# 1 *Anxious Nation and Its Ambivalent Westernism*

*Fear not*! For the crimson flag that proudly ripples in these dawns, *shall not fade*,
Before the last fiery hearth that is ablaze within my nation burns out.
That is the star of my nation, and it will *forever* shine;
It is mine; and solely belongs to my nation.

*Frown not*, I beseech you, oh thou coy crescent!
*Smile* upon my *heroic nation*! Why *the anger*, why *the rage*?
Otherwise, *the blood we shed* for you shall not be worthy...
For freedom is the absolute right of my *God-worshipping nation*!

(From the Turkish National Anthem)

Throughout my school life, between the ages of six and seventeen, together with all of the other students, I used to sing the first two quatrains of the Turkish National Anthem[1] during assemblies as we

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all italics in this book are mine. In this poem, the poet is addressing the Turkish flag that is comprised of a white crescent and star superimposed on a crimson background. Only these first two quatrains of the ten-stanza anthem are sung. But students are required to memorise all ten stanzas (Appendix 1) by heart. The poem is called *İstiklal Marşı* (Independence March) in Turkish. It was written just after the Turkish victory of the War of Independence (1919–1922) and was officially adopted by the Turkish parliament with a standing ovation on 12 March 1921. It is a motivational saga for the Turkish army, to whom the Turkish Islamist poet Mehmet Akif Ersoy dedicated the march. It glorifies the nation, its freedom, the homeland, the faith, and martyrdom to protect these. It is also an aspirational poem for an independent nation state of a country that was under occupation at the time of writing. It is regularly sung during official events, during national festivals, sporting events, school assemblies and sometimes even in small gatherings. A framed version of all ten quatrains is hung on the wall above the blackboard in school classrooms, accompanied by the Turkish flag, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's portrait and a copy of Atatürk's 'Address to the Youth' (Appendix 4). In school, we were repeatedly told that the crimson colour of the flag comes from blood of martyrs, which was so great in volume that the Sakarya River was completely red; the crescent and star were reflected in the river, which inspired the design of the flag.

came back to school on Monday mornings and before leaving for the weekend break on Friday afternoons. It is no coincidence that the first demand of the anthem is 'fear not'. As I show in this book, negative emotions like fear have been the dominant constitutive components of modern Turkish nationhood and the deep conviction of nation-builders to create a homogenous nation of desired citizens by assimilating or eliminating ethnic, religious and political minorities. The book shows that despite the radical changes having been implemented by the authoritarian Islamist Erdoğan governments, these fundamental emotions, high politics of affection and thus the desired citizen creation ambitions of the state, have not changed.

Negative collective emotions and insecurities in Turkey, especially vis-à- vis the West, have resulted in an anxious nationalism. Insecurities, anxieties and fears of the Ottoman-dominant population of Muslim Turks led by the Young Turks have continued since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. This book shows that all these negative emotions and insecurities have lingered from the Kemalist Era to the Erdoğanist Era, and they have shaped the state's radical and oppressive approach to the ethno-religious and political heterogeneity of the population, regardless of the change in the hegemonic ideology and regime. As a result of these negative emotions and insecurities, not only have the ethnic, religious and political minorities (non-Muslims, Kurds, Alevis, leftists, liberals, democrats) in the country been constructed as undesired citizens, but even the country's majority population (practicing Sunni Muslim Turks) have been treated as second class (merely tolerated but not desired) in the citizenship hierarchies of both regimes.

Arguably this anxious nationalism has always been the 'real' official ideology and guiding principle of the Turkish state. As I will try to show in this volume, this has been costly as far as the ethnic, religious and political minorities are concerned. Even the majority group (Sunni Muslim Turks), on whose identity the new national identity was built, has been the victim of Kemalist and Erdoğanist nation-building projects. All of these negative emotions and insecurities have made Turkish nation-building projects traumatic experiences for different groups of citizens. Instead of progressing smoothly, they have created more problems, injustices, victimhood and resentment. As you will see in the chapters on the rise and consolidation of Erdoğanism, Kemalist injustices, victimisations and all sorts of accompanying negative

emotions would pave the way for another authoritarian, resentful, vindictive and oppressive nation-building project that is at the moment securitising and traumatising its own out-groups of ethnic, religious and political minorities.

These emotions had been formed during the centuries-long, agonizing decline, collapse and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. This process traumatised the Ottoman Turks, especially the elite. For centuries, they have tried to stop the decline, to deal with the rising challenges coming from Russia and the West, to respond to accusations of Turks being semi-civilised or even barbarian, to tackle Western interference, to contain nationalist movements among minorities, and to stop the loss of territory and humiliating military defeats. These issues have caused immense trauma, frustration, desperation, insecurity, fear and anxiety especially with regard to dominant Western powers and civilisation. All of these emotions have been inherited via collective memory by the generations that established the Turkish Republic and maintain it to this day. These emotions have continued to inform and guide Turkish domestic and foreign policy as well as its two dominant and competing national identities and nation-building and desired citizen creation projects that this book analyses. To use the themes and expressions of the National Anthem, this book is an attempt to show that *fear*, *anger*, *rage*, desire to own the homeland *forever*, the need for a *smile*, being pleased to *sacrifice blood* for the country, and the desire to enjoy the *freedom* of the *God-worshipping* nation, victimhood, resentment and siege mentality have all been influential factors in Turkey's two subsequent and competing nation-building projects. They have not been only influential, they have made them more radical, more polarizing and tribalist, more security-obsessed and more oppressive.

These fundamental emotions, desires or themes have been propagated by the state via public statements of political leaders, education, media, pop culture and religion for the last hundred years. As a result, well before Erdoğanism, Turkey was already an 'anxious nation' (Walker 1999).[2] The Erdoğanists inherited these emotions from the

[2] In his iconic magnum opus 'The Anxious Nation' historian David Walker studies in detail the anxiety, insecurity and fears of the Australian nation in the face of rising Asia, mainly China and Japan, between 1850 and 1939. As I will elaborate in this book, Turkey under the Ottomans, then Kemalists and now Erdoğanists has also been suffering from a similar form of anxiety vis-à-vis Western powers.

last generation of Ottomans and the first generation of Kemalists, but they did not passively inherit them. As powerful political hegemons with agency, they have steadily increased the intensity of these emotions in their narrative and political performances, especially since 2010 when they eliminated Kemalist teaching and its 'ambivalent Westernism' (Yilmaz 2020). Erdoğanists have also increasingly added their 'restorative nostalgia'[3] for the lost Empire, their yearning for grandeur and imperial glory, an intense desire for global domination and Pan-Islamism, anti-Western resentfulness, vindictiveness and anger to the inherited emotions. Thus, while remaining anxious, the Turkish nation has also become an 'angry nation' (Öktem 2011) and even a 'furious nation' under the Erdoğanists who started leading Turkey towards a vindictive and confrontational civilisationism.

Creating desired citizens, and simultaneously constructing undesired citizens, is, of course, not unique to Turkey. But Turkey is one of the most significant manifestations of this phenomenon of creating a nation-state on the remnants of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual Empire. Turkey has been unable to develop a unifying national identity that entirely represents its various ethnic, religious and political groups. As a result, 'at various times, society has splintered along lines that can be glossed as Islamist/secular, left/right, Kurd/Turk, Alevi/Sunni, Muslim/non-Muslim, liberal/conservative, as well as left/left, Kurd/Kurd, and Sunni/Sunni' (White 2017, 26).

For the Kemalists, top-down social engineering meant the revolutionary modernisation and Westernisation of social, political and economic spheres in the newly founded Republic of Turkey. The Erdoğanists have used the same techniques to shift all spheres of life towards the Islamisation of Turkey. Nevertheless, with its focus mainly on religion, this book demonstrates how the Kemalist (and its antecedent, the Young Turks) hegemony and subsequent Erdoğanist Turkish Islamist counter-hegemony were under the influence of similar emotions and as a result how they also employed similar nation-building methods and social engineering tools to create their desired and undesired citizens and to consolidate their respective hegemonies.

[3] Restorative nostalgia is mainly about a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home in the present (Boym 2001; 2007). It is also used when defining who really belongs to 'the people' now (Taggart 2000). Based on nostalgia, populists decided, for instance, that immigrants would be excluded. I will look at this issue in the Erdoğanist context in Chapter 8.

These two opposing yet influential political ideologies/regimes of modern Turkey have not only been implemented using the same instruments and methodologies, but have also, arguably, used the same narratives, albeit with different motivations and for different objectives. What is more, as the book tries to show, although their conceptualisation and implementation of desired citizen typologies are at odds, there is an astonishing overlap between these two authoritarian ideologies/regimes' understanding of undesired and tolerated citizens.

Because all these negative collective emotions and experiences have been very influential in Turkish and Erdoğanist nation-building and desired citizen creation projects, in addition to being influential in the securitisation and oppression of minorities as undesired citizens, I will elaborate on this theme before moving on to the literature on citizenship and securitisation.

## 1.1 Insecurities of the Anxious Nation

The Turkish nation is haunted by its ontological insecurity vis-à-vis the West. In the *Social Theory of International Politics*, Alexander Wendt (1999, 235–236) categorises four elements of national interest that are common to all states: (1) physical survival, (2) autonomy, (3) economic well-being and (4) collective self-esteem. While the first three are defined as material needs, self-esteem refers to a state's need for respect and status (Wendt 1999, 215–219). Since interests and identities are constructed intersubjectively, variation in a state's self-image depends upon relationships with respect to significant Others. As such, humiliation or disregard by significant Others destabilises a state's self-image, resulting in competitive international environments as states seek to compensate for their self-esteem with self-assertion, and/or devaluation and aggression towards the Other (Wendt 1999, 218).

The issue of how states deal with existential threats to their identity has also been studied with reference to the term ontological (in)security. Ontological security is the need for the individual to feel themselves as whole and comprehend their sense of self to satisfy the need for a self-assured and stable identity in relation to significant Others. Giddens (1991) and others (Kinnvall 2004, 746; Steele 2005, 519–540; 2008; Mitzen 2006a, 341–370; 2006b, 270–285) have applied this concept to state identity. Ontological security-seeking is

an anxious process which features a constant desire to maintain or restore stability and social order (Mitzen and Larson 2017).

Turkey's ontological insecurity (Zarakol 2010) stems from its sense of never having aligned temporally with the West, always being 'behind' in the process of modernisation, always seeming 'backward' in comparison (Çapan and Zarakol 2019, 269), and seen as uncivilised, savage and brutal by the powerful, dominant and hegemonic West. Thus, the Turkish state did not have the same legitimacy of existence as 'the civilised states', which were seen as having a right to colonise as part of their civilising mission or, to invoke the poet Rudyard Kipling, the 'White Man's Burden'.

Turkey has historically been rather sensitive to its international status in general and vis-à-vis the West in particular (Zarakol 2010, 8). Nothing can manifestly show these emotions more than the Tenth Anniversary March,[4] which was written and composed at the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic:

> We succeeded all wars of 10 years without *humiliation*
> In 10 years, we created 15 million young people of every age
> The leader is the Commander in Chief who is *respect*ed by the whole world
> We knitted all four corners of the motherland with railways
>
> We are Turks! Our chests are the bronze shields of the Republic
> Stopping isn't suitable for Turk! Turk is at front, Turk advance!
>
> We asphyxiate evil and *backwardness* with speed
> We rise as above the *darkness* like the Sun
> We are Turks, *we are superior* to all heads
> We *existed the before history*, we will exist after history.

The desire to 'catch up' with the West and Western orientation of foreign policy were fundamental elements of Kemalist ideology, while at the same time reproducing perceptions of inferiority. Indeed, the goal of becoming part of the West emerged long before the foundation

[4] See Appendix 2 for the full lyrics. The election victory of the Turkish Islamist Necmettin Erbakan and his ascendancy to the Prime Ministership as the head of a coalition government in 1995 has made this march popular among Kemalist sections of society. During Republican rallies to stop another Turkish Islamist's elections to presidency, this march was sung almost everywhere by Kemalist masses from rallies to sporting events to protest against the AKP in 2007. During the Gezi Protests in 2013, this march was very popular too.

of the Republic in 1923, and most of the late Ottoman intelligentsia shared the view that the only way to secure the Empire was through Westernisation (Bagdonas 2012, 117). Since the nineteenth century, Turkey has been trying to overcome this insecurity by espousing, emulating and transplanting Western educational, political and legal constructs and institutions. On the other hand, it has had deep suspicions about the West's true intentions in relation to the fate of the Empire and, later, Turkey. In this context, Turkey's ambivalent relationship with the West and the international system has been repeatedly underlined (Ahıska 2003; Rumelili 2003; 2011; Bilgin 2009; Yanık 2009; Zarakol 2010; 2011; 2013; Bagdonas 2012). In short, the Kemalist response to the insecurities, anxieties and fears of the fledgling nation was what I call 'ambivalent Westernism.' In the final analysis, this was still Westernism and saw Western civilisation as the only civilisation to be emulated but it still harboured anxieties, insecurities and fears in relation to the true intentions of the powerful Western states.

Until Erdoğan's turn, Turkey had been trying to cross the bridge[5] between the East and the West for more than a hundred years, with a self-conscious anxiety that has persisted over the years and remains a source of frustration and threat, and a symptom of internalised inferiority (Ahıska 2003, 353). However, ontological insecurity was just one of the insecurities of the new nation. Fear of loss of territory as well as fear of abandonment by the rest of the world became prominent themes during the Ottoman Empire, persisted through the transformation into the Turkish nation state, and remains an underlying premise to this day (Göçek 2011, 41; Alaranta 2020, 269). Fear of loss of territory needs a little more elaboration, as it is very major concern of the current Turkish national psyche too.

In the lands of the former Ottoman Empire there are now twenty-six countries in Europe and the Caucasus, fourteen countries in the Middle

[5] It has been noted that Turkey as a bridge between the East and the West is a problematic metaphor, as it not only refers to the geographical sites of the East and the West, but also to their temporal signification: namely, backwardness and progress (Ahıska 2003, 353; Çapan and Zarakol 2019, 267). The use of the metaphor of the bridge perpetuates the binary constructions of the East and the West, maintains the artificial division and underlines the dynamics of not only connecting the East and the West but also separating them (Çapan and Zarakol 2019, 267).

East and twenty-two countries in Africa.[6] However, the expansion of the Empire stopped towards the end of the sixteenth century and stagnation began in 1606. For the first time in their history, the Ottomans lost territory with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 and their self-confidence was shaken little, but they would go on to have more victories. Nevertheless, starting with the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji in 1774, the Empire's capital would consistently receive one piece of devastating news after another, and the Ottomans would come to accept the supremacy of European power. In the nineteenth century, millions of Muslims escaping from ethnic cleansing in the lost territories of Crimea, the Balkans and the Caucasus poured into the shrinking Ottoman heartlands, creating additional trauma for the forced migrants as well as the receiving communities. In the meantime, the Great Powers (including Russia) were being granted protection rights over non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire as concessions for wars fought with the Ottomans, and were also encroaching on Ottoman sovereignty in other ways, by gradually granting citizenship to the Sultan's non-Muslim subjects and even establishing consulates on Ottoman territory, such as on the Aegean islands, to facilitate the rights of these new 'citizens'. Through these minorities, they constantly pressured the Ottoman rulers and intervened in the domestic affairs of the Empire.

Another related reason for trauma was debate over the Eastern Question, which made the Ottoman elite anxious. The Eastern Question was a diplomatic problem in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the contest for Ottoman territories. The European powers did not want another nation to take advantage and increase its own influence as a result of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Question was comprised of many interrelated elements such as Ottoman military defeats, institutional insolvency, the ongoing political and economic modernisation programme, the rise of ethno-religious nationalism in the Ottoman provinces and competition between the Great Powers (Anderson 1966; Macfie 1996). However, as we will repeatedly see throughout this book, in the Turkish national imagination, this

[6] Some of these countries partially belonged to the Empire. Also, not all of them were under the Ottoman rule at once, while some were lost, new ones were conquered.

question has been expanded to include all Ottoman territories at all times, not just during the period of the Empire's decline. Thus, in popular parlance, the Eastern Question refers to the constant attempts of Crusader Europe to rid Anatolia of Turks, from their first arrival in 1071 to the present.[7]

The shrinking of the Empire took an excruciating 220 years, leaving its traumatic mark on the national memory and motivating Kemalist Turkish nation-building. All of these traumas, anxieties and fears have been perpetuated in education (especially history), the media and popular culture to create desired citizens, warn them against external and internal existential threats and mobilise them for the state.

One of the Kemalist responses to accusations of barbarity and the Eastern Question was to develop the Turkish Historical Thesis. According to this thesis, Turks were the generators of civilisation from the very beginning of human development and almost all prominent ancient civilisations on earth were either Turks or indebted to Turks. The Turks were descendants of white (Aryan) inhabitants of Central Asia who had to migrate to other areas like China, Europe and the Near East, because of natural disasters, before establishing major states, such as the Sumerian and Hittite Empires centred in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, and helping China and India to produce their impressive civilisations. The Turks could even take substantial credit for the achievements of the Greco-Roman civilisation, which was the product of Turkic peoples who had migrated to Crete and Italy. While, paradoxically, the Turks were celebrating their arrival and conquest of Anatolia in 1071 every year, they were also claiming that they had been in Anatolia for several millennia. By extending the roots of Turkish citizens in the land they inhabited, the Kemalists endeavoured to tackle their feeling of insecurity with regard to Western powers and their Sèvres Syndrome (to be explained below). Moreover, with the aid of this myth, which bolstered Turkish self-confidence, the Kemalists did not need Ottoman glory. They filled the historical void left by their rejection and erasure of the Ottoman past with the new myth (Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013, 677).

The fall from grace as a great empire, humiliating years of constant foreign interventions that the Ottoman Empire had endured as a member of so-called semi-civilised humanity, ethnic uprisings,

[7] https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/sark-meselesi.

nationalism among minorities, traumatic incidents like the fall of the former Ottoman capital Edirne (Adrianople) to Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars,[8] the bloody dismemberment of the Empire, the occupation of Istanbul by the British in 1918, the attacks of Islamist fanatics' on the Turkish army during the War of Independence, the Kurdish uprising of 1925, and the allegedly Islamist uprising in Menemen in 1930 have not remained in the past and the resulting wounds are still open (Zarakol 2010, 15). Thus, existential fears and anxieties in relation to external powers as well as the view of ethnic, religious and political minorities as unreliable and threatening elements have persisted. This both heavily influenced but also facilitated the Kemalist elite to implement their nationalism construction project. For this, they have used a 'chosen trauma' that I will discuss in the next section.

Ottoman history in the Turkish educational system, which I myself have experienced, is a roller coaster of joy, distress, and frustration. This educational programme teaches students to be overjoyed at every victory of the Ottoman Empire, and then be angry at the collapse of the Empire and the Sultans – who were framed as corrupt, evil, suffering from psychological problems, spending all their time in the harem instead of on the battlefield, and pursuing extravagant lifestyles while the people were poor and suffering. I still remember how I felt in my school years when studying Ottoman history. I (and I am sure almost all of my classmates) would be almost ecstatically overjoyed with the victories of our heroes against the villains from one battle to another.

[8] Edirne was the Ottoman capital between 1361 and 1453 until the conquest of Istanbul. The city has a lot of symbolic value in the Turkish psyche. The biggest mosque of Sinan the Architect, Selimiye, is in Edirne. Half of its population was Muslim, almost a similar proportion to Istanbul around that time. When it fell in 26 March 1913 after five months and five days of siege, the Bulgarian soldiers looted the property of the Muslims and Jews for three days. It is only 240 km from Istanbul but the Ottomans could not do anything about it. Şükrü Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman army unit that defended the city during the siege had become an icon despite the city's fall. The Ottomans would recapture the city a few months later on 21 July 2013. But these four months were the longest and darkest times they endured before the occupation of Istanbul by the British Empire on 13 November 1918 after the Ottoman defeat in World War I. Given that, to prevent the fall of Istanbul during the Battle of Gallipoli in 1915, the Ottomans lost 57,000 lives (in popular culture the figure is 250,000). The occupation of Istanbul in 1918 was another traumatic event. All of these also explain why Mustafa Kemal, who led and won the War of Independence, is admired by many millions of people from all walks of life in Turkey. For this, he did not need a personality cult!