an understanding of life, which in turn causes the loss of part of collective memory, of the historical experience that rested on either the former or the latter word: for if there is no word to define the individual instances of that particular historical experience, then there simply is no retrievable experience remaining at all. The change from Arabic script to the Latin script, the first phase of Purificationism, had the same impact: By preventing access to centuries of collective thinking, it causes what I earlier called a cognitive rupture. The replacement of, say, three deleted words with a fabricated one was only minimally a cure to the problem. Although many Arabic/Persian terms stayed in Turkish as a matter of fact, their use was heavily belittled in newspaper cartoons caricaturing the Arabic script and words, and the new elitist intelligentsia set out to prove how ‘pure’ Turkish was superior to all of the rest of world’s languages.

The Habermasian concepts of communicative action and rational/critical debate may have some relevance at this point. Communicative action and rational debate require tools with which to carry them out. By preventing access to hundreds of years of conventional wisdom with the change in script, and by purging Arabic and Persian words from the Turkish lexicon in the name of revolutionism, the Purification movement first effectively hinders any physical attempts to establish communication with the past, and following that, it degrades, chases, and punishes the use of that which might have escaped such hindrance: The new ‘Turk’ is allowed to *be* insofar as he wrote, spoke, and read as the new state saw fit. This may well be referred to as textual administration of social reality, an administration that sets its own standards of rationality, rules of communication, and terms of debate.

In this respect, Purificationism can also be said to operate like a panoptic machine producing think-alikes and speak-alikes through the linguistic *discipline* that “characterizes, classifies, specializes; distributes along a scale, around a norm, hierarchizes [speakers] in relation to one another, and, if necessary, disqualifies and invalidates” (Foucault, 1978, p. 223). This micropolitical, linguistic strategy, this power-knowledge exercise undertaken by the

founding elite sought no less than “to produce domains of objects and rituals of truth” (1978, p. 194).

“Of all state simplifications, then, the imposition of a single, official language may be the most powerful, and it is the precondition of many other simplifications” (Scott, 1998, p.72). Manipulation of the linguistics corpus was also a clear case of simplification under the auspices of the Kemalist elite. With a simplified, ‘pure’ language, a war-torn nation that was rendered illiterate with the adoption of the Latin script would be easier to manage, hence more legible. It was this legibility that paved the way for what was to follow: A sweeping series of reforms covering virtually all aspects of life including clothing, law, education and so on. If Purificationism was an attempt to conquer, tame, and train minds, the entailing revolutionary moves were steps toward the production of *docile bodies* (Foucault, 1978, pp. 135-170).

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, Purificationism may also be viewed as the farthest-reaching of the extensions of the WEST IS UP metaphor into Turkish cultural landscape. The Saussurean structuralism presupposes that “The true nature of things lies not in the things themselves, but in the relationships between them. No element has any significance in itself, but only in relation to all elements in the system, so that it is the entire system with axes of contrasts and comparisons which defines each and every element within it.” The true nature of the WEST IS UP metaphor, which is formulated on the basis of an UP orientation, may meaningfully be understood in a relationship of binary oppositions: This metaphor exists in a conceptual system in which it is contrasted with WEST IS DOWN, a metaphor whose history dates back to the victorious days of the Ottoman Empire, those days when the Ottoman Sultan was deemed to have no equivalent counterpart in the West; when, for example, French and British Empires were referred to as *vilayets* (province) by the Ottomans. Since this perception was backed by military superiority through centuries of conquest and territorial expansion with no significant response from WEST until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, which in fact gave the DOWN orientation to the latter metaphor, Ottomans saw themselves as holding the upper hand in their relations with the West. The military pendulum swung to the other end as of early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and so did the metaphor. It is this system of contrasts, the internal balance of which was changed by the course of Ottoman history that also underlies the conceptual formulation of the metaphor with an UP orientation. The subordinate metaphor, LATIN SCRIPT IS UP, can be viewed a subordinate of the WEST IS UP metaphor. And it is this subordinate metaphor that gave shape to rituals of linguistic truth as they were conceived by the ideologues of the republican revolution.

### The Conquest of Public Space: The Village Institutes

The founding elite’s struggle to consolidate the new nationalism, one that defined Turkish identity based

on ethnicity as opposed to the former, religious definition upheld by the Ottomans, searched for ways for facilitating the settlement of the series of reforms that I briefly mentioned above. The search was most readily covering the relatively well-off sections of the society for whom, in the eyes of the founding elite, the revolutionary goals would be most palatable. In this regard, a notable historian of the Turkish Revolution, Bernard Lewis maintained that “Kemalism had brought the revolution to the towns and townspeople of Turkey, but it had barely touched the villages” (Lewis 1968, cited in Karaomerlioglu, 1998, p.63). It was through the Village Institutes experiment (1937-1946) that the state elite sought to disseminate the image of the new ‘Turk’ into rural masses.

Village Institutes project took official shape in the year 1940 when, by way of an official decree, decision was made to initiate the construction of Village Institute buildings by the very peasants in the select locations where the project was to take root. Peasants in the villages where an Institute was to be constructed were required to work compulsorily 20 days a year to finish the construction as well as to provide the land on which the building was to be constructed with labour-intensive methods. Village Institutes were planned to provide vocational education to attendees who would upon graduation be teachers of the peasant populations with a view to realizing a massive transformation of Turkey’s countryside. “In a nutshell, the broad aim of founding the Village Institutes was to educate the peasant youth in technical matters necessary to benefit the agricultural economy...This was planned as a solution to the failures of former village teachers who had been recruited from urban areas. Many believed that it was the alienness and indifference to village life of those students that accounted for their failure” (Karaomerlioglu, 1998, p.55).

Nevertheless, the Village Institutes experiments turned out to be more than an educational promise. Confronted with the overarching problem of how to reach out, ideologically, to peasant masses who constituted at the time no less than seventy to eighty percent of the overall population, the establishment found Village Institutes to be convenient conduits through which to solve the problem. “Today we have 16,000 villages whose population is less than 250. If we do not go to those villages, if we do not have *people loyal to our state*, these villages will be full of criminals and bandits. If the *people we educate as the hand of the state* go there... (italics added, F.K.)” said the architect of the Village Institutes project and the director of Primary Education, a man by the name Ýsmail Tongu (1998, p. 64).

In fact, the leading figures of the Republican People’s Party, the single ruling party that presided over Turkey until the transition to multiparty politics in the late 1940s, were expecting that the graduates of the Village Institutes would be supporters of the Party, the embodiment of the Kemalist ideology, in one way or another. Mr. Tongu himself sent letters to administrators of the Village

Institutes requesting support for the Party in the 1946 elections against the newly established Democrat Party. Village Institutes became ideological state apparatuses whereby the ruling elite attempted to enlarge its administrative scope and have its influence more directly felt by way of teachers who were trained in accordance with the Kemalist mentality to teach, or rather, to transform the countryside in line with statist premises. The law that led to the foundation of Village Institutes was one which granted extensive privileges to the teachers who were to teach at the Institutes, providing them with free land, residence, equipment and so on. Given that it was a time of financial scarcity, the privileges extended to teachers directed local peasants' resentment against them. Nevertheless, not much conflict occurred as a result of this resentment because the law was also providing protection for the teachers, threatening troublemaking peasant with severe punishments. "State control required information, and the Village Institutes were instrumental in gaining this information" including data on economic and social conditions pertaining to the particular regions where teachers and students who collected such information were on duty (1998, p.73).

Village Institutes may be viewed as disciplinary instruments through which the Panoptic the gaze of the absolute power, i.e the state, would be capable of covering more distance, reaching to the deepest corners of the countryside, making the statist surveillance ubiquitous, pushing the 'gazed', the 'disciplined' into an unavoidable sense of constantly being watched over. The Village Institutes project was a power exercise by "an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring [its] high-modernist designs into being" toward an "administrative ordering of nature and society" (Scott, 1998, p.5).

### **Conclusion: How to Localize Modernity?**

Following Marshall Berman's approach, modernity is the space that mediates between modernization and modernism. Turkish revolutionaries set out to create this space. They adopted a vision of their own and they initiated certain socioeconomic processes, two of which I tried to reflect upon in this paper. Modernism as a vision embraced by the Kemalist elite was a kind of vision that sought to relocate not only minds and hearts but also bodies against their will; that preferred the so-called universal over the local and contextual; that wished to alter the native in its search for an alternative; and that entailed practices aimed, first, at unmaking a past, and next, remaking a present. It is this vision that bore problematic consequences.

The two ensuing modernization attempts, that is, the adoption of the Latin script and the eradication from the Turkish language of Arabic and Persian words within the scope of the Purificationism movement on the one side, and, the establishment of the Village Institutes to reach out to rural masses for the purpose of producing docile bodies through disciplinary practices, on the other,

were authoritarian state practices in the discovery of new Turkey. They were far from being locally imagined visions, instead, they were two exemplary practices that sought to transform the local.

With such a vision, and with the process being led by an authoritative spirit, one would not expect a sound relationship in which modernity as a locally, contextually inspired set of practices would mediate. Purificationism and the Village Institutes experiment did instead contribute to the emergence of a pseudo-space, a hyperreal appeal, a rather exaggerated sense of serendipity, a universalistic metanarrative that historicizes conventional wisdom from an ideologically imagined standpoint.

The two examples I discussed suggest that state-led modernization in Turkey was about displacement and not reembedding; it prioritized the invalidation of history rather than an authentic, contextually inspired interpretation of the present; it reduced modernity to an imposed modernization backed by an ideological vision, hence failing to assert itself forth with unique claims to a genuine appropriation of the space that Marshall Berman called modernity.

While maintaining that different societies appropriate modernity differently, Mirsepassi et al. note that "It is simply not useful to consider Great Britain, Germany, the United States, Japan, France, Italy, South Korea, and Sweden as having created common social and cultural formations in the process" (Mirsepassi, Basu & Weaver, 2003, p.12). There is much truth in this view, however, it is equally necessary to note that each of these societies has nevertheless been able to come up with its unique appropriation of modernity, which in fact makes us see them as part of the 'modern world'. That such consideration is not useful should not blind us to the fact that each of these unique appropriations has nevertheless contributed to the formation of a common ground of values that is as readily observable in Sweden as it is in Japan: This is what is lacking in the case of Turkish appropriation of modernity. This appropriation has neither evolved into a unique character, nor has it been able to do away with its reduction of modernity into mere socioeconomic process or cultural vision.

A sensible appropriation of modernity would require no less than the establishment of a dynamic relationship between modernity and tradition within the Turkish context. This would first of all entail the radical questioning of the particular rationality that legitimizes the status of the state as the driving force of the modernization process and as the absolute holder of a peculiar modernist vision. This is a micropolitical strategy whereby the authority of the state would be eroded step by step in order that tradition, history, culture could negotiate with the elitist establishment on an equal footing on the definition of social reality as constructed day in and day out by the society itself and not as superimposed by the state.

Upon closer reflection, it seems that the relationship between modernity and tradition is far from a symbiotic

one where the two sides would feed each other off toward an authentic internalization. It is rather a hegemonic relationship in which a quasi-modern, state-led enterprise is weaving incomprehensible, paradoxical designs into the traditional fabric. The result is often cultural instability, an unending vacation in history, crises of identity, a distorted political vision, and a perplexed socioeconomic experience. There is neither a unilinear progress from traditional to modern society as modernization theory foresaw, perhaps a rather narrow foresight when it comes to the Third World; nor does one observe a peaceful cohabitation: here, quasi-modern perceptions of public sphere result in official invitation crises whereby the President of the country refrains from inviting the veiled wives of hundreds of Members of Parliament to a celebration of the Republic Day; there, tradition reasserts itself in the context of membership to the European Union by questioning whether the Europeans are in fact asking the Turk to leave his traditional Islamic identity behind for membership. This fluctuation is summed up in the following words: "A study trying to come to grips with the official Turkish identity, first of all, makes references to the strong state tradition in this country which evolved in such a way as to stifle the civil society. It is possible to argue that in such a country, the question of national identity was hardly posed as 'who are Turks?', but rather as 'who and/or how are the Turks going to be?'" (Kadioglu, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Superimposed modernization attempts of the sort discussed in this paper can offer some general insights regarding state and society relations. Probably, a broad lesson is that interventionist state designs only add to the ambiguities, contradictions, and struggles that are already associated with unilinear imaginations of modernity—an imagination typical of classical modernization theory which envisages a passage from traditional to modern society, economic progress leading toward sound democratization, and reduced public visibility of religion. The discussion in this paper illustrates Jonathan Boyarin's (1994) point that statist ideologies "involve a particularly potent manipulation of dimensionalities of space and time, invoking rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate monopoly on administrative control" (Boyarin, 1994, pp.15-16, emphasis added). Arguably, one of the reasons behind the problematic aspects of Turkish modernization after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 is the forcible historicization of the six-century-old Ottoman past. I would suggest that Turkish revolutionaries at the turn of the twentieth century historicized the Ottoman past, in other words, they made it an object of history—but an inaccessible one at that. The revolutionaries' move to abandon the Arabic script in which Turkish language was written for the preceding millennium and adopt the Latin script in its stead prevented popular access to Ottoman collective memory, more notably the written forms of that memory. But several ambiguities persisted: In modern Turkey, state elite—carriers of the invented sociopolitical, linguistic, and other traditions of

the Republic's founders—do not shy away from claiming ownership of reminders of Ottoman past when they see fit: Official Turkish outrage at the turn of the twenty-first century against a Saudi decision to bulldoze an Ottoman fortress overseeing the holy city of Mecca (once an Ottoman post) simply flies in the face of Turkish republican ideology's efforts to squeeze memories of the Ottoman past into an untraceable history: Amnesia is not comprehensive, it is selective. Whether mnemonic instruments reminiscent of the Ottoman past are part of republican Turkishness seems to have, it appears, not been decided yet. And that is probably because "...memory-makers don't always succeed in creating in the images they want and in having them understood in the ways they intended. Social actors are often caught in webs of meaning they themselves participate in creating, though not in ways they necessarily could have predicted" (Olick, 2003, p.7).

By discussing two state-led processes of modernization, I suggested in this paper that a locally imagined vision of modernity has not yet been observable in the Turkish scene. Unless a radical questioning of the status of the state as the overarching modernizer takes place and until a creative relationship is established thereafter between modernity and tradition, a productive appropriation of modernity does not, in my view, look likely in the near future. Hegel would have said the state is [still] the absolute march of God on [Turkish soil].

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The turn to France as representative of the whole Western civilization is a perfect case of *metonymy*. Lakoff and Johnson describe *metonymy* as a way of understanding where one entity is used to refer to another that is related to it, or where the part stands for the whole. One political implication of this particular case of metonymy is that it seems to have blinded the Ottomans to Western sources other than France for political, literary, and social inspiration. Nineteenth century translations are almost exclusively from French, which seems to point to the fact. For more on metonymy, see: Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 35-40.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the specifics of Turkish modernization, see in particular, Mardin, S. (1994). *Türk Modernleşmesi (Turkish Modernization)*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, as well as Bozdoğan S. & Kasaba R. (1997) (eds). *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.