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Publication date

2009

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Üngör, U. U. (2009). *Young Turk social engineering : mass violence and the nation state in eastern Turkey, 1913-1950*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Summary

This study argues that from 1913 to 1950, the Young Turk regime subjected Eastern Turkey, in particular Diyarbekir province, an ethnically heterogeneous space, to various forms of nationalist population policies aimed at ethnically homogenizing the region and including it in the Turkish nation state. The study has highlighted the role played by the Young Turks in the identification of the population of the eastern provinces as an object of knowledge, management, and radical change. It has detailed the emergence of a wide range of new technologies of population policies, including physical destruction, deportation, urban planning, forced assimilation, and memory control, which all converged to increase ethnic and cultural homogeneity within the nation state. It also provides evidence for the thesis that a clear continuity can be observed in population policies between the first Young Turk regime of 1913-1918 (the Committee of Union and Progress), and the second of 1919-1950 (the Republican People's Party). Finally, it questions how effective these policies have been.

This study began with a general, introductory framework and explained how the ideas of nationalism and population policies gained currency among new upcoming classes of Ottoman Muslim military officers, intellectuals, bureaucrats, and experts, divided by profession but united in ethnic nationalism. The ideology of population policies was the common source from which the various policies were derived. The spread of nationalism and population policies reached the Ottoman Empire and deeply influenced its political elite. Of paramount importance was the emergence of the Young Turk party in the late nineteenth century, a nationalist revolutionary movement that engaged in a power struggle with its liberal, religious, and monarchist competitors as well as with ethnic minority parties. The movement grew in power, emerged victorious in the bloody *coup d'état* of 1913, and installed a dictatorship with totalitarian ambitions that never shunned the use of violence against its opponents and parts of its own population. The Young Turks were convinced that the only way the Ottoman state could survive was as a nation state, which meant that a profound ethnic homogenization needed to be organized. In this process, the eastern provinces came to hold a special place (and for this reason are worthy of special attention in this study). The East differed in terms of geopolitical position, economic development, and ethnic composition far from the utopian ideal of the Young Turk vision. As a result, it would be subjected to a series of population policies with high levels of violence.

The first set of population policies launched were forced assimilation and expulsion, but the outbreak of World War I radicalized these policies into physical destruction. The genocide of the Armenians developed from this radicalization. The genocide consisted of a set of overlapping processes that geared into each other and together produced an intended and coherent process of destruction. These processes were mass executions, deportations, forced assimilation, destruction of material culture, and the construction of an artificially created famine region. It heralded the coming of a new era and stipulated the parameters of a formative Turkish nation state, or an empire with a dominant Sunni Turkish core and a marginalized periphery. This shaping of such a future was a very important aim and outcome of the genocide and precluded potential future ethno-majoritarianist claims by minorities. This interpretation suggests that the Armenian genocide not only influenced but shaped the contours of the Turkish process of nation formation.

In the aftermath of the war and the genocide, Diyarbekir became known as a city of social outcasts, such as orphans, converts, prostitutes, and bandits. These people had one thing in common: they were for a large part products or by-products of Young Turk population policy. The destruction of the Armenians produced orphans, converts, and prostitutes on the victim side, whereas many of the bandits were those chieftains who had been armed by the

CUP on the perpetrator side. The Young Turk dictatorship wanted to bring “order” into the Diyarbekir of orphans, converts, prostitutes, and bandits. The regime saw itself as a master gardener, bringing “structure” into the garden of society by organizing the diversity of plants and weeding out the “undesirables”. Deeply influenced by a high-modernist philosophy, it viewed the reorganization of space and population as a necessary passage to “modernity” and “civilization”. The “restructuring” of Diyarbekir city was an important pillar of the regime’s ideology and practice of population policies. Everything in the city that reminded the visitor of its multi-ethnic past needed to be effaced in favor of a “purely Turkish city”.

Deportations of Kurds away from and the settlements of Turks into the eastern provinces formed another vector of population policies. Three major waves of deportations struck the Kurdish population of the East. The first generation of deportees suffered perhaps the most amidst the harsh conditions of the First World War and the seasons. The second cohort, deported right after the establishment of the Republic from 1925 to 1927, did not stay away from their native regions very long and many deportees returned within a year or two. The third deportation was organized after the consolidation of the single-party dictatorship in 1934 and was more sophisticated and categorical. Only when the Young Turks were ousted from power in 1950 were Kurds no longer deported. The deportations displayed a distinct process of evolution from the first to the last phase. Young Turk social engineers accumulated experience and as they muddled through, learnt from their prior mistakes and thus sophisticated and perfected the craft of deportation.

This study has also chronicled what happens when schools are put in the service of a political ideology. Young Turk educators infused their ideology into every aspect of the educational infrastructure with tireless diligence, from history to geography, and from literature to gymnastics. The dictatorship’s particular understanding of teaching sought to do three things: naturalize the nation state and the place of the eastern provinces in it, craft through propaganda new generations loyal to the party, and “Turkify” the non-Turkish population culturally. It constructed hegemonic canons of culture and language, practising culture beyond which was prohibited and punishable. These canons were embedded in and widely disseminated through the school textbook. Education played a very important part under the Young Turk regime in trying to cultivate a loyal following for the nation, Atatürk, and the Young Turk party. Most importantly, schools were to achieve the “Turkification” of children from non-Turkish backgrounds, such as Kurds, Arabs, Circassians, and others, so as to assimilate them into the Turkish nation. This constituted a frontal attack on existing forms of culture and education in the eastern region. The multiple assaults on cultural identities were informed by racism and colonial attitudes but masked as a civilizing mission.

The Young Turk regime, by meting out a new identity for the country, also meted out a new memory for it. From 1913 on, the Young Turk treatment of the past ranged from the organization of oblivion regarding the traumatic past and construction of an official narrative that included heroic and eternalized images of the nation. Orders were given to write new histories. These official textbooks, nationalist canons, and city histories not only imposed broad silences on critical historical issues, they also banished all ethnic minorities out of (regional) histories. Although the era itself is over, all its politicians, military officers, and intellectuals mentioned in this study having passed away, their legacy remains problematic. Claims of retribution by Armenian and Kurdish groups continue to bedevil the relations between these groups.

This study concludes by arguing that no matter how ambitious and totalitarian the Young Turks’ efforts of social engineering were, they produced limited results and were not fully effective due to a combination of factors: internal strife, unrealistic objectives, the resilience of peasant societies, and the counterproductivity of violence.