



Turkey 1908-1914: Biographical Approaches. Zürich: Hans-Lukas Kieser, Historisches Seminar und Orientalisches Seminar der Universität Zürich in Zusammenarbeit mit der Stiftung Forschungsstelle Schweiz-Türkei (SFST) und der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft Mittlerer Osten und Islamische Kulturen (SGMOIK), , 13.11.2008-15.11.2008.

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Turkey 1908-1914: Biographical Approaches

To say that the period between 1908 and 1914 represents the "best of times and the worst of times" in the history of the Ottoman Empire would be neither hyperbole or melodramatic. These critical years that preceded the establishment of the Republic of Turkey do represent, simultaneously, a time of unparalleled optimism and crisis in the evolution of the Ottoman state. The Young Turk Revolution, which was consummated on 24 July 1908, ushered in a powerful wave of rising expectations and hope for both large sections of the empire's political elite and broad swaths of the population. With the reinstatement of the constitution of 1876, notables and commoners alike anticipated the materialization of the sort of political and social reforms they as individuals or as members of larger collectives had been denied under the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Herein lies a critical paradox: As one surveys the broad range of expectations from the center of the empire to the periphery, many of these expectations would ultimately prove to be, by their very nature, contradictory of those of the revolutionary leadership.

As revelatory marches convened in villages and town squares across the Ottoman lands that July, an atmosphere of profound crisis colored the heralding of revolution. From virtually all points of view found across the political spectrum of the Ottoman Empire, it was unanimously agreed that the state was teetering on disaster. Discontent manifested itself in various sectors of

the economy as foreign interests exercised greater sway over the empire's commercial and political infrastructure. Material and economic disparities between town and country and rich and poor continued to soar. Debate also raged over the character and prerogatives of the imperial government. The growth of nationalism in the empire's periphery and the increasing drive towards state modernization and consolidation set in motion a series of physically and rhetorically violent clashes in various corners of the Ottoman lands. Most ominous threat of all was the ongoing danger of provincial insurrections and foreign military interventions. Even in the provinces of Macedonia, comprising the very heart of the revolution and the adopted home of the Young Turk movement, sectarian violence and European interference seemed destined to rip these lands from Ottoman control.

It is against this historical backdrop that the participants of "Turkey 1908-1914: Biographical Approaches" met. Over the course of this three-day conference, scholars based in both Europe and North America presented a variety of perspectives on the men and women who helped shape and interpret the events that transpired during this critical period in Ottoman history. The goal of these proceedings, in the words of the organizer, Hans-Lukas Kieser, was to address "the hopes, fears, trends, doctrines, fraternizations and polarizations expressed against the backdrop of the crucial quest for the Ottoman Near Eastern future." Participants of the con-

ference introduced multiple figures representing a broad range of experiences, professions and cultures befitting the diversity of the Ottoman Empire. Through this smattering of historical voices, ranging from religious figures, ideologues, revolutionaries, parliamentarians, journalists, novelists and assassins, the conference underscored the connection between the sheer multiplicity of conflicting view points during these years of revolution and the intense violence and upheaval that would mark the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the modern Middle East.

The core thread that bound all the papers presented in Zürich was the dissonance between representation, understanding and reality among the participants and observers of the post-revolutionary period. As one turns towards the inner leadership and those who would become the most vocal advocates for revolutionary reform, it seems clear that personal and corporatist interests were paramount in determining the perceptions and implications of the Young Turk movement. Central figures, such as Talat and Enver Pashas, were far from accidental heroes or reluctant conveyors of the revolution. The core leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the vanguard party of the revolution, were the beneficiaries of decades of planning and debate aimed at overturning the order represented by Abdülhamid II. Largely comprising Muslim officers and officials educated in the empire's finest schools, members of the CUP were well acquainted with the multiple crises threatening to completely overturn the state. While individual opinions and plans may have differed, they shared a collective goal: the saving of the state through the reconsolidation of state power. Revolution, in the eyes of the Young Turks, was to be a top-down enterprise, an agenda to be applied capriciously with or without the absolute consent of the empire's diverse population. As the revolution gained momentum into the First World War (and arguably even after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey), this statist vision of reform and revitalization began to permeate circles outside the immediate halls of power as journalists, intellectuals and authors invested their own dreams and aspirations into the reestablishment of centralized power.

Yet, as one looks beyond the internal formation of the Young Turk leadership, individuals and groups located in the empire's periphery took a far more localist approach to this period of opportunity and uncertainty. From Macedonia to Libya to eastern Anatolia, the revolution seemed to signal a turn where the immediate concerns of provincial notables could be addressed. Some

saw the aftermath of the July revolution as a chance for individual personal gain. Others saw it as a vehicle to combat impending local dangers. Still others would see the Young Turk Revolution as a momentary, but ultimately fleeting, moment when a fresh round of political negotiations could be established between Istanbul and dissident groups in the provinces. For these groups further a field, the sum outcome of the years immediately following the CUP's ascendancy would be marked, at the very least, by disappointment. The outbreak of war, be it in the southern Balkans, North Africa or in the eastern Mediterranean lands, would put an end to any kind of participation in this revolutionary moment as these one-time imperial notables found themselves (often unwilling) members of newly established nation-states or European colonies. The rigidity, secrecy and callousness of the emerging Young Turk administration thwarted the participation of many other provincial leaders. As disaster loomed with the outset of the First World War, successive waves of violence and state terror would silence virtually all erstwhile supporters of the revolution in the empire who had sought a renegotiation of the empire's political and social order.

It is in this latter regard that the conference took a particularly close look at the role of Armenian leaders and personalities during the Young Turk years. The disenfranchisement, deportation and mass murder of Ottoman Armenians arguably stands as *the* original sin that taints the Republic of Turkey's body politic. Yet so many unanswered questions remain as to the origins, reactions and ultimate intentions of this unprecedented display of state-imposed violence upon the Ottoman Armenian population. Several conference participants, in taking up the biographical approach towards the Young Turk era, would venture to address, among other issues, the meaning and significance of the prewar years from the perspective of a variety of Armenian figures. In surveying the lives of Armenian writers, intellectuals and activists, it appears that no one act or moment foreshadowed the kind of cataclysm that would befall Ottoman Armenians (and many others) during the Great War. To the contrary, it seems to be the case that many noted Armenian personalities would embrace the revolution as an opportunity to establish a partnership with the new regime in the hopes of both addressing the future of the Ottoman state and the welfare of the empire's Armenians. Yet, as one looks at the sampling of the Armenian (and Greek) figures presented at the conference, it seems clear that the real and perceived connections between non-Muslims and Western interests would serve as a roadblock to any

kind of reconciliation. As Christian men and women of letters, commerce and intellect, their collective identification with trades and professions beyond the purview of direct state service set them, in the eyes of the CUP, even further outside the measures of loyalty to the Ottoman revolutionary regime. Seemingly no declaration or gesture of devolution to the Ottoman state and the revolution, no matter how sincere, could alter the conclusions ultimately reached by the Young Turk regime that Armenians, as well as Anatolian Greeks, Nestorians and many others, could no longer be included in the future of the Ottoman state.

The conference came to a close with an assessment of the legacies of the Young Turk order. In surveying not only the establishment of the Kemalist regime, but also the twists and turns that the Turkish Republic would take in the decades following Atatürk's death, it would appear that the authoritarianism, secrecy and violence associated with the Young Turk ascendancy has had the most lasting imprint upon Anatolia. This conclusion appears in part natural since, as ERIK JAN ZÄRCHER points out, the primary engineers and retainers of the Young Turk period would come to populate and shape the early Republican administration. As one probes both Ankara's unyielding, yet opaque, commitment to top-down governance and the often bloody implementation of Turkey's on-going revolution from above, it appears that the Young Turk movement continues to haunt Anatolian society.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

Political history and biography 1908-1914: seminal years?

Chair: HAMÄT BOZARSLAN, EHESS, Paris
MEHMED ÄÄKRÄ HANÄOÄLU (Princeton): The CUP and the 1908 Revolution.

ERIK JAN ZÄRCHER (Leiden and Amsterdam): Political socialization 1908-1914.

Icons, leaders, and mentors 1908-14 (1) Chair: FATMA M. GÄÄEK, University of Michigan

SACÄT KUTLU (Istanbul): Enver Bey, the icon of the period (in Turkish, paper in English).

FUNDA SOYSAL (Istanbul): Ahmed İhsan, the founder of the journal *Servet-i Fânun*.

HANS-LUKAS KIESER (Zurich): Talat Bey, a biographical approach.

Icons, leaders, and mentors 1908-14 (2)

Chair: ERIK JAN ZÄRCHER, Univ. of Leiden and International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

ALÄ SUAT ÄRGÄPLÄ (Bamberg): Hayri Efendi, minister and Sheikh ul-Islam, according to his diaries.

RAYMOND KEVORKIAN (Paris): Krikor Zohrap.

Public lecture by MEHMED ÄÄKRÄ HANÄOÄLU, Chair of the Near Eastern Studies Department at Princeton University:

Dr. Bahaeddin Shakir (1874-1922), a Young Turk par excellence

Belief in an Ottoman future? The Young Turk Revolution in the provinces

Chair: RAYMOND KEVORKIAN, Univ. Paris VIII
FUAT DÄNDAR (Paris): Milli Ibrahim Pasha and Ziya GÄkalp in Diyarbakir, 1908: clash of political cultures and visions?

BERNARD LORY (Paris): Pance Dorev, a Bulgarian Young Turk at Bitola/Monastir.

VANGELIS KECHROITIS (Istanbul and Berlin): Izmir, the Rum and the Young Turk Revolution.

The Young Turk Revolution in the provinces (2)

Chair: ÄÄKRÄ HanioÄlu, University of Princeton
ASTRID MEIER (Zurich): Intellectuals in the Arab provinces.

HENNING SIEVERT (Zurich): Berber chief Sulayman al-Baruni: from prisoner to statesman.

RYAN GINGERAS (New York): Circassians, the Special Organization and Deep State Politics: a biographical approach?

14.30-15.30 Women pioneers Chair: Astrid Meier, University of Zurich

SERPÄL ÄAKIR (Istanbul), Making women pioneers visible: Fatma Aliye, Ulviye Mevlan (paper read by S. A.).

SIMA APRAHAMIAN (Montreal): Ottoman women's movements and Armenians.

A revolution in literature? Authors, figures, translators (1)

Chair: HILARY KILPATRICK-WAARDENBURG (SG-MOIK)

STEPHAN GUTH (Oslo): The sentiments of the engineers: An emotiogram of early Turkish nationalism, based on Halide Edib's Memoirs and her pre-WWI novels.

EROL KÄROÄLU (Istanbul): Historical and political positioning of literary authors 1908-14.

A revolution in literature? (2)

Chair: Stephan Guth (University of Oslo)
KEVORK BARDAKJIAN (Ann Arbor): The fatal failure of the Muses: literary biographies of Daniel Varuzhan and Siamanto.
AHMET ALTAN (Istanbul, to be confirmed): Writing today on the Second Constitutional Period.
From Union and Progress to the EU and reform, or to

an apocalyptical Middle East? Rethinking a century.

Chair: FATMA M. GÄÄEK (Ann Arbor): 1908â2008: A sociological analysis of continuity and change. H.L. Kieser (Univ. of Zurich)

HAMÄ°T BOZARSLAN (Paris): From CUP to âEr-genekonâ: dynamics of violence and State-coercion in Turkey.

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