

*Defensive- and Liberal Nationalisms,
The Kurdish Question and Democratization*

November 24, 2005

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Forthcoming in E. Fuat Keyman, ed., Remaking Turkey: Globalization, Alternative

Modernities, and Democracy (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006)

(Under Revision, please consult with the author before citing)

Acknowledgements: I presented the main ideas in this essay in September 2005 in the seminar series of the Study Group on Modern Turkey, Center for Government and International Affairs, Harvard University. I would like to thank Cemal Kafadar, Fuat Keyman, and Nur Yalman for insightful questions and valuable comments and suggestions. Evrim Altıntaş, Koray Mutlu, and Banu Turnaoğlu offered dedicated assistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of modern Turkey, the “Kurdish question” or *Kürt Sorunu* has been and continues to be the most politically challenging and violent problem facing Turkish modernization. (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997; Barkey and Fuller, 1998; Bruinessen, 2003; Cemal, 2003; Taşpınar, 2005). In accordance with the arguments in this essay, it can be formulated as the question of how to include ethnic Kurds in this project of modernization as Kurds—with their distinct identity—without undermining the project’s major goals and sustainability. For reasons that I explore in this essay, and despite its many achievements, Turkish modernization largely failed to address the Kurdish question as defined above. This in turn appears to have weakened its ability to achieve many of its fundamental goals such as full-fledged socio-economic development and becoming an equal member of the ‘West.’

Currently, Turkish modernization is going through a transition to and consolidation of liberal democracy, the outcome of which is yet uncertain. This process is occurring in a context of revived and remade Kurdish nationalism within its own borders as well as in its Middle Eastern and European neighbors. Why has the Kurdish question been such a major challenge to Turkish modernization, and what are the prospects for the future evolution of the Kurdish conflict in its current context? As I will discuss further below, current research on Turkey offers insufficient answers to these questions. In response, I aim to put forward and discuss in this essay three major sets of theses and arguments.

Discursive-Cognitive Differentiation and the Specter of Radical Polarization

Currently, the *majority* Turkish society—people with no Kurdish background, and Kurds who are assimilated into the mainstream society or well-integrated with it and view themselves as Turkish nationals as well as Kurdish—is experiencing a period of significant *ethnic differentiation* in a discursive and cognitive sense.¹ The majority is increasingly

¹ I use the term “Turkish” as a national identity and citizenship that can be embraced by a multiethnic group of people. Thus, it includes the self-perceptions of people who consider themselves ethnic Turks, those who

becoming aware of Kurdish difference and perceiving social, political, and economic actors and events in terms of ethnicity. In the past, the majority society's awareness and articulation of the Kurdish difference were suppressed by a mainstream discourse that subdued (or denied) the expression of the Kurdish category. In fact, until the early 1990s, the very term Kurd was a taboo within the mainstream public-political discourse.

The drastic discursive changes that occurred during the 1990s are being reinforced and given new shape by current social and political developments (Somer, 2005a). The political developments include Turkey's yet insufficiently implemented legal-political reforms and EU integration, which entered a new stage in October, 2005, with the start of the negotiations toward full membership; the uncertainties in Iraq and the rising expectations of Iraqi-Kurdish statehood; and renewed Kurdish activism and violence between the PKK rebels and the security forces in the Turkish Southeast. (Kirişçi, 2004; Somer, 2004; Barkey, 2005).

The reflections of these developments in the Turkish public-political discourse include renewed interest in the Kurdish question, intellectual and literary works reinterpreting the history of Turkish nation-building and the historical and current meanings and contents of the Turkish and Kurdish identities. (Somer, 2005b). The Kurdish identity category is increasingly employed by Kurdish as well as non-Kurdish actors in order to describe, classify, and explain events, actors, and social-political groups. It should be noted here that this current process of ethnic differentiation is mostly affecting the majority society. As members of an ethnic minority that conflicted with the Turkish state from the beginning, those Kurds who had a high level of ethnic consciousness, especially Kurdish nationalists, experienced ethnic

embrace it as a national identity, and those who consider themselves as Turkish citizens, Turkish Muslims, or *Türkiyeli*, which means "from Turkey." In the Turkish language, the term *Türk* has multiple meanings. Depending on the context in which it is used, it can denote a historical and ethnic or cultural-linguistic identity, national identity, or citizenship. Historically, it was used by insiders and outsiders to denote an ethnic-linguistic category and was sometimes used by Europeans to denote all Ottoman Muslims. During the Turkish nation-building the meaning of the term was expanded and transformed to denote a nation, nationality and citizenship, without losing its usage as an ethnic-linguistic category.

differentiation much earlier.² One reason for this is an important dissimilarity between Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. Turkish nationalism was aimed at unifying politically and culturally a multiethnic population in a given territory. Not surprisingly, it tended to produce inclusive values that played down (and suppressed) difference.

By contrast, from the beginning, Kurdish nationalism was based in ethnic particularism: it was aimed at politically unifying an ethnic-linguistic population based on its actual and imagined differences from neighboring groups. (McDowall, 1997; Özoğlu, 2001; Bruinessen, 2003). Accordingly, its values tended to highlight Kurdish (cultural, linguistic, historical) differences (e.g. from Turks, Arabs, or Persians). Thus, Kurdish cultural and political nationalists possessed a differentiated perception of Turkish society for a long time. The existence of this perception is easily revealed for example by their memoirs and biographies. For younger generations of Kurdish nationalists, it seems to have developed during the 1970s and gained serious momentum during the 1990s.³

The pessimistic and so far unlikely scenario is that the ongoing differentiation for the majority society and the existing differentiation for the minority evolve into radical polarization. For non-Kurdish members of the majority society, polarization would imply more and more exclusion of and opposition to Kurds. For Kurdish members of the majority society, it would mean either further assimilation into, or alienation from the majority.⁴ For Kurds with already differentiated self-perceptions, it would mean further politicization and differentiation from the majority society. Inevitably, this scenario would also include further political violence and painful social-economic separation of Turks and Kurds. A second and more likely scenario is that the Kurdish conflict continues as a protracted and violent conflict,

² Throughout this essay, I use the term *minority* in a purely numerical-demographic sense, not necessarily as a legal or political status and category. Note that Kurdish individuals can simultaneously be part of the majority (via self-identifying as Turkish nationals and via socioeconomic integration with the majority society) and the minority (via their ethnic-linguistic self-perception).

³ Among others, Ballı, 1991; Bucak, 1991; Bırand, 1992; Çalışlar, 1993; İmset, 1993; Burkay, 2002; and Kaya, 2004.

⁴ For an elaboration, see Somer, 2004.

but remains a regional (to Southeastern Turkey) conflict and creates limited social-political polarization on a national level. Even during the climax of violence between Kurdish separatists and the security forces in early 1990s, the state managed to prevent such polarization.

From the point of view of coexistence, peace and stability, the optimistic scenario is that the Kurdish difference is accommodated in a context of liberal democracy—protecting minorities’ abilities to promote their interests via the means of pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, and constitutional guarantees—and national unity.⁵ The Kurdish question and nationalism are unlikely to disappear under this scenario, as they would under the other two scenarios. However, this scenario has the potential to minimize violent ethno-political mobilization and conflict, and may be able to address the Kurdish question peacefully and to the satisfaction of most of the actors involved. From this point of view, in this new stage, the Kurdish question can be more specifically defined: how to address the old and the new ethnic-cultural, national, and socio-economic claims of Kurds by using the means of liberal democracy, and without undermining social peace, territorial unity and the liberal-democratization process itself.

Ideas, Nationalism, and Turkish Modernization

In order to examine the roots of the Kurdish question, current research has mostly focused on the ideational characteristics of Turkish modernization. These characteristics include its illiberal- authoritarian (i.e. oriented towards duties rather than rights), state-centric, diversity-phobic, assimilationist, and the interchangeably ethnic-exclusive and civic-inclusive (but ethnicity-blind) beliefs and values. (Yavuz and Gunter, 2001; Yavuz, 2001; Canefe, 2002; Yeğen, 2004; Cagaptay, 2004; Kahraman, 2005; Kadioğlu, 2005). This research helps a great deal in illuminating various aspects of the Kurdish question. Pending a more detailed

⁵ While liberal democracy is the norm within the EU which Turkey is seeking to join, there is no single criteria or set of practices as to how liberal democracies ought to protect minority interests, within the EU and in general.

discussion and review in the next section, however, it should be noted here that it leaves a number of questions unanswered. First, it understates the demographic-geographic factors, which will be discussed later, that help one to understand the Kurdish question in comparison to other ethnic questions in the world. Second, and more importantly, it does not explain *the extent* (and part of the nature) of Turkish state policies vis-à-vis Kurds. Most of the current research gives the impression that the state policies toward Kurds were more or less predestined by Turkish nation- and state-building's major ideational characteristics. In other words, the impression is given that these policies directly follow from the major goals of this project. In fact, many state policies do not necessarily follow from the major goals of the nationalist project; the same goals could have been pursued with different and less diversity-phobic policies and institutions.

Third, by analyzing Turkish nation- and state-building in terms of its dominant values, current research overlooks its less dominant values that affected state policies to a limited extent, the counterfactual paths that it might have followed, and the future paths that it may take by building on hitherto less dominant values and ideas. In return, I maintain that different values, ideas and policies were known and put forward during the development of Turkish nation- and state-building. What I call *defensive-nationalist perspectives* (henceforth DNP) suppressed the alternative versions that could indirectly have led to the emergence of rudimentary forms of *liberal-nationalist perspectives* (henceforth LNP).⁶ This outcome resulted from critical actor decisions, prioritization of some goals of modernization over the others, institutional choices, and events that led to the domination and marginalization of these alternative versions. Both of these perspectives will be defined and discussed in detail ahead.

⁶ Note that both DNP and LNP are plural as neither forms a monolithic set. The choice of the term “defensive” nationalism as opposed to “offensive” nationalism is not intended to convey any normative judgment or justification.

However, the dominant ideational characteristics of Turkish modernization is essential to understand the past and the current of the Kurdish question in one important sense, that is, the significance of nationalism in this project. Turkish modernization can be understood as a radical project of modernization/westernization that was aimed at transforming both the private and public spheres of society so as to create a modern, secular and socio-economically advanced nation-state. (Ahmad, 1993; Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997; Mardin, 2003; Hanioglu, 2005; Kasaba, forthcoming, 2006). In pursuit of this double transformation, Turkish nation- and state-building targeted more than merely the political institutions of the old regime. It also opposed religion and traditional culture, the latter including Ottoman-cosmopolitan (palace and urban) and local (Anatolian-Muslim) culture, conflicting with their proponents. Inevitably, these clashes gave rise to major gaps in the ability of the state to regulate social and economic life, maintain social and political unity, and consolidate its own legitimacy during its formative years. Indeed, to resolve these problems in a context of rapid and multifaceted transformation, and of conflict with the old rules and sources of legitimacy must have been major challenges.

Turkish nationalism was the major ideological recipe that Turkish nation- and state-building put forward in response to these challenges. Thus, Turkish nationalism and national identity were supposed to fulfill key roles in this project. They were supposed to unify and homogenize a multiethnic, multi-confessional, and traditional society; provide legitimacy for the state and its modernizing project; enable social and economic integration and development by standardizing language and other mediums of communication and cooperation. Accordingly, major attempts were made by the state to solidify Turkish nationalism as the main unifying ideology in society. Thus, nationalism has been and is a major component of Turkish mainstream political and social beliefs. Except for the extremes on the left and religious-right, for some liberals, and for Kurdish nationalists, the legitimacy and basic tenets

of Turkish nationalism are embraced by all major Turkish political and social actors. Finally, it is important to study Turkish nationalism in order to understand the Kurdish question because Kurdish nationalism partly developed as a response to it.

Liberal-Nationalist Perspectives and the Kurdish Question

Because of the importance of nationalism in Turkish modernization, and because strong Kurdish nationalist movements are already present in Turkey, its neighbors, and Europe, it is unlikely that the current process of political-economic and ideological transformation in Turkey will give rise to new political actors and ideologies that are devoid of nationalist values. Nor is it likely that such ideologies can develop politically feasible solutions enjoying wide constituencies. Theoretically, liberal-nationalist solutions are more likely to emerge and have more potential to succeed. However, before becoming actual alternatives, such perspectives have first to be formulated and then embraced and articulated by social and political actors.

In this sense, a major bottleneck toward the solution of the Kurdish question is the dormancy of liberal-nationalist perspectives in the Turkish and Kurdish political and intellectual discourses.⁷ What I mean by liberal nationalism here and the theoretical and empirical compatibility of liberalism and nationalism will be discussed ahead. Suffice it to say that for the majority Turkish nationalism, it denotes one that posits a positive relationship between the recognition of ethnic-cultural diversity through minority rights (or affirmative policies) in a liberal-democratic system, and national (social and political) unity.⁸ For minority nationalisms, it denotes a nationalism that is open to internal (cultural and ideological) diversity and multiple identities (such as simultaneous identification with

⁷ Insofar as ethnic differentiation and polarization have occurred, these (Turkish and Kurdish) spaces can be seen to be separate. Currently, one can only talk about a partial separation, because the majority of Kurds also participates in the Turkish discourse.

⁸ The desirability of the institution of cultural *rights* is problematic within liberalism because the absolutist discourse of rights tends to create zero-sum rivalries among different rights and between the holders of different rights. Hence, the recognition of diversity may be achieved through other means, such as temporary entitlements or affirmative policies. For a review, see Beiner, 2003: 150-151.

Kurdish ethnicity and Turkish nationality) within the minority group, and pursues self-governance through minority rights (or affirmative policies) in a liberal-democratic system.

Currently, there are three major groups of ideological perspectives and political projects that are vaguely but vocally articulated in response to the Kurdish question. The first are the Turkish DNP. The Turkish DNP are highly skeptical of the political expressions of ethnic-cultural diversity, especially that of its Kurdish variety. They view these expressions as inherently inimical to social and political unity and open to foreign manipulation. They reflect the dominant values and beliefs of Turkish nationalism and continue to shape the predominant political reflexes of the actors within the military, the state apparatus, and major political actors on the right and left. They have Kemalist, and Anatolian or Turkish Muslim-nationalist versions. The second vocal group of perspectives can be called the Kurdish DNP, which claim that Turkish Kurds are a nation of their own and are entitled to external self-determination, i.e. the right to secession, even though Kurds may choose to seek administrative autonomy within a Turkey that would be an EU member. These perspectives can have secessionist, pan-Kurdist, and autonomist versions. The Kurdish DNP have most clearly and militantly been articulated by the separatist PKK and by Turkish Kurds who live outside of Turkey. There is little social or political tolerance for these perspectives within the majority Turkish society.

A third group consists of *liberal perspectives* (henceforth LP). LP have become vocal in Turkey in line with Turkey's integration with the world economy and the rise of the civil society's autonomy from the state since the 1980s, and the acceleration of the integration with the EU since 1999.⁹ LP advocate Kurdish cultural and political rights within national unity and in a context of liberal democracy. In addition, LP are highly skeptical of any nationalism

⁹ Arslan, 2005; Erdoğan, 2005; Yılmaz, ed., 2005.

whether Turkish or Kurdish.¹⁰ They have center-right and social democratic versions that are inspired by western liberal thought, as well as Islamic versions inspired by the unifying role of Islam in Turkish society and the belief that ethnic-cultural expressions would not endanger national unity as long as Islam is allowed to play an enhanced role in society.

These three vocal perspectives fail to represent the interests and potential preferences of two groups in particular. First, the Kurdish DNP exclude the potential interests of what may be called a silent majority of Turkish Kurds, which comprises ethnic Kurds who are part of the majority society as defined above, and those Kurds who, although marginalized by Turkish modernization, may be happy to remain part of the Turkish political system as long as their identity and cultural rights are recognized. In other words, these Turkish Kurds may want to adopt Kurdish LNP pursuing cultural rights in a context of liberal democracy. Similarly, the Turkish DNP and LP fail to represent the interests and preferences of people who may be willing to embrace an alternative version of nationalism that upholds ethnic-cultural diversity and rights within a context of national unity and liberal democracy. In their stylized forms, purely liberal and nationalist perspectives are too opposed to each other to allow compromise; by comparison, LNP can help to bridge their differences.

Insofar as these observations are correct, LNP have the potential to contribute to the democratic resolution of the Kurdish question. Various values and ideas that could form the basis for such perspectives are separately present in Turkish political and intellectual discourses. However, they are not combined and expressed as liberal-nationalism. Several necessary but insufficient factors would have to come together in order for this to happen. Intellectually, such perspectives would first have to be formulated, in particular by resolving the apparent incompatibilities between liberal and nationalist ideas. I will discuss these intellectual-theoretical issues in the second section, and then offer a reevaluation of the

¹⁰ For two recent examples, see Taha Parla, “İrkçılıktan Mahalleçiliğe, Mahalleçilikten Milliyetçiliğe” (From Racism to Parochialism, from Parochialism to Nationalism), *Radikal 2*, May 22, 2005, and Ayşe Kadioğlu, “Milliyetçiliğin İyisi Var mı?” (Is There Any Good Nationalism?), *Radikal 2*, June 30, 2005.

development of the Kurdish question in the third section. Socially and discursively, the emergence of LNP would require a major social debate in a series of areas, such as the possibility and desirability of ethnic-cultural rights in a democracy, the role that ethnic nationalism played in Turkish history, and the definitions and contents of Turkish and Kurdish identities. Such a debate is already occurring in Turkey, albeit with a less than desirable dialogue among major actors, as I try to demonstrate and argue in the fourth section.

Politically, after being formulated and socially debated, new perspectives would have to be embraced and translated into political projects by social and political actors. The potential social and political-economic constituencies of such projects, and the domestic and external contexts that would affect their chances of success, will be discussed in the conclusions section.

II. THE POSSIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF LNP

For the purposes of this essay, nationalism can be defined as an ideology fostering common identities and standards of cooperation (including a common vernacular and political discourse) within a people seen as sovereign (i.e. bearing the right to self-government), culturally differentiable, territorially defined, and a major source of political loyalty and collective solidarity.¹¹ Liberalism can be defined as an ideology or school of thought that seeks to maximize individual well-being and liberty (or autonomy) through universally applicable rights, entitlements, and the rule of law.

¹¹ Note that while defining nationalism as an ideology as opposed to a sentiment or collective action, I do not define it as a strictly *political* ideology that claims that the borders of the nation must be coterminous with the state. See Gellner (1983) and Hechter (2000) for alternative definitions. The broader definition here allows for nationalism to continue as an ideology of patriotism, i.e. political loyalty and collective solidarity, even after the group achieves its goal of making the borders of the nation coterminous with that of the state by founding a nation-state. This definition also allows for nationalist ideologies which, while retaining the claim to the right of self-government, do not seek a separate nation state. Also note that unlike other definitions, the definition here does not imply that nationalism requires one nation to be the *supreme* source of loyalty, as opposed to, say, one's family, religion, ideologies such as socialism, and other national loyalties for people with multiple loyalties. In some contexts, however, nationalism may require people to choose between two national loyalties. For related and alternative definitions, see Greenfeld (1992), Hutchinson and Smith (1994).

In their stylized forms, liberalism and nationalism are incompatible ideologies. Liberalism cherishes individual freedoms and autonomy, while nationalism treasures sacrifice for the group. Liberalism is focused on the positive-sum opportunities for international and transnational cooperation, while nationalism is focused on international competition caused by zero-sum conflicts of national interest. Liberalism highlights the liberating, developmental potentials of markets and other self-regulating social orders, while nationalism looks to nation-states for the same potential. Liberalism emphasizes the future, and the possibility and desirability of social and political progress via the voluntary actions of individuals. Nationalism emphasizes the past, and the importance of historically created social-cultural differences and loyalties that only change slowly.

In their practical forms, however, nationalism and liberalism often complement each other. Liberal cooperation requires that people focus on their common rather than opposing interests. In practice, this means that they have sufficiently in common so that competition among them does not translate into zero-sum conflicts that end up breaking up all cooperation. Nationalism helps this by fostering a common identity, culture, and standards of cooperation within nations. This is best captured by the famous motto that “[liberal government requires] a people so fundamentally at one that they can afford to bicker.”¹² Furthermore, many people would argue that markets and nation-states complement each other because markets need nation-states’ crucial help in order to build and maintain the formal and informal institutions—from the judiciary to schools to welfare state practices moderating the distributional conflicts that can undermine the market system—that are crucial for their survival and equitable functioning. Like any other institutions, the creation and maintenance of these political and economic institutions need people who are willing to contribute to their

¹² Lord Balfour’s statement in reference to the adaptability of the English constitution in colonies that were ethnically and racially more heterogeneous than England itself. Kymlicka (1995:54).

creation and are willing to make a long-term commitment to their maintenance. Nationalism helps this by fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment to one's national institutions.

Finally, liberalism needs protections against arbitrary and oppressive states, and nationalism provides an ideology as to why states need people's approval for government, by defining nations as the bearers of sovereignty.¹³ Without liberalism, nationalism tends to produce authoritarian nation-states disrespectful of individual freedoms and autonomy. Without nationalism, liberalism tends to produce free markets coupled with benign yet weak states and political systems; these states may have little capacity to nurture a sense of popular sovereignty and to check social and political conflicts domestically, and to foster peace and cooperation internationally.

Thus, many liberals are also 'moderate' nationalists in the sense that, first, while analyzing the world they take the existence of national social and political institutions and identities for granted. Second, they have national identities and loyalties themselves in the sense that they are not entirely neutral toward the well-being and interests of different nations. In order to be ethically and philosophically consistent, people claiming to be entirely committed to the stylized version of liberalism devoid of nationalism should equally value the well-being of their own national group and that of others, and should be equally committed to contributing to both. Similarly, they should value the territorial unity of their own country no more than they value that of others. These requirements rule out a large share of individual and voluntary contributions to social and cultural public goods in developing and developed nations. Many individuals who embrace liberalism to differing degrees, say philanthropists who give to charity in their own countries more than in countries that need it more on the basis of objective criteria, or professionals who have globally mobile skills but who prefer to work in their own countries because of their sense of responsibility for contributing to the

¹³ See, among others, Greenfeld (1992) for the relation between the emergence of nationalism and democratic regimes.

common good in their homelands, are all nationalists of some sort. However, these people may also denounce many of the excesses that nationalist ideologies often promote, from notions of racial and cultural superiority to the brutal subjugation of minorities, because of their respect for human rights and freedoms. Thus, they may simultaneously hold liberal and nationalist values.

Nevertheless, it may be impossible to define a coherent notion of liberal nationalism in a political-theoretical and philosophical sense.¹⁴ Notions of liberal nationalism seem too easily to justify those who argue that some nations' nationalisms, especially those of Anglo-American nations which are most associated with liberalism, are more benign than—and thus superior to—other nations' nationalisms. History is replete with liberals who undertook, or agreed to, the brutal subjugation of other people in the name of liberalism or civic nationalism. Thus, it is very hard for students of politics, especially normative political theorists who by nature of their discipline seek coherence within normative theories, to imagine liberalism and nationalism together. So many stylized principles of liberalism and nationalism contradict each other that liberal-nationalism seems an oxymoron. Accordingly, attempts to conceptualize versions of nationalism that are more compatible with liberalism and democracy, such as civic nationalism as opposed to ethnic nationalism, have been accused of creating a wolf in sheep's clothing.

If internal consistency were a prerequisite for actual actors to hold an ideology, however, few ideologies would pass the test. People compartmentalize their lives and adhere to different ideologies in different domains. Thus, for positive theorists as well as political behavioralists, the apparent contradictions between liberalism and nationalism are less important. Furthermore, along with the ascendance of identity politics since the 1980s and the challenges this posed to liberalism, a significant body of liberal theorists has developed liberal

¹⁴ See Beiner (2003) for a review.

notions of nationalism. (Kymlicka 1995 and 2001; Tamir, 1993; Miller 1995). They have argued that liberalism can and ought to embrace some forms of nationalism in order to be able to fulfill its own ideals.

Liberal-nationalist theorists differ from their libertarian, civic-republican and communitarian counterparts in the following important ways that are crucial for this essay. Libertarians oppose all types of nationalism as inherently exclusive and undemocratic. They also downplay the importance that national identities, and a national political-discursive space where people from different backgrounds share views and inform each other, may have for political systems. By contrast, liberal nationalists maintain that a common, national vernacular and identity, and a political discursive space shared by all ethnic-cultural groups in society, are essential for the survival and proper functioning of liberal democratic institutions.

Civic and republican nationalists surmise that liberal institutions can promote equality among individuals of different ethnic-cultural backgrounds by creating ethnicity-blind institutions that treat everybody the same regardless of their differences. Thus, they oppose minority group rights. Liberal nationalists maintain that ethnicity-blind institutions unfairly favor the culture-language and identity of the majority in society and tilt the balance of opportunities in the majority's favor. They maintain that people can legitimately value the maintenance of a minority culture-language that may be essential to their ability to make meaningful individual choices.¹⁵ Thus, they assert that the liberal goal of equality may require the institution of minority rights or entitlements.¹⁶ Finally, liberal nationalists differ from communitarians by highlighting that individuals should have choice in determining their group belongings. Communitarians view group identities as given at birth and value groups' ability to restrict the choices of their individual members for the survival of the group identity

¹⁵ This applies both to people who are born into that cultural group and value the security of belonging to that group, and those who are not born into a minority group but who believe that diversity in their environment enables them to become aware of different possibilities and choices in life.

¹⁶ There are important reasons not to conceptualize these as rights. See footnote 7.

and culture. By contrast, liberal nationalists uphold individual members' ability to "exit," i.e., disavow their identity or distribute their loyalties among different groups by cultivating multiple and conglomerate identities, as essential to individual freedoms and autonomy.

The forces of globalization increase the importance of liberal notions of nationalism in two senses, especially for developing nations. First, it is rarely realized that a major effect of globalization on developing countries is that the human and financial resources in these countries become internationally mobile. This makes these countries vulnerable to the flight of local human and financial capital much needed for national development. Liberal nationalism is an ideology that justifies the voluntary employment of these resources for national developmental needs without necessarily undermining the global economic order. Second, globalization tends to weaken nation-states from above and below. While strengthening supranational as well as transnational institutions and identities (especially but not exclusively for people with internationally mobile skills and opportunities), it may promote micro nationalisms among minorities. Liberal nationalism offers a way to minimize the conflict-prone and disintegrating impact of micro nationalisms by accommodating them via minority rights, short of the right to secessionism.

In light of the above discussion, we can now offer more refined definitions of DNP and LNP in the Turkish context. For the majority society, both of these perspectives can be described as nationalist in the sense of their shared sensitivity to the maintenance of a cross-ethnic national identity and common political culture, and to the perceived interests and unity of the Turkish nation-state. However, they differ as to how these can and ought to be pursued.

¹⁷ For DNP, actual and enforced cultural-linguistic homogeneity (and to a lesser extent, religious homogeneity in a cultural, identity-related sense) is the insurance for state survival and for social cohesion and political-territorial unity. In addition to the peculiar historical

¹⁷ These definitions draw on, and develop, the definitions in (Somers, 2005b).

context in which it emerged, DNP acquired its diversity-phobic values from an uneasy combination of two ideologies, civic nationalism promoting ethnicity-blind institutions and ethnic nationalism favoring Turkish ethnicity and culture.

By contrast, the majority's LNP acknowledge that ethnic-cultural peculiarities may be legitimate objects of loyalty in a context of national unity. The state's allowing, or even institutionalizing, more freedom of expression for these particularities may be a better way to serve national interests and to strengthen national unity. This is because it would induce voluntary participation especially by people who were marginalized or alienated by state- and nation-building. First, these people would have less reason to seek secessionism when their special cultural-linguistic needs are accommodated. Second, they would be encouraged to voluntarily associate themselves with the national polity and/or identity when their autonomy to make such choices is recognized and respected. Thus, LNP may be better insurance for state survival. During the last decades, LNP have also been influenced by liberal-nationalist ideas that posit that individual autonomy and life choices can be enriched by promoting diversity.

In a nutshell, the majority's DNP are diversity-phobic and have an uneasy relationship with pluralistic democracy, while the LNP tend to be more tolerant and supportive of diversity and more compatible with pluralistic democracy.

The minorities' DNP and LNP are also nationalist perspectives as defined above. A common claim in the writings of Kurdish nationalists is that Turkish Kurds constitute a sovereign nation of their own; however, different actors seem to have different ideas as to the nature of this sovereignty and differ on how Kurds should exercise it.¹⁸ A major distinction is between actors favoring violent and nonviolent means. However, even 'moderate' actors

¹⁸ See, among others, Bucak, 1991; Burkay, 2002; and the interviews in Ballı, 1991 and Çakır, 2004.

argue that violence is legitimately used against the state under certain conditions.¹⁹ The minority's DNP are based in a communitarian and often essentialist, primordialist conception of nationhood. They imply suspicion toward diversity and multiple identities within the minority group and disdain group members who choose to associate themselves with the majority identity. In addition, they imply distrust in the majority political system and disbelief that the minority's cultural and other interests can be served by working within that system. In the view of DNP, minority political actors who cooperate with the majority political actors are traitors who undermine the group cause. In return, the minority's LNP imply that minority interests can be served by cooperating with majority political actors who are willing to accommodate the minority's demands in a context of liberal democracy. It also implies recognition of diversity within the minority group and acceptance toward group members who choose to associate themselves with the majority identity.

Note that I use the term liberal in reference to attitudes toward ethnic-cultural diversity and freedom of expression, that is, the extent to which one recognizes and welcomes diversity (rather than seeks homogeneity) and other individuals' autonomy in choosing and expressing their group identities. Liberal-nationalist views in the sense used here (and, for that matter, defensive-nationalist views) are found among center-right as well as social-democratic actors. Also note that the distinction between defensive- and liberal-nationalist perspectives is one between sets of beliefs and values, not necessarily one between actors. Distinctions between liberal-nationalist and defensive-nationalist actors can be misleading because they may overlook the potential diversity of beliefs and values within each of these actors. Thus, they may overlook the ideational sources of change within each actor. For example, it is possible that individuals are aware of one perspective and feel some affinity for it, although their political preferences and behavior are predominantly shaped by another perspective. Actors'

¹⁹ E.g. the views of Kemal Burkay. *Çalışlar*, 1993: 113-115, 119-120. The major actor favoring violent means has been the PKK.

behaviors may also be context-dependent: for example, in a political context, a person's behavior may reflect a defensive-nationalist perspective, while the same person's behavior may seem to reflect a liberal-nationalist perspective in a social context. This context-dependence may explain the seemingly paradoxical observation that although Turkish politics has been predominantly shaped by authoritarian attitudes toward difference, social life in an everyday sense has continued to reflect many aspects and attitudes that are relatively flexible and tolerant, if not liberal, towards diversity. Finally, it is possible for people to sympathize with the liberal-nationalist perspective without expressing it in public-political settings.²⁰

Important policy implications follow from distinguishing between different types of nationalisms, and from recognizing actual and potential actors who embrace the Turkish national identity and the basic premises of Turkish nationalism but also embrace ethnic-cultural diversity. For example, the assumption that Turkish nationalism *per se* is a direct cause of the Kurdish question leads many analysts to propose policies that follow this causal analysis. One such proposal is for state institutions to adopt a new and ethnicity-neutral identity, such as *Türkiyelilik* (meaning from Turkey), through changes in the constitution.²¹ If the assumption that Turkish nationalism is direct a cause of the Kurdish question is incorrect, however, this proposal may either be unnecessary or not produce the desired results.²²

Discussions of liberal nationalism can also complement citizenship-based reform projects by highlighting the role that national identities play in liberal democracies.²³ Reforms emphasizing citizenship-based strategies can help to resolve the Kurdish question without embarking on new forms of national identity construction by developing the rights and practices that people from different backgrounds experience as citizens and which address

²⁰ See Somer (2005a and b) for an elaboration.

²¹ Oran (2004).

²² This is not to say that the strengthening of a common *Türkiyeli* identity cannot be beneficial for social-political peace and harmony in itself.

²³ Keyman and İçduygu, eds., 2005. Also see E. Fuat Keyman, "Çokkültürlü Anayasal Vatandaşlık" (Multicultural Constitutional Citizenship), *Radikal*, November 21, 2004.

their common and different socioeconomic and expressive needs. They can also have positive spillover effects on national identity, because common experiences of citizenship would also strengthen people's sense of belonging to the same nation. However, would such spillover effects suffice to sustain a sufficiently strong national identity and political-discursive space? Some identity-based challenges challenging the Turkish democracy, such as secessionist Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish DNP, are not merely demanding to change the rules of this polity. They are also challenging its very existence. A purely citizenship-based strategy which underestimates the importance of unifying values and national identities for the functioning of liberal democracies may fail to meet these centrifugal challenges.

III. TURKISH NATIONALISM AND THE KURDISH QUESTION

On the surface, one can easily explain the dominant values and policies of Turkish nationalism. It is a state-building nationalism that was influenced by the French civic-republican model.²⁴ It was aimed at building a nation from a multiethnic population within the remaining territory of an ex-empire that collapsed in the midst of competing ethnonationalisms and imperialist interventions of rival great powers. Turkish nationalists were largely the late, revolutionary generation of Ottoman elites building on a grand state tradition that prioritized state survival over any other goal. Therefore, one may explain, Turkish nationalism developed diversity-phobic and authoritarian-assimilationist values suppressing the ethnic-linguistic differences in society. This explanation, however, would leave several questions unanswered.

The first one is the *extent* and nature of Turkish nation-building's practices and values vis-à-vis Kurds. More than merely trying to assimilate Kurds on the basis of a common, Turkish vernacular, Turkish nation-building generated a mainstream public-political discourse

²⁴ For the French nation-building, see Weber, 1976; Brubaker, 1992.

that completely left out the Kurdish language and category. At times, great efforts were made to prove that “they were in reality of Turkish origin but had lost their Turkish identity due to foreign influence.”²⁵ Particularly given the demographic structure of the population, however, these values and practices do not seem to have been the only or the most effective means of assimilationist nation-building.

Second, such an explanation ignores the diversity within Turkish nationalism and assumes that there was elite consensus on the goals as well as the means of nation-building. This does not seem to have been the case. Even though there might have been tacit or explicit agreement on the *goals* of nation-building, there appears to have been significant disagreement on the means. Third, one may argue that this explanation is not an explanation at all because it does not show how the outcome would have been different under different conditions and sequences of historical events. The real challenge is to build an analytic narrative that can relate to events “that *did not* occur and the motivation for *not* behaving in a particular way,” which can link “what we observe with what we do not observe.”²⁶ Such an analytic narrative should also help one to explain the differences between Turkish nation-building and others, say, Iranian nation-building.

In order to contribute to the development of such an explanation, the goal in the rest of this section is to discuss the following theses. The demographic-structural features of the Kurdish question make it unlikely that DNP could ever successfully achieve the goals of Turkish nation-building. Under different sequences of political developments, the initial ideational diversity of Turkish nationalism could indirectly have led to the development of proto-LNP vis-à-vis Kurds, which might have been more successful in achieving nation-building. However, such an outcome might also have affected other aspects of Turkish modernization such as its radical secularism (or laicism).

²⁵ Kirişçi, 1998: 235.

²⁶ Greif (1998: 26). Also see Thelen, 1999.

Demography, Geography, and the Kurdish Question

There are major historically given demographic and geographical conditions that make the Kurdish question more intractable than other cases of identity based politics. First, like the *Alevi*s but unlike the other minority groups in Turkey, people with full or partial Kurdish background constitute a large portion of the population, twelve to twenty percent according to different estimates. (Mutlu, 1996; Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002; Bruinessen, 2003). Second, unlike any other case, ethnic Kurds constitute significant majorities in a sizeable portion of the country, the Southeast. However, the remaining third or half of Turkish Kurds are spread throughout the country and mixed socially and economically with the rest of the population. This makes political-territorial separation difficult and prone to violence and distinguishes the case of Turkish Kurds from cases such as the Quebecois in Canada and the Czechs and the Slovaks before their separation.

Third, Kurds are an indigenous group of Anatolia, unlike most other Muslim minorities in Turkey who migrated to Anatolia during the last two centuries. Most of them escaped persecution in the Balkans and the Caucasus, and were eager to assimilate. At the beginning of Turkish nation-building, the idea of a Kurdish nation and a Kurdish nationalist movement were already present, even though Kurdish masses were mostly oblivious to it and this idea was mainly held by a small group of urban-cosmopolitan elites. At the same time, there was no precedence of a Kurdish statehood that the Kurdish elites could build on. Kurdish elites were torn between their competing potential roles and statuses as Ottoman state elites and Kurdish and Turkish nation-building elites.²⁷

Fourth, the Kurdish population is predominantly rural, young, and poverty- and unemployment-stricken, especially in the Southeast, which *facilitates* the emergence of

²⁷ The path of joining Turkish nationalist elites was open to Kurdish elites adopting Turkish nationalism and language. Some prominent Turkish nationalists such as Ziya Gökalp were of Kurdish background.

violent identity-based movements.²⁸ However, one should stress that the reasons for the Kurdish question cannot be reduced to socioeconomic grievances: Turkey has other regions comparable to the Southeast in poverty but these have not produced such movements because they lack the other factors that produce the Kurdish question.

Fifth, Turkish Kurds have large and politically mobilized cultural relatives in three neighboring countries, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, which makes the Kurdish issue a trans-state and trans-national issue. Initially, what is now Northern Iraq where Iraqi Kurds are concentrated was within the sought-after borders (*Milli Misak*) of Turkish nationalist movement. As a result of a critical agreement in 1926 between Britain, Turkey, and Iraq, the League of Nations included this region (the former Mosul province of the Ottoman Empire) within the British-mandated Iraq. As a result, a considerable portion of the Ottoman Kurds, who had lived under the same polity for centuries and who had originally been part of the Turkish state- and nation-building, remained outside modern Turkey's borders, and control. This raised the specter of pan-Kurdish nationalism and secessionism in the future and reinforced the state's wariness of Kurdish nationalism. Indeed, the later development of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism significantly affected the development of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.

Finally, one may argue that ethnic-nationalist questions are very difficult to resolve anywhere in the world. From the Irish and the Welsh in Britain to the Basques and the Catalans in Spain to the Tamils in Sri Lanka, these questions have proven to be long-lasting and violent. However, there are major differences in the degree to which different states have been able to manage these questions and to minimize human suffering and injustice. Thus, political institutions and ideologies play major roles in shaping the course in which identity-based political conflicts evolve.

²⁸ The land ownership structure in the Southeast is also considerably less equal than in the rest of Turkey. This should not be seen as a necessary condition explaining the economic underdevelopment or ethnonationalist mobilization in the region. See (Mutlu, 2002) for a detailed discussion. However, the landless increase the numbers of the young and disgruntled population, which adds to the potential ground for ethnonationalist mobilization.

In a nutshell, the structural conditions produce several insights. First, they explain why it was unlikely that DNP could ever have resolved the Kurdish question successfully, either through the complete assimilation of Kurds or by preventing Kurdish nationalism from producing a major anti-systemic movement.²⁹ Second, the presence of a rival Kurdish nationalism at the beginning of nation-building may be part of the explanation why DNP came to dominate Turkish nationalism.

Ideational Factors and the Kurdish Question

What were the major ideational features of Turkish nation-building, and to what extent do they explain the practice? Can Turkish nation-building now, and in the future, support different values and policies? One way to approach these questions is by focusing on the dominant values of Turkish nation-building (mainly by inferring them from the state laws, discourse, and practices) and trying to explain how they qualitatively *fit* together. One problem with such an approach is the inherent assumption that the state's dominant texts and practices properly represent the dominant values of Turkish nationalism. More importantly, however, such an approach inherently seeks consistency both among the different values of nation-building, and between its values, goals, and means. In other words, it seeks Turkish nationalism as a more or less monolithic set of consistent beliefs.

An alternative thesis that I want to put forward here is that Turkish nation-building produced an incoherent synthesis of different values and means of achieving the nationalist goals. Arriving at this thesis requires one to combine the ideational factors with structural conditions, political developments, and critical actor decisions in the form of an analytic narrative. On one hand, these latter factors led to the domination of Turkish nation-building by DNP and to the concealment of the ideational diversity that initially existed within this project. On the other hand, these factors led to an incomplete compromise (as opposed to a

²⁹ For a recent commentary, see Mesut Yeğen, "Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler" (The Republic and Kurds), *Radikal*, December 5, 2004.

more or less complete domination or synthesis) between the different initial perspectives regarding the means of nation-building. This incompleteness explains the oscillations and inconsistencies among the values, and between the values and the practices. In other words, these inconsistencies and oscillations are an inherent outcome of Turkish nation-building.

Ideologies, especially broad and vague ideologies such as modernization and nationalism, are rarely homogeneous and coherent. They are not created by single ‘authors’ and lack critical scrutiny, as in the case of academic writing. They are created incrementally by numerous intellectual and political figures and emerge from social and political conflicts and compromises among numerous political actors and social groups.

Turkish nationalism might particularly have been permeated by such internal incoherence common to all mass ideologies. This is because modern Turkish nationalism emerged in a context of remarkable political and military turmoil, and, as argued, in a political context that undermined the state elites’ ability to seek popular participation and legitimacy. This context did not allow for conciliation among opposing views and social groups and between state elites and society, and for the emergence of a consensus.³⁰ The “oscillations” between the ethnic and civic definitions of Turkish national identity are but one example of this incomplete compromise between various state elites and the masses on one hand, and between DNP and LNP on the other.³¹

The growing body of historical research on Turkish nation-building suggests that during its initial, formative period (c.a. 1920-1925), there was elite consensus and ideational homogeneity on some goals but not on others, and there was considerable disagreement on how to achieve the agreed ends.³² In other words, while some of Turkish nationalism’s ideational characteristics and goals were relatively solid during the formative period, there

³⁰ Keyder, 1997.

³¹ Yeğen, 2004. Also see Deringil, 1998, and Cagaptay, 2004.

³² 1920 is the year nationalists assembled the Great National Assembly (BMM); 1925 is the year Sheikh Said rebellion took place, which hardliner nationalists used to pacify the “liberal wing.” Ahmad (1993: 58-59).

was more flexibility regarding others (Ahmad, 1993; Mardin, 2003; Demirel 1994 and 2005; Zürcher, 2005a and 2005b).

The first solid goal was that of *one* nation-state. Although there is some evidence that the idea of local autonomy for minorities such as Kurds was entertained, there is no evidence that the idea of a bi-national or multinational state was ever considered.³³ Second, there is no question that the nationalists were skeptical of cultural-linguistic diversity. From France to Eastern Europe to Iran, it was the rule rather than the exception then that nation-building involved majority nationalisms' pursuing homogeneity at the expense of minority cultures. They had their personal experiences regarding diversity during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire when they associated themselves with the center and with the task of preventing the breakdown. In their view, the reason Ottoman elite attempts to rescue the state by offering representation for the various ethnic and religious elements of the Empire in a context of constitutional monarchy failed was because too much tolerance was granted to rival micro nationalisms supported by foreign powers. Many of them grew up or had descendants in the Balkans and other former Ottoman territories where independence-seeking nationalists targeted ethnically Turkish and non-Turkish Muslims who were seen as the representatives and allies of the center.

As a result, there is no evidence that the nationalists ever considered adopting a liberal attitude toward diversity in the sense of cherishing diversity and tolerating minority nationalisms. Even a major critic of the regime vis-à-vis its policies (or rather its alleged lack of policies) toward the Kurds, General Kazım Karabekir, was by no means a liberal in this sense. When faced with a choice between *taltif* (persuasion by paying tribute) and *tehdit* (use of threats and force) vis-à-vis Kurds, he argued, one should always choose the latter.³⁴

³³ Kemal, 1993 [1923]: 104-105.

³⁴ Karabekir, 2004.

Third, Kemalists were wary of Kurdish nationalism, although it is not clear how important this was in their minds until the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion. Some argue that the rebellion took them largely by surprise and left them in a state of existential shock, while others argue that they were well aware of the intentions and activities of the *Azadi* movement that was involved in the rebellion, at least after 1924.³⁵ But it is clear that there was suspicion and disdain toward Kurdish nationalism, which had organized itself in terms of mostly urban based autonomist and secessionist organizations. The Sevres Treaty, which the Ottoman State signed after the end of the First World War but the implementation of which was voided by the nationalist movement, had stipulated Kurdish autonomy in Eastern Turkey, along with an Armenian state. Nevertheless, during the nationalist war, Turkish nationalists were able to enlist the support of most Kurds on the basis of values such as common homeland and history and Muslim brotherhood. They were also able to suppress any Kurdish uprisings.³⁶ As a result, the Kurdish issue appears to have been overshadowed by other concerns, such as the consolidation of the nationalist regime, the question of the public role of Islam, and the Armenian question. Concerns with Kurdish nationalist mobilization were discussed, especially in relation to the possibility that the establishment of a Kurdish government in the British controlled Northern Iraq (then the Mosul region) could induce separatism among Turkish Kurds.³⁷ However, the Kurdish language and culture were considered too backward and fragmented to be worthy of nationhood, and Kurds were viewed to constitute a backward portion of the population too divided by tribal divisions to achieve successful nationalist

³⁵ Mumcu (1994); Mutlu (2002); Bruinessen, 2003. There is also scholarly disagreement on how much the new government's plans prior to 1925 foresaw emphasizing the Turkish language, culture and ethnicity and suppressing the Kurdish language, culture and ethnicity.

³⁶ Bruinessen, 2003; Olson, 1989.

³⁷ İğdemir, 1975; Kemal, 1993 [1923]; TBMM, 1985 [1923].

mobilization.³⁸ Finally, the discourse of Turkish nationalists suggests their expectation that the union of Turks and Kurds based on common religion, *blood*, and ideal would prevail.³⁹

These solid features of Turkish nation-building being the same, some of the political and intellectual elite differences during this period could indirectly have led to the employment of more liberal policies toward diversity and Kurds. The opponents in that period differed from the hardliners who were defending DNP, with respect to the state-society relationship that they envisioned and the level of respect and toleration they had for religion and tradition, as instruments of nation-building. Karabekir, for example, thought that the Caliphate, a major symbol of Ottoman tradition drawing Turks and Kurds together as Muslims, was abolished prematurely; he also urged the government to gain the sympathy of Kurdish peasants by nurturing direct and congenial relations with them, bypassing their oppressive and untrustworthy landlords and religious leaders.⁴⁰ Implementing the first suggestion could have resulted in the avoidance or postponement of the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion, which had mixed religious and Kurdish goals, although it would also have had implications for the degree to which the regime could have been able to pursue secularism. Implementing the second suggestion would have made it necessary to adopt more lenient policies toward the use of Kurdish in order for state officials to be able to communicate effectively with the Kurdish masses.

The ideological differences during the first Grand National Assembly (1920-1923) are revealing. Even though the opponents in this period, called “the second group,” were more conservative (i.e. pro-religion and pro-Ottoman tradition) ideologically, they did not necessarily oppose the modernist-nationalist goals of the first group.⁴¹ Rather, they were

³⁸ Yeğen, 1996. Also see TBMM, 1985: 93.

³⁹ For example, TBMM, 1985: 73, 86, 94-95, 1153; İğdemir, 1975: 65. It is not clear what the speakers meant with ‘blood’ in these statements, because Kurds were recognized as an ethnic-cultural group distinct from Turks. It may be a reference to common nationhood (e.g., the term race was often used then to denote nation), the cultural proximity or mixing between Turks and Kurds, or to their historical coexistence.

⁴⁰ Karabekir, 2004.

⁴¹ Demirel (1994 and 2005).

opposing the first group's revolutionary means to overhaul Ottoman institutions and to transform society via top-down and fast-track decrees by bureaucratic-elites. Instead, the second group was defending a more moderate, gradualist, and voluntary transformation in which the representatives of society would participate through parliamentary debate and legislation. The indirect results of this alternative approach would have been more liberal-nationalist policies and institutions vis-à-vis diversity. It is hard to conceive, for example, that a process involving the voluntary participation of representatives from Kurdish areas would have approved nation-building practices that denied the existence of the Kurdish category. At a minimum, it would have sanctioned a more liberal approach, for example by allowing the use of Kurdish in local economic transactions and cultural institutions.

Theoretically, more moderate methods than the state actually employed could have produced better results. For example, in the long run it would have been more effective for the state to win over moderate Kurdish elites by recognizing and respecting their ethnic-cultural identity. The memoirs of Turkish Kurd intellectuals contain numerous examples of how the children and grandchildren of brutally punished or exiled Kurdish nationalists often became even more obstinate nationalists a few decades later.⁴² Similarly, using Kurdish-speaking teachers and teaching materials in Kurdish would probably have been a more effective way of teaching Turkish to women and children whose mother tongues were Kurdish, than to deny them such opportunities. Thus, arguably, some of the actual practices of Turkish nationalism and nation-building can be argued to have contradicted the very goals of these ideologies themselves.

The political developments following the Sheikh Said rebellion led to the weakening and purging of actors who could have promoted these more moderate methods vis-à-vis Kurds, along with less radical methods vis-à-vis the state control of religion. With Mustafa

⁴² Bucak, 1991; Cemal, 2003; Kaya, 2004.

Kemal's backing, the "liberal" Okyar government, which was unwilling to use draconian methods to suppress the insurgency, was replaced by the İnönü government, which dealt with the insurgents by using military force and summary courts. The events that followed also led to the shutting down of the newly established opposition party representing the second group in the national assembly. The Sheikh Said rebellion was followed by a series of other rebellions until the 1940s. These rebellions and their political ramifications led to the militarization of the Kurdish question and generated a political discourse that was centered on the denial of Kurdish ethnicity. They also played a major role in enabling the ruling hardliners to prevent the emergence of any real opposition from emerging, because opponents could easily be blamed for inciting Kurdish nationalism.

More research on the historical record is needed to build a complete analytic narrative. Critical factors and turning points leading to the dominant status of DNP within Turkish nationalism seem to include the abolition of the Caliphate; the priority of secular reforms over the Kurdish question and the fact that actors who were more tolerant of ethnic diversity might also have been more tolerant of religion; the League of Nation's inclusion of Northern Iraq in the British-mandated Iraq rather than in Turkey; and the political and psychological consequences of the early Kurdish rebellions. The last factor may suggest that the Kurdish question might have shaped Turkish nationalism as much as it was shaped by Turkish nationalism and modernization.

One should emphasize however, that the outcome was different than it would have been had there been no diversity within Turkish nationalism. Although the ideas and values underlying LNP were marginalized, one cannot expect them to have disappeared altogether. It is noteworthy that the Turkish political system displayed significant flexibility in allowing limited Kurdish political representation. Kurdish actors were widely represented within mainstream political parties, especially after the transition to multiparty democracy, although

they were mostly products of patronage politics and acted as regional, not ethnic, deputies. Although the Turkish mainstream public-political discourse almost completely suppressed the Kurdish category, it was also largely devoid of any negative connotations vis-à-vis Kurds. Kurds who were not suspected of Kurdish nationalism and who did not accentuate their ethnicity were able to participate in socio-economic and political life with little discrimination. Many Kurds experienced significant socio-economic upward mobility benefiting from these features of Turkish nation-building. As one author put it during the 1990s, “like the Irish in British society, the Kurds in Turkey were both insiders and outsiders. They knew the rules of the game, as played out in their country, and the country in which the Kurds moved was Turkey, not Kurdistan.”⁴³

As a result, one cannot talk about a common experience that applied to all Turkish Kurds. Those Kurds who joined, or were suspected of having joined Kurdish rebellions, and many of their descendants, faced such treatment in the hands of the state that they developed a hardened sense of Kurdish difference and a highly skeptical image of Turks and the Turkish state. Other Kurds voluntarily associated with Turkish nationalism as an ideology of liberation and modernization, while others reluctantly assimilated into the mainstream Turkish society, to differing degrees for different individuals, in response to the state’s assimilatory policies. Yet other Kurds developed their sense of ethnic difference as a result of their geographical, educational and economic mobility during the industrialization, urbanization, and politicization of Turkish society from the 1960s on. Finally, many more Kurds experienced ethnic differentiation as a result of the oppressive practices of the 1980-1983 military rule, and the environment of physical and socio-economic insecurity created by the PKK insurgency and the state’s counterinsurgency during the 1990s.

⁴³ Mango, 1994: 981.

IV. CURRENT MAINSTREAM-DISCURSIVE DYNAMICS

The potential emergence of LNP requires among other conditions intellectual debates that would resolve the apparent contradictions between liberal-democratic policies toward diversity, and national unity and interest. Since the 1990s, but especially after 1999, when the PKK leader Öcalan was sentenced to jail for life and the EU declared Turkey a candidate for full membership, the social-intellectual debates on human and minority rights, national interest, democracy, and the Kurdish issue have accelerated. These debates are necessary for liberal-democratic change, although they cannot by themselves bring about ideological shift.

As argued, the three vocal sides of these debates have been the Turkish DNP, which has often been called a new wave of nationalism and which has adopted an EU-skeptical tone, the LP, and the Kurdish DNP, leaving out potential LNP. The Kurdish DNP largely evolve in separation from the Turkish mainstream social-political discourse and requires separate treatment. Thus, my following discussion will focus on Turkish DNP and LP, as reflected by the Turkish mainstream discourse.⁴⁴

A detailed content analysis of the mainstream-nationalist Turkish daily *Hürriyet* supports the thesis that since 1999 the mainstream discourse has been undergoing a transformation that prepares a basis for LNP. The analysis covers all issues of *Hürriyet* from 1984 through 2003. All articles that were fully or partially related to the Kurdish question were identified and their contents were analyzed with respect to their subject matters and the terms and group categories they used to describe people, places and events. The data on 1984-1998 come from Somer (2005a). Table 1 and Figure 1 compare the period of 2000-2004 to the period of 1984-1998. Pending the results of content analyses covering more media sources,

⁴⁴ The term *mainstream* is intended to mean here the “generally acceptable social-political discourse, denoting the way people openly write and talk when they cannot control their audience, i.e., in the presence of people they do not necessarily know and trust.” As such, the mainstream discourse covers the discourse used by the mainstream media, politicians, state actors, and any other actors whenever these actors know that they are unable control who will be in their audience and thus feel compelled to be socially and politically correct. See Somer (2005a and 2005b) for a more detailed discussion and for how the mainstream discourse is partially separate from the state discourse. Sometimes, the state discourse may overlap with the mainstream discourse, but it is maintained that the two are different and are affected by partially separate dynamics.

these results, which come from an unlikely case of a nationalist newspaper, suggest a considerable shift within the mainstream discourse. Social aspects and identity- and human rights-related (non-security) aspects of the Kurdish issue have become more visible.

Period	Monthly Average of Articles	Share of All Articles Using the Word Kurd	Share of Non-Security Articles within All Articles
1984-1998	16.8	0.29	31
Transition Period 1999 ⁴⁵	147.6	0.23	54
2000-2003	46.29	0.35	70

Table 1. Discursive Shift on Kurds in the Daily *Hürriyet*. Comparing 1984-1998 to 1999-2003.

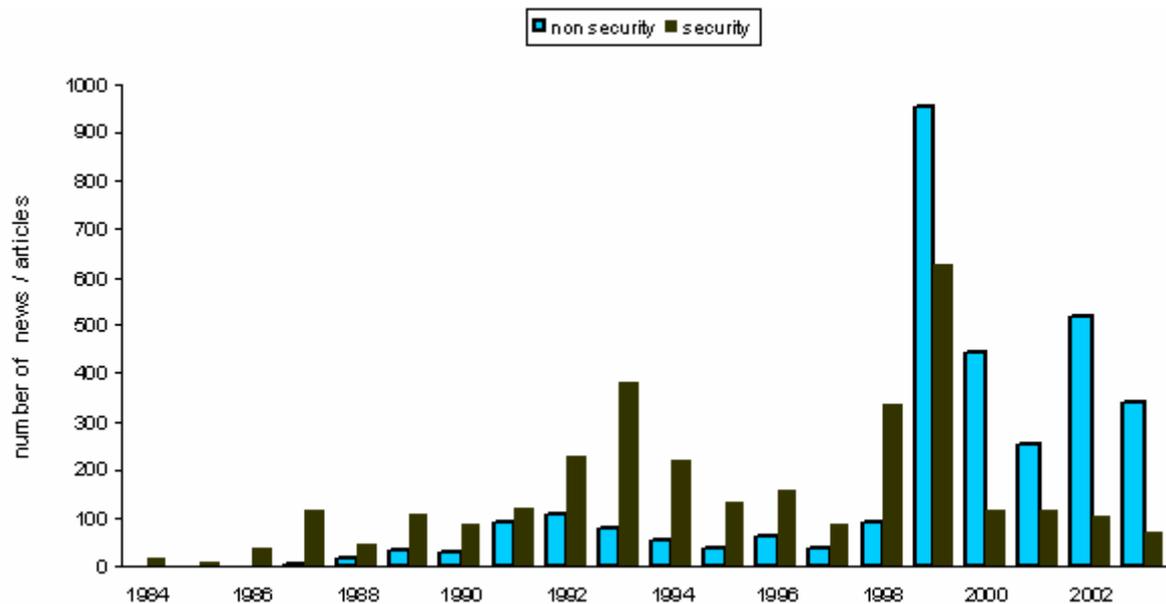


Figure 1. Interest in the non-Security Aspects of the Kurdish Question and the Daily *Hürriyet*, 1984-2003.

⁴⁵ For 1999, the year of the PKK leader Öcalan's trial, a large number of articles that were exclusively on Öcalan were excluded from the analysis since it was difficult to classify them as security-related or non-security. 24 percent of the articles on Öcalan used the term Kurd.

This data merely suggests, of course, that issues of minority and human rights are being reported on discussed, but does not show in which ways, in a qualitative sense. Examining some of the books contributing to the debates reveals, however, that they address a number of important questions regarding the causal connections between diversity and national unity. (Somer, 2005b). In particular, these contributions reveal attempts to reevaluate Turkey's history of state- and nation-building with a view to identify, and problematize, the political and ideological roots of its diversity-phobic values. Most of these contributions are also intended to appeal to a large societal audience beyond narrow academic and intellectual circles.⁴⁶ Contributions from DNP offer justification for the moral and historical foundations of these values, while those from LP cast doubt on them.

Many of these contributions reflect an implicit Turkish LNP vis-à-vis the Kurdish question, although they would not necessarily be labeled as such by their authors and readers. (For example, Cemal 2003). Thus, these attempts do not yet amount to the formulation of LNP, and would benefit from more broad-based participation by, and appeal to, the public.

The ongoing intellectual debates in Turkey on the formative years of the republic are taking place between two increasingly vocal and organized sides: those who reinterpret history in ways criticize the dominant narratives and those who seek new ways of justifying the dominant narratives. These debates are more than battles between competing records of historical evidence. They represent efforts to reinterpret history in a way that can justify the formation of less (and more) diversity-phobic nationalist ideologies: they prepare the intellectual background for any future political and ideological shifts.

V. POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PROSPECTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

⁴⁶ At the time of the writing of this chapter, an investigative novel on *Milli Mücadele* (the National Struggle or the Turkish War of Independence), Özakman (2005) was a national bestseller undergoing its 179th edition.

If DNP monopolize the political articulation of the current ethnic differentiation that the Turkish society is going through, radical polarization can result. LNP can play a role in averting this outcome, if current social and intellectual debates can produce less diversity-phobic mainstream beliefs. However, a number of internal and external political-economic processes will determine whether or not such perspectives can emerge and be translated into viable social and political projects.

These processes all draw on the fact that the Turkish and Kurdish DNP reinforce each other. Similarly, LNP would reinforce each other, and, any majority LNP would not be sustainable in the sense of drawing critical popular support unless supported by a minority LNP, and vice versa. This is because the credibility of LNP is inevitably undermined if either the majority or minority political-discursive space is dominated by DNP. This is because the minority LNP promise that the strategies of allowing internal diversity, abandoning claims to external sovereignty, and working within the majority political system can be sustainable political strategies of pursuing internal self-governance, especially for the minority's identity-related and cultural demands. This promise cannot be credible in the eyes of the minority members if the majority political-discursive space is dominated by DNP, which are skeptical of these demands.

For the majority society, LNP maintain that diversity and its political expressions by the minorities are not inimical to social and political unity. This premise cannot be credible in the eyes of the majority members if the main minority is dominated by DNP, which reject the legitimacy of the majority political system. Thus, any political efforts to generate alternatives from LNP require simultaneous collaboration on the part of the majority and minority societies. This condition of simultaneity is a major challenge for the emergence of LNP, and is summarized by Figure 2.

One object of cooperation among moderate actors may be to reduce or to lift the national electoral threshold, which requires a party to win a minimum of ten percent of national votes in order to enter the parliament. This threshold has prevented explicitly Kurdish parties from entering Parliament, building strong ties with their constituency independently from the PKK support, and fully embracing legal politics.⁴⁷ In return, Kurdish parties should make a commitment to non-violence and the other principles of liberal democracy, abstain from supporting separatism and the PKK, and develop Kurdish LNP. A related challenge is the ability of liberal-nationalist actors (both Turkish and Kurdish) to differentiate themselves from other actors (in the case of Kurds, especially from the PKK but also from any pan-Kurdish nationalist actors), and to create trust among themselves.

		Majority Political Space Dominated by	
		DNP	LNP
Minority Political Space Dominated by	DNP	DNP dominates both	DNP dominates both
	LNP	DNP Dominates both	<i>LNP dominates both</i>

Figure 2. LNP as Focal Points and the Necessity of Simultaneity.

Knowing the condition of simultaneity, defensive nationalists have an incentive to undermine the emergence of LNP in both societies. The PKK, for example, has an incentive to try to prevent the emergence of LNP not only among Turkish Kurds, as it does by using

⁴⁷ For a recent commentary, see E. Fuat Keyman, “Kürt Sorunu ve Demokratikleşme” [The Kurdish Problem and Democratization], *Radikal* 2, August 7, 2005.

political means as well as violence, but also within the majority society.⁴⁸ In this respect, the PKK's incentives conflict with that of the Iraqi Kurds. Iraqi Kurds need Turkey's support in order to be able to maintain and extend their current autonomy, and thus have an incentive to pursue pan-Kurdish nationalism. Nevertheless, it is possible that Iraqi Kurdish politics will become more pan-Kurdist and anti-Turkish in the future. In this case, the sustainability of LNP in Turkey would be undermined by both reinforcing the Kurdish DNP and by undermining the credibility of LNP in the majority society. Similarly, DNP in Turkey undermine the possibility of cooperation between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds because, from the point of view of DNP, the more Turkey recognizes Iraqi Kurds the more it would encourage separatist Turkish Kurds. Finally, the prospects for cooperation between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds critically depends on US support and political skills to mediate the two sides' fundamental interests and concerns. This relationship between the Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish relations and the dominant nationalist perspectives in Turkey is illustrated in Figure 3.

Turkey-Iraqi Kurdish Relations

		Dominant Turkish Nationalist Perspective	
		Conflictual	Cooperative
DNP	DNP dominant in Turkey	Cooperation with Iraqis unsustainable	
LNP	LNP in Turkey unsustainable	LNP in Turkey sustainable	

Figure 3. Turkey – Iraqi Kurdish relations and the Dominant Perspective in Turkey

⁴⁸ For recent commentaries, see Ahmet Insel, “PKK Sorunu mu, Kürt Sorunu mu?” (Is It the PKK Problem or the Kurdish Problem?) *Radikal* 2, August 26, 2005; Birand, Mehmet Ali, “AB’nin Bu Cinayetten Haberi Var mı?” [Does the EU Know of This Murder?], *Milliyet*, October 26, 2005.

In general, the emergence of LNP and the continuation of liberal-democratization in a context of EU-integration should also be seen as mutually reinforcing processes. EU membership does not eliminate nationalism in member or candidate countries; in fact, it reinforces nationalism by raising concerns about losing sovereignty to a supranational entity and by creating incentives to mobilize in order to promote national interests within the EU institutions. However, although EU integration does not eliminate nationalism in affected countries, it certainly modifies nationalism. Although there is no single set of agreed upon standards on minority rights within the EU, it is clear that minority issues are expected to be resolved by using the means of liberal democracy. Thus, mainstream Turkish political actors as well as Kurdish political actors who want to maintain Turkey's EU integration will have to develop liberal nationalist solutions toward the Kurdish question and other minority issues.

EU actors who are in favor of Turkey's membership and who are interested in the stability of the Union's southeastern flank have much to gain from supporting the emergence of Turkish and Kurdish LNP. However, the EU's ability to play a positive role in resolving the Kurdish question democratically will depend on the EU's own stability, the continuation of its political will to incorporate Turkey, and its ability to differentiate between Kurdish actors promoting LNP and DNP. The EU's support of Kurdish political actors who fail to denounce DNP and to separate themselves from the PKK is likely to reinforce the Turkish DNP and to induce further political polarization. Finally, it should be stressed that Turkey has to complete its democratic consolidation vis-à-vis the Kurdish question for the sake of its own development and unity, even if it does not become a member of the EU.

Those segments of Turkish society who favor political and economic integration with the world, especially with advanced western democracies, constitute the major potential political constituency for LNP. The weakness of Kurdish political-economic actors who fall into this category, along with the weakness of Kurdish civil society organizations, is a factor

weakening the prospects for LNP.⁴⁹ Turkish Kurds who are well-integrated with the majority society but who seek respect for their ethnic background, and Kurds who are socially and politically marginalized but who believe that their political and economic interests are better served by being part of a politically and economically developed Turkey, form the potential constituencies of all LNP in Turkey.

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⁴⁹ For the need to strengthen civil society organizations among Kurds, see Keyman, 2005.

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