

Introduction

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When a decree law (no. 696) was published in the Turkish *Official Gazette* in December 2017, granting ‘immunity to all civilians, whatever the nature of their acts, provided they act in the name of antiterrorism or to prevent an attempt to overthrow the government’, the reaction was muted.¹ Yet these provisions, passed in the wake of the attempted coup of July 2016, legalize the use of violence in particular circumstances. The Turkish state thus allows its citizens to act with impunity against a supposed enemy. In the current domestic context sustained by the conflicts flaring across the Middle East, observers have puzzled over the introduction of these measures, which would be inconceivable in most states. These ‘legal’ provisions raise questions about their field of application. What use do the authorities intend to make of these prerogatives – extended to a swathe of civil society with links of varying kinds to the governing party – against likely target groups. These emergent threats provide a singular perspective on the issues addressed in this book about how practices of collective violence have evolved in Turkish society. This perspective is especially valuable when examining collective violence in its most extreme forms, for the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey over the past century and a half is one of regular outbursts of extreme violence triggered mainly by the state.

‘Today, contrary to past thought, we are compelled to say that the state is the only human *Gemeinschaft* [community] that claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. However, this monopoly is limited to a certain geographical area, and in fact this limitation to a particular area is one of the things that defines a state’, wrote Max Weber in his 1919 lecture, ‘Politics as a Vocation.’² This definition underlines that the legitimacy of state violence, central in the construction of modern states, is at the heart of the reflection in which we engage in this volume. It suggests, by extension, that the state can use force in accordance with its security imperatives. Does its role as a social regulator, ensuring the security of its citizens, allow it to practice ‘extreme violence’ against a targeted part of society? This question obviously arises when the state in question operates outside the democratic framework or in a hybrid environment, mixing authoritarianism and democratic practices. It is this singular state framework of regimes practising extreme violence, by abusing their legal prerogatives, that constitutes the framework of our collective inquiry – a

questioning of the notion of transgression of the legal framework of the state, which has seized international jurists for decades.

To use legal prerogatives to practise different forms of coercion can only, apparently, be the act of a state. One observes, however, cases of the delegation of the use of violence attributed to members of the social body, as in situations of self-defence. This delegation can even, in the context mentioned above, transform itself into implicit authorization, or even explicit encouragement, to murder, plunder or kidnap in the name of the state, legitimized by its absolute sovereignty. This raises the question of the nature of the social contract between the criminal state and its society, or at least that part of it that adheres to the criminal programme of power, or that eventually uses it for personal gain.

In his treatment of the concept of collective violence, Charles Tilly identifies several 'ages', including a 'modern' age. Modern collective violence is unique for its vast scale, and is closely associated with building the national state and economy. Its most massive outbreaks are the work of organizations or parties that are integral to the system, and to which the state has granted a form of legitimacy and thus delegated the use of violence.³ These observations bring us straight back to the history of modern Turkey and the decree law mentioned above. They also apply to the Young Turk period, when the republic was built on the exclusion and extermination of certain groups.

In the same vein, Charles Tilly highlights that collective violence stems from competition to acquire or retain established power positions, or to renew the political structure of the governing group and redistribute state positions. These recurrent features apply to the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. But the geographical area studied here is further characterized by a major structural shift, with the transition from an imperial model to a nation state, accompanied by an upsurge of Turkish nationalism. This is the point of departure for the ideas presented here. This multi-authored work focuses on the massive use of force and violence directed against multiple groups constituting the empire, and used as an instrument for forming the modern Turkish state. These groups were perceived as 'internal rivals' who could not be assimilated and were regarded as hostile to building a 'Turkish state'. They were thus subjected to radical treatment meted out in accordance with a hierarchy of violence, which needs to be determined. Another crucial point relates to the extent to which tribal and social structures with ties to the Ottoman sultans, and then, as of 1908, to the sole governing party, the Committee of Union and Progress, were involved in exclusion practices. This point underpins examination of the socio-economic consequences of these acts of violence on members of these structures, who benefited to varying degrees from new resources by capturing assets previously belonging to targeted groups, and by being rid of their rivalry.

'State terrorism', in the form of genocides, repression, disappearances, torture, and other human rights abuses, often generates a culture of denial, which is shared by a society to the extent that it has adhered to the collective violence orchestrated by the authorities. Official discourse to justify or deny this criminal behaviour continues to function as a communal good in those countries where these mass murders were committed. It is a matter of shirking responsibility or of subscribing to a reassuring, dominant current of opinion. A regime change generally makes it possible to assume the mass crime committed by previous generations and launch the rehabilitation process, and thereby, at least partially, overcome the trauma of the persecutors. In the case of interest to us here, no governing party has ever assumed the original crime, the genocide of the Armenians and Syrians. Furthermore, there have been additional acts of mass violence up until the present day. This raises the question, addressed by the chapters in this book, of whether permanent denial encourages the perpetuation of collective violence.

This phenomenon contaminating Turkish society is part of what the British historian Eric Hobsbawm called *The Age of Extremes*, with its total war and the 'centrality of martial acts'.⁴ In other words, a singular context that transformed and radicalized behaviour, facilitating the perpetration of violent deeds. This clearly raises the question of how Turkish society interiorized the most extreme forms of violent practice as legitimate acts.

It is no easy task to observe these acts of violence circulating through society for over a century. Within their respective fields, each of the contributors has looked at the outbursts of state and/or collective violence that have occurred throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, along with victim groups' memories of them. Some contributors have observed phenomena targeting a particular group, while others have sought to detect recurrent links between these ongoing acts of violence. Are we justified in speaking of a culture of violence contaminating a not negligible part of Turkish society, and of epistemic violence against targeted groups? However, care must be taken not to fall into essentialism, which would reduce the scope of this volume, and emphasize how much the impact of mentalities weighs in this society.

To answer these questions, we have sought to identify the markers of this phenomenon within a long historical time frame, asking why Turkish society has singled out and excluded such-and-such group. This has required examination of the virulent nationalism acting as a social underpinning steadfastly maintained by the Turkish state – a nationalism characterized primarily by the repeated affirmation of Turkish identity as the unique source of legitimacy. It has also entailed examining discourse that stigmatizes the enemy within – traitors by definition – in a prelude leading straight to the upcoming violence. It transpires that the construction of Turkish identity, undertaken in the second

half of the nineteenth century, required regular updating of the 'enemy within' as an object of popular opprobrium to foster social cohesion. We thus needed to examine state discourse to delineate and define targeted groups using appropriate terminology, lending the state's approach political and social legitimacy, the better to visit punishment on them. An epistemological approach was thus needed to define groups who 'betray the national interest', and who, failing to conform to official canons, become targets of 'legitimists' and those faithful to the values upheld by the authorities.

In addition to the comparatively well-explored topic of state violence, it seemed judicious to examine the practices of model citizens who felt absolved from legal constraints, as they had been implicitly or explicitly promised impunity should they carry out crimes defined as acts of resistance or legitimate reaction to internal danger. It was also necessary to study political discourse and religiously connoted court sentences, for such pronouncements help to legitimize murder together with the appropriation of targeted groups' assets. Since such groups are intrinsically unworthy of belonging to society, their families may be justly punished, and their women taken as legitimate booty. As Paul Ricœur has taught us, one of the main purposes of historical research is to identify social syndromes, explore how a society relates to its past, and probe its representation of how past relates to present. That, in any case, is the ambition guiding this work. It is a joint undertaking to examine how collective violence has operated in Turkey over the long term.

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Once contemporary Turkey's social markers have been diagnosed, they still need to be exposed to rigorous criticism before any general lessons can be drawn. We therefore decided on a relatively classical method, combining case studies and topical research, and looking at the history and memory of these events. The first two parts of the book comprise case studies examining exactions committed against specific groups of Ottoman subjects. These exactions took the form of cyclical crises that sought to stigmatize and in various ways exclude these groups by mobilizing social violence in the name of building the Turkish state.

To obtain the requisite historical depth, the chapters in Part I provide an assessment of the Ottoman legacy of collective violence. Stephan Astourian goes over the acts of mass violence that occurred throughout the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. As the title of his chapter ('On the Genealogy of the Armenian–Turkish Conflict, Sultan Abdülhamid and the Armenian Massacres') suggests, he focuses on that conflict and its treatment in the literature –

that is to say, the persecution of Ottoman Armenians and its scholarly interpretation. Examination of this latter point is especially important since it raises the question of the inner workings of these mass crimes – or at least the view that historians, in positing socio-economic origins, have of them. This overview appraises the *modus operandi* used in the days of the sultans, and that deployed by the Young Turk regime in Cilicia in 1909. It thus provides the groundwork for thinking about changes in scale in the perpetration of mass violence from one regime to another.

David Gaunt ('The Long Assyrian Genocide') discusses a subject that has long been an orphan, the persecution and genocide suffered by various Assyrian groups. Although very localized, in the vilayets of Bitlis and Diyarbakir, little represented in Ottoman political life, the Assyrians were exterminated at the same time as the Armenians. David Gaunt also shows that the Kurdish tribal networks contributed powerfully to these exactions which illustrate more forcefully the genocidal intention of the Union and Progress Committee.

Ayşenur Korkmaz ('The Hamidian Massacres: Gendered Violence, Biopolitics and National Honour') explores the sexual practices of soldiers and members of Kurdish militias towards Armenian women in that period. More so even than rapes, the abductions and forced marriages that occurred with all impunity raise the question of what motivated the abductors, and of the singular relationship between the persecutors and the women in the victim group.

Among the case studies of collective violence, Raymond Kévorkian treats the genocide of the Armenians from a specific angle, looking at the involvement of Ottoman society in the enterprise to destroy the Armenians. His first chapter ('On Collective Responsibility in the Extermination of Ottoman Armenians') raises the question of 'collective responsibility' in this founding crime, while assessing the varying extent to which Young Turk militants, local notables, and Kurdish and Circassian tribal chieftains were implicated. Drawing on documented events in two vilayets, Erzerum and Sivas, he focuses on the motivations of these criminals, admittedly influenced by Unionist egalitarianism, but also encouraged to act for, at times, far more prosaic reasons. The tools used in the history of mentalities, though powerful, are insufficient for addressing these complex issues, given the rupture between the multicultural imperial model and the exclusivist Turkish nation state. What is required to tackle these phenomena – abandoned by scholarship – is the battery of tools developed by political sociology and social psychology, inspired by Holocaust studies.

There has been virtually no study of the post-First World War period, heralding the transition to the Republic of Turkey. Yet it is crucial for understanding how measures during the First World War to eliminate the Armenians and Syrians continued under the successors to the Committee of Union and Prog-

ress, particularly Mustafa Kemal, and the Young Turk cadres who followed him by attacking the Greek Ottomans too. This topic is studied by Raymond Kévorkian in his second chapter ('The Final Phase: The Cleansing of Armenian and Greek Survivors, 1919–1922'), who looks at the consequences of genocide for both persecutors and victims. He appraises the post-war situation, assessing the number and location of survivors, and discusses their attempts to return home together with Turkish society's recurrent mobilization against handing back 'abandoned' Armenian assets. In particular, Kévorkian raises the issue of the apologetic historiography promulgated by the Kemalist movement, presented as the champion in the 'liberation struggle', thus seemingly overlooking its ideological and operational affiliation to the genocidal practices of the Young Turk regime.

In 'Collective State Violence against Greeks in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1821–1923', George Shirinian explores the persecutions suffered by the Greeks of the Ottoman Empire over the long term, with a long section devoted to the violent exclusion of Greeks from Asia Minor in 1920–23, in the form of deportations, massacres, and population exchanges. This exclusion was intended to demonstrate that the policy to homogenize Asian Minor, introduced in 1915, had been fulfilled. The various groups excluded from the Ottoman Empire and Turkey met with suffering at the hands of the central authorities, or were subjected to public lynching or 'epistemic violence' (to use Markus Dressler's expression), followed by physical brutality.

Part II comprises case studies of collective violence during the Republican period. It opens with a chapter by Rifat Bali studying the pogroms against Jewish populations in Thrace ('The Attempted Pogrom against the Jews of Thrace, June–July 1934'). These were highly localized, and carried out over a short period. They thus offer a way of examining the Kemalist regime's strategy to pursue the elimination of non-Muslims still present in Turkey, and especially to capture their assets. The fact that it was the minister of the interior, Şükrü Kaya, who travelled to Thrace is revealing, for he was involved in planning the 1915 events. These programmes raise the issue of the Turkish state's responsibility, and of how the local population assisted state violence. In a more memorial register, Talin Suciyan ('A History of Armenians Remaining in Turkey: Survival and Denial') looks at the daily experience of Armenian survivors in Constantinople and the provinces in the post-war years. She draws on hundreds of regional monographs by diaspora Armenians in which they have transcribed their memories of their lost land. By studying chapters based on press articles about these regions in the Republican period, she examines the communal experience of living in a state that labelled its citizens 'suspects' and – together with the vast majority of their neighbours endowed with legitimacy – practised segregation on a daily basis.

The pogroms of Istanbul Greeks in September 1955 are no doubt the most revealing events of the continued existence of violent practices in Turkish government circles and certain affiliated networks. Dilek Güven provides a critical reading of these pogroms ('The Events of 6–7 September 1955: Greeks, Armenians and Jews within the Context of the Strategies of the Turkish Republic'), and seeks more generally to detect elements indicative of the republic's and government's strategies towards non-Muslim minorities (or what remained of them), nearly all of whom were in Istanbul. By plotting the complex links between these events – officially described as spontaneous outbursts – and state plans, Güven paves the way for further examination of the public expression of violence in Turkey.

With Markus Dressler's chapter on violent practices against the Alevi/Kızılbaş populations ('Physical and Epistemic Violence against Alevis in Modern Turkey'), and Mesut Yeğen's chapter on the Kurdish issue ('State Violence in "Kurdistan"'), the focus shifts to collective violence against groups hailing from the Muslim tradition. In these instances, Turkish nationalism disregards the religious origins of the two groups, though admittedly the Alevis/Kızılbaş are not in the Islamic mainstream. The Kurdish case is studied over a century-long time frame, as part of a panoramic overview of the Kurds' relationship to the state, looking both at those who cooperated with the authorities and at those who opposed them. It thereby raises the issues of the place of Kurdish citizens in contemporary Turkey, the Turkish state's refusal to grant them the most basic rights, and, last, the difficulty or impossibility even of managing political dialogue.

The study of Alevis/Kızılbaş persecution is of a different nature. It starts by emphasizing the semantic strategies leading to the term 'Kızılbaş' being replaced by 'Alevi', together with a historiographical construct seeking to assert the latter's Turkism. Marcus Dressler's study reveals a particularly interesting facet in the well-documented state strategy to assimilate or eliminate non-Turkish groups. The Alevi case brings out several degrees and types of violence, ranging from the 1937–38 massacres, to public lynchings in Sivas and Marash, not to mention the public epistemic stigmatization that often preceded physical violence. The denial of violence committed against Armenians and Alevis is the subject of Annika Törne's chapter ('Inscriptions of Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Memory Narrations from Dersim'). Her parallel interviews with descendants of Armenian survivors of 1915 and descendants of Alevis massacred in Dersim in 1937–38 sketch out how these individuals perceive official denials or legitimizations of these crimes, and how they transmit the memory of them to their children.

The last chapter of this section deals with violence against the Yazidi population. Caroline Schneider ('The Yazidis: Resilience in Times of Violence')

takes a long-term look at the history of this singular group, a minority in the minority, mistreated by successive powers and by their neighbours from the Kurdish tribes. In particular, it raises the question of the nature and origin of violence against the Yazidi, a mixture of religious rejection and a desire to assimilate into the dominant group.

Part III is composed solely of thematic studies looking from multiple angles at collective violence emanating from state or society. Behind their ideological underpinnings, invoked too systematically as an explanation, we may detect far more prosaic issues, such as land ownership, acquiring positions of power, and, of course, controlling local resources. The use of slogans such as domestic jihad or 'ummah war', examined by Hans-Lukas Kieser ('Public Violence in Turkey since the Nineteenth Century Onwards'), and often invoked to exhort public opinion, raises the question of the social reception and real impact such slogans have. This opens onto the more or less direct dialogue between the state and parts of society who, in view of the concrete advantages that may accrue to them, adhere to the state's discourses of exclusion.

Be that as it may, it is impossible to overlook the extent to which xenophobic values have taken root in Turkish society, stemming from the ideological corpus drawn up by the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress, supplemented by Mustafa Kemal, and adopted by successive governments. The state has thus associated with the most radical sections of society, often even with criminal organizations – a caricatural example being the Susurluk scandal, involving a chief of police, far-right mafiosos, and the political establishment – to which it has entrusted nefarious deeds, as studied by Hamit Bozarslan ('Structures of Power, Coercion and Violence in Republican Turkey'). The Turkist collective identity, imposed primarily by the education system, is intended as normative, giving citizens a unique model with no alternative. The excessive racial dimension vaunting the superiority of the Turkish race has marginalized, isolated and excluded many groups who do not fit into the category of standard Turkish citizens. The central authorities, who regularly call for mobilization against a supposed internal enemy, fuel collective violence trained against targeted groups. The authorities delegate the crimes they cannot officially commit, farming them out to society (or at least the part that adheres to its programme), before then methodically presenting them as spontaneous outbursts of popular 'anger'. Such an approach is central to the nationalist logic instigated by the Young Turks, who were convinced that Turkish citizens should serve the state, rather than vice versa.

Many of the contributors explicitly raise the question of the roots of the political practices and political violence that is rife in present-day Turkey, and reminiscent of the authoritarian state instigated by Mustafa Kemal. Some emphasize the way mass violence and the Armenian Genocide have engendered

'moral misery, mourning and melancholy for millions of people who have literally and totally lost their world' (Etienne Copeaux).

But the authors focus even more on the consequences of these involuntary amputations from the social body, even addressing the issue of self-destruction. For by eliminating the Armenians and Syrians, and by excluding the Greeks, the Turks have 'destroyed their own world, that of a plural society in which they had lived since the Middle Ages' as Etienne Copeaux ('Violence and Its Masks: History and Nation') observes. While benefiting from assets 'abandoned' by non-Muslims, they have lost neighbours, friends, tradesmen, shopkeepers, farmers, and an entire economic structure.

'While proclaiming secularity, Islam is the only tie binding the new Anatolians together. They overthrow everyday semiological landmarks, modifying the calendar, place names, surnames, costume, the alphabet, language even – and it is soon the turn of history. Having accomplished the loss of a world, having swept it away, the new inter-world will be one of imposed happiness, and especially nationalism' (Etienne Copeaux).

Finally, more recent events such as the 'Gezi Park protests' raise the still central question of the continuing existence of violent practices in the Turkish state, while a minority, embodied by the Gezi protesters, call for an end to these reactionary practices. The methods used to silence them, including harassment by non-official media outlets and conventional nationalist discourse, are, as Uğur Derin observes ("Who Did This to Us?" Blaming the Enemies as Part of Turkey's Authoritarian Political Culture'), reminiscent of past events, displaying the traces of shallow amnesia.

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Notes

1. Jégo, 'Turquie'.
2. Weber, *Weber's Rationalism*, 136.
3. Tilly, *Collective Violence*.
4. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*; Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre*.

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