'Citizen, Speak Turkish!': A Genealogy of Turkey's Linguistic Nationalism

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Know that history and language are the mark of identity,
A full-length mirror showing the inside and outside.
From this council blessings and felicity
will be born for pure Turkdom,
The Kurultay will save the pure language from other languages.[1]

Introduction

After Turkey's Independence War, Anatolia was a place of entropic heterogeneity. Many cultures and nations were spaced together unharmoniously and unwillingly. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in formulating his newly-founded Turkish Republic's national identity, decided that language and culture could become the sites through which an ethnic identity of the Turk can be constituted. When creating this imagined homogeneous Anatolia, the Kemalist regime employed language as an indicator of inclusion and exclusion. Those who spoke the Turkish language were deemed a part of the Turkish Republic and those who did not, were not. In service of this ideal, Turkish Republic, in the twentieth century, invested its resources in the production of a standard and authoritative Turkish language. This project strived to define the nation as homogeneous and modern. By tracing the development of Turkish Linguistic Nationalism in three periods -its pre-republican ideological origins, its republican application, and its contemporary echoes-, this article will attempt to explore how Turkish nationalism invested itself in capturing of the domain of language, controlling its dictionary and disciplining its ethno-linguistic minorities. It will further argue that, in pursuit of this ideal of linguistic homogeneity, the regime has produced an ideological schema which outlines Turkey's relationship with its East and its West. Thereby it will try to point out the continuities and discontinuities between these three periods of nationalist linguistic ideology.

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[1] Turkish Language Society, 'Congress March', undated.

*Conceptualising the Political Role of Language
in the Turkish Republic*

For many scholars of Turkey's linguistic nationalism, the language reform that oversaw the Kemalist government's project of nation-building in the 1930s is worth studying only in its significance in Turkey's modernization process. In Ilker Ayturk's several extensive works on the history of Turkish language reform, where he outlines the development of the ideas leading to the orthographic and vocabulary reform, there is a reluctance to dig out the instances of ethnographic identity-making in the reform processes of the 1930s. In 'Turkish Linguists Against The West', he argues that:

> The appearance of ethnicity and race based terminology in the linguistic writings of that period does not in any way indicate the wholesale conversion of an academic elite to the racist ideology. Rather than being the result of a profound change of mentality, the use of that terminology was an attempt to neutralize the racist condemnation of the Turks from within by utilizing the same jargon.[2]

Ayturk's analysis of Turkey's language reform frames the process as 'equality-seeking' rather than 'privilege-seeking'. Approaching the language reform as a 'functionalist' process solely aiming modernization, Ayturk's article omits from consideration the racial undertones fuelling the incessant 'othering' of oriental languages from Turkey's linguistic space.

In contrast to this perspective, other theorists and historians see these policies of Ataturk as violent and orientalist. In its quest to Westernise and homogenise the nation, it is argued that the Kemalist regime has alienated and disciplined the oriental cultures of Anatolia into submission. The Kurdish minority population of South Eastern Turkey is argued by these scholars to be the primary focus of this project of linguistic nationalism. Ismail Besikci, in his 'Türk Tarih Tezi, Güneş Dili Teorisi ve Kürt Sorunu' (Turkish History Thesis, Sun Language Theory and The Kurdish Question) examines the wider implications of Turkey's language reform and statist ideology on Turkey's Kurdish minorities. He critically analyses the Turkish

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[2] Ilker Ayturk, 'Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey', in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (Nov 2004), p. 19.

History Thesis and its adjacent Sun-Language Theory and breaks down several speeches from Turkey's language and history congresses to reveal the underlying racist discourses powering them. Besikci posits that 'the official ideology in Turkey defends that a person or a group called 'Kurds' doesn't exist on earth, in the Middle East and consequently (and crucially) in Anatolia and that these people are actually Turkish.'[3] He frames Turkey's linguistic nationalism and its main pillar in the 1930s, the Sun-Language Theory, as a pseudoscientific project denying and denigrating Kurdish language to ensure the nation's ethnolinguistic homogeneity.

It can be argued that there are two central approaches to Turkey's linguistic nationalism: the former seeing it as a primarily racial ideology directed towards assimilating the east, and the latter prioritizing the modernizing/westernising aspect of it. This article attempts to reconcile the two, situating Turkey's linguistic nationalism as an ideology outlining Turkey's relationship with the West and the East; racially denigrating the east while pandering to the west.

In addition to expanding the literature in its spatial treatment of the language reform, it is also required to determine the scope and the temporal scheme of our analysis. For instance, the relevant chapter in Hale Yilmaz's book on nationalist reforms in 1920-1940s Turkey, for instance, excellently treats the socio-cultural ramifications of Turkey's language reform.[4] However, she narrows down her analysis to an examination of the orthographic reform. Similarly, Ayturk's article limits the scope of its research to the Sun-Language Theory. Although in-depth analyses of particular policies of the language reform are certainly welcome and significant, it can also be beneficial to widen the scope of the analysis to examine the interconnections and interdependencies between different strands of the Turkish language reform process. It is crucial to examine the different layers of the language reform – the Kurdish question, the banning of Arabic and changing the script to Latin- as they are all interrelated in their overall implications for Turkey's national politics and in how Turkey situates its national identity spatially.

Finally, there is a reluctance in the literature to make the

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[3] İsmail Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi: Güneş Dili Teorisi ve Kürt Sorunu* (Denge Komal, 1977), p. 9.
[4] Hale Yilmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923-1945* (Syracuse University Press, 2013), Ch. 3.

connections between Turkey's linguistic nationalist policies of yesterday, and their manifestations and implications on Turkey today. Academic studies mentioned above, and many other, such as Geoffrey Lewis' *Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*, and Senem Aslan's 'Citizen, Speak Turkish: A Nation in the Making', structure their analyses of Turkey's linguistic policies based around the temporal frame in which these policies are being enacted.[5] Both Lewis and Aslan spend the majority of their analyses on the nation-building process of 1930s. Discursive continuities between Turkey's language policies today, and those of 1930s Turkey, or even nineteenth century Turkish nationalism have received minimal attention or analysis. This is a major defect in the literature that needs to be explored. Therefore, to build from and add on what these academics have built, this article strives to produce a short genealogy of Turkey's linguistic nationalism, tracing the discursive continuities sustaining it through three specific time periods. Turkey's language reform and its implications have not ended. It's still there, haunting the linguistic minorities of Turkey. Looking at the continuities between nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century, we can comprehend the wider impact of this language standardization project on the Turkish nation.

Origins of Turkey's Self-Flagellating Orientalism

In its most basic form, one can argue that Turkish Linguistic Nationalism rested upon two simple ideas regarding the nature of Turkey and its relationship with the West and the East. Firstly, as a symptom of Turkey's deeply embedded inferiority complex vis-à-vis European nations, it was based on an assumed imperative for Turkish language to be proven as an equally legitimate and important language in comparison to European languages.[6] Secondly, it assumed an existential necessity to rid the nation's language of 'backwards' cultural and linguistic elements of 'inferior'

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[5] Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Senem Aslan, '"Citizen, Speak Turkish!": A Nation in the Making', in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2007), pp. 245-272.

[6] Mustafa Celaleddin Pasha, *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes* (Courrier D'Orient, 1869). Also, İlker Aytürk, 'The First Episode of Language Reform in Republican Turkey: The Language Council from 1926 to 1931', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS)*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2008), pp. 275-293.

oriental languages.[7] The combination of these two ideas formed the backbone of the Turkish Linguistic Enterprise in the Republican Era. In order to inquire into the development of the Turkish Language in accordance with these two ideas, we must first trace the origins of these ideas in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman academia and politics, and their impact on the formation of a Turkish Nationalism.

a. 'Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes'

During the nineteenth century, at the height of European racialist theories,[8] prominent European philologists who aspired to prove the superiority of Western languages formulated pseudo-scientific hypotheses on a 'root-based classification of languages which divided all human languages into three categories (isolating, agglutinative, and inflectional languages) that corresponded to ascending levels of civilisation and human achievement'.[9] These philological assumptions were seen as emblematic of their civilizational superiority.

Framing his theory as a reaction to these European philologists, Mustafa Celaleddin Pasha, an Ottoman General, published a treatise titled *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes*.[10] His treatise, rather than condemning the racist undertones of the so-called 'inflectional superiority thesis', accepted the assumptions of this European civilizational discourse and attempted to prove that the Turkish language is indeed an Indo-European language.

Simultaneously refuting, and pandering to the racial theories of Europeans of the time, Celaleddin Pasha argued that: 'other than revealing an ignorance of the languages of Asia, the contemporary ethnological theory, which excludes the Turanian races from the family of the Aryans of Europe, violates the historical rights of the Turks as to their due place, as one of the principal branches of humanity.'[11] This claim implied and requested that Turkey should be

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[7] Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri hakkında Sosyolojik Tektikler* (YKY, 2007). See also, Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi.*

[8] For an example, see the discussion in Arthur Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races* (H. Fertig, 1967)

[9] Friedrich Max Müller, *The Science of Language*, Vol. 1 (Longmans, Green and Co, 1899), pp. 391-3.

[10] Mustafa Celaleddin Pasha, *Les Turcs Anciens et Modernes.*

[11] Mustafa Celaleddin Pasha, *L'Europe*, p. 229.

considered a part of European civilisation.

Essentially, Celaleddin proposed that the Ottoman Empire and Turkish people were stripped of their birth rights by the humiliating practices of European philologists such as Friedrich Max Muller and that Turks' role as an equal partner in the development of European civilisation should be recognised. An idea that would later become a central component of the Kemalist regime's thought process, the perceived necessity to be a 'Western' nation via the appropriation of its linguistic nationalism originated in the writings of Celaleddin.

b. 'The Principles of Turkism'

In the turn of the twentieth century, ideas of Turkism were becoming more and more prominent in the Ottoman Empire with the rise of Young Turks and its adjacent 'Committee of Union and Progress'.[12] Young Turks, after deposing Abdulhamid, rejected his Ottomanist ideology and instead advocated and practiced a fetishistic modernism and a Turkist ideology influenced by the works of nationalists such as Ziya Gökalp[13] and Ömer Seyfettin. On the institutional level, article 7 of the 1908 political programme of the Society for Union and Progress ran: 'the official language of the state will remain Turkish. Its correspondence and deliberations of every kind will be conducted in Turkish.'[14] On the ideological level, however, a debate between the so-called 'purists' *(tasfiyeciler)* and 'Turkists' (such as Omer Seyfettin) was afoot. The purists wanted to purify the language by banning all Arabic/Persian influenced words from Turkish. The Turkists, on the other hand, thought that some words of Arabic/Persian origin are deeply integrated to the language and that they should not be changed forcefully. Instead, they advocated breaking away from Arabic/Persian grammatical rules while preserving the multicultural vocabulary.[15] The core of the debate was a question of 'practicality'. However, the decision to

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[12] Doğu Ergil, 'A Reassessment: The Young Turks, Their Politics and Anti-Colonial Struggle', in *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 16 (1975), pp. 26-72.

[13] Ziya Gokalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gokalp* (Columbia University Press, 1959); Ömer Seyfettin, *Omer Seyfettin'in Siirleri* [*Poems Written by Omer Seyfettin*] (Turk Kulturunu Arastirma Enstitusu, 1972).

[14] Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 21.

[15] Ömer Seyfettin, *Butun Eserleri 13: Dil Konusunda Yazilar* (Bilgi Yayinevi, 1989), p. 24.

reform the Turkish language, to strip it away from its oriental identity was almost unanimous. The mission of these reformists was to dissociate the nation's language from its Islamic past and realign it with the West and its pre-Islamic glory.[16] The Language Reform was formulated – as would later become Atatürk's personal mission statement- as a quest for the westernisation and modernisation of the Turkish Language. The delusional thought that these two concepts were synonymous led to an understanding of linguistic reform that sought to mimic Western linguistic nationalism, rather than finding an authentic voice. Therefore, it was no surprise when 'often Arabic terminology was shed under the pretense of purity to be immediately replaced by the same word adopted from French.'[17] In this regard, Turkey's policy of eliminating Eastern cultural influences from the core of the nation can be argued as an 'orientalist' or even a 'self-orientalist' practice. The Ottoman Empire's culture and language has been shaped significantly, throughout centuries, from its cultural exchanges with the Persian and Arabic peoples.[18] By denying this Arabic-Persian element in exchange of a westernised language, these linguists not only forced an unwelcomed change to the nation's centuries-old culture, but also has accepted the *a priori* superiority of the Western way of life to their own. One can even argue this mode of thinking was not only 'self-orientalist', but also 'self-colonizing'. It imposed Western values on its own citizens before Western imperialists would.

Besides this orientalist attitude towards the Ottoman language, language policies advocated by Ziya Gökalp in, 'A Sociological Study of Kurdish Tribes', argued for the necessary disciplining of the Kurdish minorities in the Turkish-speaking political space. Gokalp, has attempted to interpellate the Kurds as 'linguistically disunified, culturally alien and socioeconomically primitive'.[19] He stated: 'In Egypt and Algeria we have lost hundreds of thousands of Turks to Arabification. However, Kurdistan is still in our control and we are losing Turks in our homeland to Kurdification.'[20]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Matthew Chovanec, 'Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş: Language Ideology in the Work of Ziya Gökalp', in *SocArXiv*: doi:10.31235/osf.io/qdvcy (7 March 2017), n.pp.

[18] 'The Turkish Language and Literature', *The Illustrated Magazine of Art,* Vol. 4, No. 20 (1854), p. 119.

[19] Chovanec, 'Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş', n.p.

[20] Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri hakkında Sosyolojik Tektikler*, p. 559.

There is a concurrent 'othering' of the Kurds and Arabs vis-à-vis the Turks in this quote where it is implied that these oriental cultures pose an existential threat to the Turks. This discourse of threat is produced via the use of terms such as 'losing' as seen in the quote above. The project of Turkification is thus drawn as a 'war' with martyrs, a zero-sum game struggle and a clear enemy to be fought against. Co-existence and multiculturalism is ruled out.

In the writings of Celaleddin Pasha and Ziya Gokalp, and in the policies of the Young Turks' government, then, we can observe the initial formations of some prevalent ideas of Kemalist linguistic nationalism. These 'intellectuals' saw the salvation of their nation in the adoption of the normative linguistic expectations of the ideal European regimes (especially the French and Germans) and in the orientalist othering of Arabs and Kurds.

The Making of a Linguistic Nationalism

Atatürk's Kemalist regime sought to emulate and mimic the administrative methods of French and German linguistic nationalist traditions when formulating its linguistic policies. Formed in 1635, *Academie Francaise is* France's state-led arbiter on matters related to the standardization and authorization of the French language. Its primary purpose is to defend the purity of the French language by eliminating regional languages and ensuring that everyone is speaking the French that the institution approves of.[21] 'For years France's regional languages were seen by Paris as a taboo that threatened national unity and should be repressed - children were punished for speaking Breton in the playground, banned from speaking Occitan in southern schools or Alsatian dialect in the east.'[22] Ataturk, who was inspired by France's understanding and execution of the nation strived to dissociate the nation from the Ottoman multilingual tradition to promote a linguistic system similar to that in France. In service of this ideal, the Kemalist regime has imposed an ethnically homogeneous understanding of the nation and of

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[21] Patrick Sean McCrae, 'Standard Republican French and French Nationalism: Une et Indivisible', in Elizaveta Khachaturyan (ed.), *Language-Nation-Identity: The "Questione Della Lingua" in an Italian and Non-Italian Context* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 8-29.

[22] Angelique Chrisafis, 'Local Language Recognition Angers French Academy', in *The Guardian*, 17 June 2008, online. (Last accessed 20 October 2018.)

Anatolia based on a shared language. Ataturk's philosophy on this issue is drawn from the thought of Johann Gottfried Herder and German Lingusitic Nationalist Tradition. 'Herder treated language as the quintessential characteristic of nationhood, saying that 'truth, beauty and virtue-became as national as language was.'[23] Ataturk, following this idea, has attempted to 'nationalise' the language and make it as 'perfect' as it can be.

a. Capturing and Westernising the Language

The first attempt to civilise and westernise the country's language was made on 20 March 1926 when the Minister of Education, Mustafa Necati Bey announced the foundation of The Language Council *(Dil Heyeti).* The Council 'was going to deal with the problem of orthographic reform of Turkish scripts first and foremost and the adoption of the Roman alphabet.'[24] According to Geoffrey Lewis, 'the purpose of the change of alphabet was to break Turkey's ties with the Islamic East and to facilitate communication domestically as well as with the Western world.'[25] The usage of Arabic alphabet in day-to-day conduct would have meant that Turkey was 'different' from the Western nations. Turkey, however, in order to be accepted as a 'civilised' country, had to mimic and emulate the living standards of the West.[26] Therefore, the alphabet of the West must be adopted as well.

Mustafa Kemal proclaimed, in a speech at the famous Gülhane Park, 'to deliver the nation from ignorance, the only course is to abandon the Arabic letters, which are not suited to the national language, and to accept the Turkish letters, based on the Latin'.[27] His rhetoric implied a trajectory for how Turkey's relationship with the West and the East were to be defined in the Republican era. Being Arabic, speaking Arabic and using their language was interpellated as 'ignorant'. In order to be 'civilised', it was implied, that the Turks needed to adopt the alphabet of the West and therefore, be Western.

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[23] Alan Patten, 'The Most Natural State: Herder and Nationalism', in *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2010), p. 667.

[24] Aytürk, 'The First Episode of Language Reform', p. 278.

[25] Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 27.

[26] Petr Kučera, 'Becoming European: Kemalism as an ideology of Westernism', in Lucie Tunkrova & Pavel Šaradín (eds.), *The Politics of EU Accession: Turkish Challenges and Central European Experiences* (Routledge, 2010), pp. 18-33.

[27] M. Şakir Ülkütaşır, *Atatürk ve Harf Devrimi* (TDK, 1973), p. 77.

The formation of the Language Council, however, was a mere formality, as 'the political decision to Romanise the Turkish script had already been made and it was not going to change as a result of scientific deliberations at the Language Council.'[28] The Language Council, functioned to serve the state's nationalist ideology, as did other pseudo-scientific institutions of the time, guising itself as an independent research committee. This was emblematic of Kemalist regime's complete capturing of the domain of language. The institution was founded not for genuine scientific research but for the purposes of reconfiguring Turkey's national identity.

> b. Controlling the Dictionary

The second phase of Atatürk's linguistic nationalism was the purification of the Turkish language via the production and distribution of a purely Turkish and state-funded dictionary. For this purpose, on 12 July 1932, Atatürk founded the Turkish Society for the Study of Language (*Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti)*. Atatürk, inspired by the aforementioned ideas of the twentieth century Turkists, 'resented the dominance of the Arabic and Persian elements in the language and believed that the intelligent use of native resources could make the use of foreign borrowings unnecessary'.[29] Subsequently, a nation-wide mission to outlaw all Arabic/Persian influenced words from the Turkish language commenced. State servants called *tasfiyeciler* (purifiers) mobilised the people through newspapers and radio stations and encouraged them to suggest Turkish replacements for Arabic words in the language.[30]

Atatürk, in a speech he gave in the First Turkish Language Congress, said: 'We are going to defeat Ottoman. Turkish is going to be a language as free and as independent as the Turkish nation, and with it we shall enter the world of civilisation at one go'.[31] He imagined Turkish language's existential struggle against oriental influences as a mission for emancipation as he depicted a narrative of Arab domination or invasion of Turkish culture. 'Defeating Ottoman' meant defeating the orient. Using a lexicon full of connotations of war, struggle and resistance through phrases such as 'independence' and 'freedom', he established a discourse of an emancipatory

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[28] Baki Süha Ediboğlu, *Falih Rıfkı Atay Konuşuyor* (Ankara, 1945), pp. 30-31

[29] Ibid, p. 40.

[30] Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform.*

[31] Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Atatürk'ün Dil Çalışmaları* (ATD, 1963), pp. 116-117.

struggle against oriental languages. In addition, he argued for an alignment with the ideal European linguistic methodology by implying that 'Turkification' meant 'entering the world of civilisation at one go'.[32] These connotations of war were so effective that the project for collecting purely Turkic words was denominated 'the word-collection mobilisation'.[33] Turkey was effectively at war with the multilingualism and multiculturalism of the Ottoman Empire.

The irony in the production of this pure Turkish dictionary was the fact that the primary referent of this dictionary reform was not Ottoman Turkish or local dialects, but the French language. Originating from the then-Prime Minister İsmet Paşa, the Language Council (later Turkish Language Society) resolved to translate the French *Le Petit Larousse* to Turkish.[34] Aytürk rightfully argues that, 'the decision to produce a Turkish Larousse revealed a tacit or subconscious recognition of the inadequacy of Turkish in comparison with French or other western languages in meeting the demand of the modern society for an ever-increasing number of scientific terms and the age-old inclination of the Turkish intelligentsia to regard French as the most civilised and beautiful language'.[35]

Controlling the language through a state-funded dictionary which performed as an authoritative and standardising agent for linguistic unity was an endeavour in severing the ties with the nation's multicultural and multilingual past. Simultaneously, it was a massive effort in 'Westernising' the country by introducing ethnic homogeneity to the nation's culture through the creation of a purely Turkish vocabulary.

c. Disciplining the Minorities

In the words of Mesut Yeğen, the Kemalist project 'aspired to transform a heterogeneous social space ruled by the logic of empire to a homogeneous social space governed by a modern nation-state'.[36] In Atatürk's imagined Anatolia, therefore, there was no space for ethno-linguistic minorities. Therefore, Atatürk's project of linguistic

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 49.

[34] Aytürk, 'The First Episode of Language Reform', p. 284.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Mesut Yeğen, 'Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question', in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2007), pp. 119-151.

nationalism, other than capturing the language and controlling the dictionary, also strived to discipline its minorities in order to produce a purely Turkish speaking political space. This would ensure Turkey's ethnic unity and homogeneity and align the country with the ideal model of Western nations.

Consequently, a campaign called 'Citizen, Speak Turkish' was initiated by law students sponsored by the government which pressured the non-Turkish speaking Muslim and Non-Muslim minorities into speaking Turkish in public. A violent ultimatum was present at the heart of this slogan. It implied that if one aspires to be a citizen and assume the basic human rights of a Turkish citizen, they had to accept and assimilate into the Turkish culture, identity and language. In tandem with this campaign, 'many municipalities started to impose fines on those who refused to speak Turkish in public'.[37]

This campaign was especially significant for the treatment of the Kurdish minority in the Turkish Republic. The Kemalist ideology rejected the existence of an ethnic minority group called the Kurds. In Turkish History and Language Congresses that were held in the Republican Era, the Kurds were linguistically inscribed as backward, tribal and nomadic 'Mountain Turks'.[38] They would argue, 'Kurd means being a highlander, being a savage... dirty Kurd, tailed Kurd, useless Kurd.'[39]

First, as part of a policy called 'Eastern Reform Plan', Kurdish minorities living in the East were resettled to majority Turkish-speaking areas to assimilate them to the Turkish culture. This would effectively force them to renounce their identity and assume the identity of a Turkish citizen.[40] 'In the minds of republican cadres, Turkishness was not about religion or voluntaristic declaration, it was about language and ethnicity.'[41]

Secondly, the Kemalist project would use the means of the Language Association to officially deny the existence of the Kurds. Controlling the dictionary in the 1930's Turkey essentially meant controlling 'meaning'. Kurds, in the official dictionary of the Turkish Language Association published in 1936, were defined as 'a

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[37] Aslan, '"Citizen, Speak Turkish!'.

[38] Besikci, Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi*, p. 81.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene* (İletişim Yayınları, 2001), pp. 286-90.

[41] Soner Çağaptay, 'Reconfiguring the Turkish Nation in the 1930s', in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2002), pp. 67-82.

community composed of Turkish people, speaking a broken Persian dialect.'[42] This definition, in its simplest form, implied two reconstructed identities for the Kurdish minorities.

Firstly, their identity as a legitimate ethnic group was rejected. They were reduced to the status of a 'community' therefore losing the rights of an ethnic minority group that came with the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. Secondly, their language was rejected and reduced to a mere dialect of the Persian language. The importance of this specific identity-making would become clearer when Celal Şahir Bey, declared in a speech in the First Language Congress that 'for obvious reasons, languages spoken by uncivilised tribes are not legitimate.'[43]

The reduction of Kurdish to a mere dialect of Turkish meant that they would not be considered a legitimate ethnic minority. This implied that they would not have access to basic human rights of ethnic groups. Using the assumed 'backwardness' of Kurdish by virtue of its status as a 'disunified dialect', the Kemalist regime legitimated a project of civilising the East and making it 'Turkish'. Through a rhetoric not dissimilar to those of the nineteenth century colonisers, 'Turks' have bestowed upon themselves a reworked version of the white man's burden. It was argued that 'Turks had a historical duty to civilise and edify'[44] the Kurds. The identity-making of this rhetoric combined with the state-led discourse of 'civilisation' meant the survival of Turkey's linguistic nationalism rested upon the assimilation of the backwards Kurdish minorities and their language. Ergo, the linguistic authority of the Turkish state functioned in legitimating its violent army incursions into East Anatolia in the 1930s and its on-going mission of the Turkification of the Anatolian political space.

Reverberations of Linguistic Nationalism
in Contemporary Turkey

The impact of Atatürk's project of linguistic nationalism still echoes in the state policies and social composition of the contemporary Turkish republic. The coup of 12 September 1980, marked a turning point epitomising the second nationalist moment of Turkish history. Under the leadership of General Kenan Evren, the junta regime

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[42] Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi*, p. 188.

[43] Celal Sahir Bey, *First Turkish Language Congress* (1932)

[44] Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi*, p. 54.

undertook a project of institutionalising its nationalist ideology. With the 1982 constitution the Turkish Language Association was officially nationalised and put under the direct authority of the state. On 11 August 1983, the Language Society was officially reconstituted as part of the Ataturk Cultural, Linguistic, and Historical Institute that was after linked to the Prime Minister's office.[45] This decision both literally and symbolically consolidated the three key elements of the Turkish nationalist project – culture, language and history- and their relationship to the state and Ataturk. Moreover, in a change to constitution made on 19 November 1983, the regime constitutionally established the nation's linguistic ideology, stating, 'the native language of Turkish citizens is Turkish. It is forbidden to speak or disseminate any other native language other than Turkish.'[46] This decision was especially impactful for how the Kurdish minorities were treated in South Eastern Turkey after the coup, as now it became constitutionally illegal to even speak Kurdish in public spaces. As a symptom of this exclusionist policy towards the Kurdish language, signs saying 'Speak Turkish, Speak Plenty' appeared in prisons around Kurdish-speaking Diyarbakır province of Turkey[47]. Many incidents resulting in violence towards Kurdish-speaking minorities in Turkey were recorded in the time of these changes to constitution. With this further institutionalisation of Turkey's linguistic identity, an exacerbated form of pressure was put on Turkey's ethnic-linguistic minorities. This was a direct remnant of Atatürk's legacy of linguistic nationalism.

Today, despite several breakthroughs regarding the treatment of minority groups in Turkey (i.e. allowing TV programmes in minority languages and facilitating the learning by Turkish citizens of minority languages),[48] an air of nationalist authority over language still exists. The decision to allow TV programmes in minority languages was accepted only on the condition that 'there would be no children's programmes, no minority language teaching programmes, and that all programmes would be subtitled or

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[45] Lewis, 'The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success', p. 162.

[46] Turkish Constitution (19 November 1983), Statute 2932.

[47] İsa Tekin, '*E-Tipi Hilton*' *Diyarbakır Cezavi: Türkçe Konuş Çok Konuş* (Peri Yayınları, 2012)

[48] Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, '*Türk* or *Türkiyeli*? The reform of Turkey's Minority Legislation and the Rediscovery of Ottomanism', in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (May, 2007), p. 426.

simultaneously translated into Turkish.'[49] This condition implies a resistance towards the creation of an exclusive Kurdish-speaking zone in Turkish public spaces. The decision to facilitate education in minority languages faced similar stumbling blocks put by the Turkish bureaucracy. 'Although reform measures clearly acknowledged the right to open private minority language schools, the administration found several reasons to delay this development; most important being the use of the term 'language' instead of the term 'dialect' as a pretext to delay the opening of private Kurdish language schools.'[50] The Turkish administration rejected the rights of the Kurdish minorities through the reduction of their language to a dialect. Being a language or even claiming to be a language was regarded as a 'threat' to the nation's integrity. Their recognition was allowed only on the condition that they accept their status of being a dialect.

A Prison in Southeastern Province of Diyarbakir:
'Speak Turkish, Speak Plenty'

This idea of 'threat in the Kurdish language was created via a constructed link between Kurdish and the terrorist group PKK. 'A criminal court in Diyarbakır ordered the confiscation of a number of music albums in January and February 2005 on the basis of Article 312 of the former Penal Code, claiming that the Kurdish-language

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar: Kavramlar, Lozan, İç Mevzuat, İçtihat, Uygulama* (TESEV Yayınları, 2004), p. 104

lyrics constituted propaganda in support of an illegal organisation.'[51] In this instance of linguistic nationalism, the constructed relation between the language and the organisation was instrumentalised as a pretext for the further exclusion of the language from the public space. This exclusion and the overall policy of preventing Kurdish as a native language reached such an extent that in the winter of 2017, it was decided, under the state of emergency, that Kurdish kindergartens named `Zarokistan` will be closed.[52] Assimilation of the Kurds then, also assumes a direct pedagogical function, striving to limit Kurdish as a native language itself.

The fact that these reforms over minority rights and language were made in order to comply with the conditions of EU's reform package[53] can be regarded as illustrative and as a continuation of Turkish nationalism's long-lasting trend of reconfiguring its linguistic policies as a plea for recognition from its 'perceived superiors'; the 'modern' Western civilisation

Conclusion

Tracing Turkey's linguistic nationalism through its three phases –its ideological beginnings, its republican application and its reverberations in contemporary Turkey– reveals two central attributes of Turkish identity. First, as seen by Celaleddin Pasha's reactive hypotheses about the origins of Turkish language, Atatürk's insistent policy of Romanising the alphabet and contemporary minority language reforms as an appeal to the EU, Turkey's linguistic nationalism is formulated via a perceived imperative to be a Western nation. This is emblematic of Turkey's long-running inferiority complex vis-à-vis 'the West'. Secondly, revealed by Gökalp's ideological ramblings about the Kurdish language, Atatürk's war-like mission for outlawing Arabic from the language, and modern Turkey's prevention of Kurdish-speaking public spaces, it also acts on the assumed necessity to be disassociated from its oriental roots.

Turkey's national identity revolves around how it situates

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[51] Grigoriadis, '*Türk* or *Türkiyeli*?', p. 427.
[52] Uygar Gultekin, 'Zarokistan closed down', in AGOS, 15 February 2017, online. (Last accessed 20 October 2018.)
[53] Grigoriadis, '*Türk* or *Türkiyeli*?', p. 424.

itself spatially over the vast swathes of land called Anatolia. Configuring where the Turkish identity lies in the time of modernity has been the central objective of the Young Turkist and Kemalist projects. This project of turning Turkey westwards and rejecting the millennia-old oriental character of the nation was essential to the state's language policies. How Turkey identified the nature of its relationship with its West and its East then led to this specific understanding of linguistic nationalism which, as shown above, invested itself in the capturing of the domain of language, controlling the dictionary and disciplining ethno-linguistic minorities.

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