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Conceptualizing the Turkish Revolution in the *Longue Durée*

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Abstract

Through a combination of the methods of theoretical review and historical-narrative analysis, this study seeks to unveil the main catalysts of the Turkish Revolution by addressing its structural and subjective dynamics in tandem. The literature lacks a theoretically-guided and systematic study of the Turkish Revolution, which marked its centenary in 2023—a significant gap that this paper seeks to fill. The article also contributes to the broader field of revolution studies by presenting an integrated framework that transcends the current fragmented state of prevailing theories. Based

on a critical synthesis of revolution theories, the first part of our empirical analysis focuses on the structural dynamics underpinning the Turkish Revolution, with special emphasis on two chief factors: administrative and socio-economic breakdown. Demonstrating that the mere existence of class-structural strains and mass grievances does not automatically trigger revolutionary action, the second part reveals how the Revolution unfolded through a convergence of mediating factors associated with collective agency, namely leadership and ideational dynamics.

Keywords

historical-narrative analysis – Kemalism – modern Turkey – revolution theories – theoretical review – Turkish Revolution

1 Introduction

The 1923 Kemalist Revolution, named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, marked a transformative era in the transition of the Turkish Republic from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire into a modern nation-state. The beginning of the Kemalist Revolution is conventionally attributed to the Armistice of Mudros in 1918, which marked the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, and the commencement of the Turkish War of Independence on May 19, 1919 (see, e.g., Çetinkaya, 2017). During this significant juncture, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a highly regarded and prominent general of the Ottoman Empire, disembarked in Samsun. His arrival marked the initiation of a resolute campaign against foreign occupation forces following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I. This being said, the historical origins of this revolutionary process can be traced further back to the era of Ottoman decline (1699–1792) and the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, similar to the 1905 Revolution in Russia and the 1911 Revolution in China. This earlier event was characterized by a social uprising aligned with the aspirations of Young Turk intellectuals, aimed at reinstating the constitutional monarchy. To truly grasp the emergence of the Kemalist Revolution, therefore, it is imperative to go beyond the Kemalist framework and contextualize it within the broader historical context in which the modern Turkish republic took root and shape.

The Turkish revolution remains underexplored systematically and conceptually in the current literature. With this in mind, the present study addresses the underlying socioeconomic and political dynamics of the Turkish Revolution, which recently marked its centenary in 2023. It not only fills a

gap in the literature by providing a systematic study of this revolution, but also contributes to revolution studies by presenting an integrated framework that transcends the current fragmented state of prevailing theories. Through a combination of the methods of theoretical review and historical-narrative analysis, it seeks to unveil the main catalysts of the Turkish Revolution by addressing its structural and subjective dynamics in tandem. Against this backdrop, the first two parts of this article are dedicated to methodological and theoretical considerations, respectively. Subsequently, the ensuing sections offer a historical-narrative analysis of the Turkish Revolution based on a unified theoretical framework synthesized from the canonical literature. While the third section addresses the structural dynamics of the Turkish Revolution in the *longue durée*, the fourth section explores the subjective factors that propelled this transformative process.

2 Methodological Framework: Theoretical Review and Historical Narratives

This study employs the methods of theoretical review and historical-narrative analysis to conceptually examine the genesis of the Turkish Revolution within an integrative framework, which also contributes to the theoretical literature on revolution studies. From a methodological point of view, merely assembling a sequence of chronological events would yield limited insights into the multifaceted web of causal relationships and cumulative outcomes. Thus, offering a theoretical synthesis to establish meaningful connections and contextualize these events stands as a valuable undertaking as part of historical research, which also points to the relevance of the methods of theoretical review and historical narratives from a historical-sociology perspective.

Theoretical review “draws on existing conceptual and empirical studies to provide a context for identifying, describing, and transforming into a higher order of theoretical structure and various concepts, constructs or relationships ... to develop a conceptual framework or model with a set of research propositions or hypotheses” (Paré et al., 2015). The aim is thereby to “bring[s] together diverse streams of work ... and ... develop novel conceptualizations or extend current ones” (Paré et al., 2015: p. 188). In light of this methodology, our approach involves a thorough reassessment of prevailing theories of revolution through a succinct examination of seminal works, with the aim of formulating a cohesive framework that surpasses the limitations of fragmented knowledge in the field of revolution studies. This will allow us to go beyond the confines of historical empiricism, understood as the “mere recital of facts” (Hallett

Carr, 1990: p. 22) and re-contextualize the Turkish Revolution in a political-sociological framework.

As regards historical-narrative analysis, Büthe's notion of narratives refers to the ways in which scholars “present the results of their empirical analysis, providing information about actors, institutions, events, and relationships” within a unified narrative framework (Büthe, 2002: p. 482). Büthe's theory-guided narrative method falls within the broader tradition of historical macro-analysis, making it particularly adept at “conceptualizing history” and “trac[ing] historical processes over long periods of time” (Büthe, 2002: pp. 482, 484). This aligns with the main objective of this research, which consists of conceptualizing the long-term development of the Turkish Revolution from a systematic and holistic perspective.

The first step in narrative analysis involves constructing a theoretical model that identifies regular patterns and elucidates causal mechanisms, considering the dynamic influence of temporal progression on institutions, actors, and their preferences. This theoretical modelling is built upon coherent and empirically substantiated frameworks, wherein concepts are distinctly delineated and empirical analyses unfold in a logical progression. Additionally, these frameworks are to remain sensitive to the context-specific manifestations of overarching assumptions (Büthe, 2002). According to Büthe, the explanatory capacity of narrative analysis is maximized when it involves “a careful combination of [multiple] models and narratives” (Büthe, 2002: p. 484). Consequently, this research begins by conducting a theoretical review in order to construct a coherent model, as presented in the next section. Within Büthe's framework, moreover, the second step of narrative analysis entails crafting multiple narratives that systematically present empirical data, simultaneously subjecting the assumptions of the theoretical model to empirical scrutiny. This entails drawing upon external sources to bolster the reliability and validity of the constructed narratives, which will be explored in the empirical sections (Büthe, 2002).

A few words are in order regarding our temporal focus and research scope. Taking a *longue-durée* approach characterized by its focus on “structures that persist during long periods” (Wallerstein, 2011), our temporal scope encompasses the interval spanning from the onset of the Ottoman decline in 1699 to the pivotal juncture of October 29, 1923, which witnessed the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. Worthy of special note here is that our research scope is narrower than the broader literature on this period, which is predominantly framed within the context of modernity, modernization efforts, and the development of capitalism, with a primary focus on the late Ottoman era up to the Young Turk period. Particularly, Marxian studies within this

literature offer valuable guidance for this study concerning the conflict- and class-driven dynamics contributing to the revolution. For example, the book by Ertan Erol (2020) offers a historical analysis of the multi-scalar production of capitalist space in Mexico and Turkey within the framework of Gramsci's passive revolution and world-systems theory. Erol examines the Porfiriato in Mexico (1877–1911) and the Hamidian regime (1876–1909) in Turkey, which are typically characterized as despotic and conservative, and labels them as progressive forms of Caesarism in the context of capitalist development and the strengthening of central governments. This form of Caesarism results in “revolution-restoration” or “revolution without revolution”, conceptualized as passive revolution in Gramscian terminology. In Mexico, this process is reflected in the consolidation of modern capitalist underdevelopment during the 1910–1920 Mexican Revolution. In Turkey, it is seen in the institutionalization of the capitalist periphery status within a nation-state framework during the Young Turk Revolution and the Kemalist Revolution, from 1908 to the 1920s. According to Erol, the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution and the transformation of capitalist space parallels the consolidation of peripheral capitalism through the Young Turk Revolution and Kemalism in Turkey (Erol, 2020).

Based on Political Marxism, Eren Düzgün (2018) challenges the common narrative that Ottoman modernization was a straightforward process of Westernization, arguing instead that it was shaped by the selective adoption of two conflicting strategies: capitalism and Jacobinism. Over time, pressures from within the empire and from external forces led the Ottoman state to increasingly prioritize the Jacobin model, which emphasized centralization and state control, over market-driven capitalism. Therefore, Düzgün argues that the outcome of the Ottoman modernization effort was not a peripheral form of capitalism, as often assumed, but a unique form of Jacobinism. As such, he also departs from Erol's neo-dependency, or Gramsci-inspired world-systems framework that rather emphasizes peripheral capitalism and its incorporation into global capitalism. According to Düzgün, this form of Jacobinism bypassed both capitalist and socialist models, instead focusing on alternative structures of property and social organization. By the late 19th century, the Ottoman Empire's reliance on tax farming and the growing power of provincial notables (*ayans*) created challenges for centralization and fiscal stability, combined with external geopolitical pressures and rebellions. Facing these difficulties, the Ottoman state increasingly leaned towards Jacobin policies, including the 1876 constitution, which introduced universal conscription and aimed to secure property rights while avoiding the pitfalls of capitalist development. Düzgün emphasizes that the Young Turks, driven by both internal revolts

and external threats, radicalized their approach to reform, leading to the creation of a “patriotic” bourgeoisie and the establishment of a citizen-army. This approach linked social rights and property to military service rather than market success, creating a unique path to modernization that diverged from the capitalist model and focused on non-capitalist forms of social organization and property rights (Düzgün, 2018).

Çağdaş Sümer’s book (2023) shifts the focus from broader political factors to class conflict. It begins by critically examining two dominant approaches in the literature on the late Ottoman era. The first approach assumes that nationalist movements played the primary role in the conflicts of this period, while the second attributes these conflicts to the opposition between the state and civil society, suggesting that top-down reforms were not accepted by the broader population. However, Sümer argues that a class-analytical perspective offers a stronger understanding of these conflicts by highlighting diverging and conflicting class projects. He acknowledges that from the 1770s to the 1920s, this period was shaped by the combined impact of international wars and internal conflicts. During this time, the ruling bloc within the Ottoman Empire began to fragment, leading to conflicts between strategic groups offering different solutions to the state’s crises, with the Young Turks being one of these groups. Particularly in the 19th century, as the Ottoman state faced increasing financial burdens from wars and rebellions, it intensified its exploitation of the peasantry, leading to heightened unrest, especially among non-Muslim peasants. This period saw intensified conflicts between the Muslim propertied class and non-Muslims, with the propertied class’s resistance to tax reforms playing a significant role in the events leading up to 1908. After the revolution, the Young Turk discourse initially featured an intention to eliminate the class and political inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, they were unable to implement a sufficiently radical program to achieve this goal. External factors such as the Balkan Wars and World War I, along with inconsistent policies and rising ethno-religious violence in Anatolia, prevented the Young Turks from creating the stable environment needed to fully execute their original program. Additionally, the propertied class was politically divided, and while World War I led some sections of the urban Muslim propertied class to temporarily curb their internal divisions due to the threat of the Russian-Armenian alliance, not all supported the Young Turks’ centralization policies (Sümer, 2023).

Continuing the class-focused approach exemplified by Sümer’s book, Y. Doğan Çetinkaya and Neslişah L. Başaran Lotz’s research challenges the argument that the Turkish bourgeoisie is an artificial creation of the Young Turks and highlight their often-neglected significance in late Ottoman history

(Çetinkaya, 2023; Başaran Lotz, 2023). In his article, Y. Doğan Çetinkaya examines the rise of the Muslim/Turkish bourgeoisie, challenging the notion that this class was a mere creation of political intervention. For example, he argues that the development of banks and companies by this bourgeoisie after the 1908 Revolution was not solely driven by political forces like the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), but also by existing social dynamics and class demands. The period known as “National Banking” in the post-1908 era marks a significant phase in Turkish capitalism. This era saw the rise of banks like *İtibar-ı Milli Bankası*, which were instrumental in shaping the national economy. Çetinkaya highlights that these banks were products of the “National Economy” movement, supported by the CUP, but were also rooted in the demands of an already established Muslim/Turkish bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie had already begun creating small local banks in Anatolia to meet their commercial needs, reflecting a broader social dynamic rather than a class artificially created by politics (Çetinkaya, 2023). In a similar vein, Neslişah L. Başaran Lotz (2023) argues that the Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie has deep roots in the Ottoman period that even precedes the 19th century, gaining strength with the establishment of the Republic. Lotz highlights that, contrary to popular belief, Muslim traders were significant in the Ottoman economy, especially in the eastern provinces. She also emphasizes that ethnic and religious divisions were not the sole drivers of socioeconomic transformation, while this period’s policies mostly favored non-Muslim traders in cities like Istanbul and Izmir (Başaran Lotz, 2023).

These studies do not offer a conceptual and systematic understanding that specifically addresses the underlying catalysts of the Turkish revolution. This being said, their examination of the late Ottoman period and modernization certainly intersects with the theme of revolution as another defining feature of this era, providing a valuable foundation for the study of the Turkish revolution. Overall, three distinct but complementary insights can be drawn from this Marxian literature, which are highly significant for guiding research on the Turkish Revolution and contribute to the multi-narrative framing of our historical-narrative analysis. First, the peripheral nature of Ottoman capitalism in late Ottoman history and its influence on the trajectory of Turkish modernization cannot be overlooked. Second, while this neo-dependency paradigm is important, it alone does not fully explain Turkish modernization; this process must also be understood in the combined context of geopolitical pressures, internal societal tensions, the collective agency of political actors such as the Young Turks, and their hegemonic struggles. Third, both societal tensions and the agency of political actors are deeply connected to the evolving class dynamics in the late Ottoman era. While our historical-narrative analysis

builds on these insights, it shifts the focus of the modernization narrative toward revolution studies and revolutionary dynamics, with an expanded time frame that also includes the national struggle era. Therefore, the historical narrative proposed in this article presents the Turkish Revolution as a protracted *process* driven by geopolitical tensions, peripheral capitalism, class struggle, and hegemonic practices, which commenced in the late 17th century and was marked by two pivotal revolutionary moments, namely the 1908 and 1923 revolutions. Put differently, as the Marxian literature reveals, one cannot reduce the history of the Turkish Revolution to the period between 1918 and 1923, namely the national struggle era. On the contrary, comprehending the occurrences within this relatively brief timeframe requires a firm grasp of late Ottoman history in the *longue durée*. Given space constraints and the specific research objectives confined to investigating the *origins* and *main catalysts* of the Turkish Revolution, however, our inquiry will not be extended to the post-1923 period and delve into supplementary aspects such as gender dynamics, passionate politics, and Turkey's counter-revolutionary turn after the passing of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

3 Canonical Perspectives in Theorizing Revolutions: Towards a Unified Framework

Our analysis proceeds from a broad definition of revolution that encompasses “effort[s] to transform the [socio]political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities” (Goldstone, 2001: p. 142). It is important to note that this definition also accommodates instances of mobilization that do not fully attain their intended goals, such as China's 1911 Revolution and Turkey's 1908 Revolution, as well as relatively peaceful attempts and alternative modes of transformation enacted from the upper echelons of authority, including Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution (Kroeber, 1996: pp. 24–26; Goldstone, 2001; Beck, 2011: p. 169). Building upon this definition, we situate our conceptual exploration within the theoretical literature concerning the origins of revolutions, which has been notably categorized into four successive generations by Jack Goldstone (1982, 2001), a classification that continues to retain its primary status within the field. In what follows, we will evaluate these theories and address how they apply to the case of Turkey as part of our historical narratives.

Goldstone (2001: p. 140) categorizes the initial wave of revolutionary studies as the “natural-history school,” characterized by its reliance on “simple

descriptive generalizations” to discern shared patterns across revolutionary occurrences. This approach centers on the sequencing of events but does not systematically engage with the diversity of factors driving these revolutions (Sawyer Pettee, 1938; Brinton, 1965; Paterson Edwards, 1970; Goldstone, 1982). Within this framework, intellectuals and bureaucrats withdraw support from the regime prior to a major revolution, demanding reforms. The state may enact reforms in response, but this could result in a political crisis due to the state’s inability to fully address targeted issues, leading to the regime’s downfall. This is reminiscent of how the Ottoman reforms triggered revolutionary activities with the emergence of the Young Ottoman movement and the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, as will be explored in the ensuing sections. Moderates often seize state power initially, followed by more radical mass mobilization and new organizational forms. After successful revolutions, radical mass-mobilizing groups supplant moderates, leading to shifts in societal organization. The ensuing disorder and radical control often result in coercive rule. Struggles between radicals, moderates, and external foes enable military leaders to rise to prominence. Ultimately, the radical phase yields to pragmatism, embracing progress within the new status quo, as exemplified by the history of the 1789 French Revolution (Goldstone, 1982).

According to Goldstone, the second generation of revolution studies marks the beginning of systematic efforts at constructing general theories of revolution, notably emphasizing the fundamental catalysts driving revolutionary occurrences (Davies, 1962; Johnson, 1966; Gurr, 2010). These efforts, guided by perspectives in social psychology and functionalism, frequently depict revolutions as manifestations of irrational collective behavior. The central focus lies in elucidating how rapid modernization disturbs the societal balance, giving rise to heightened expectations and socioeconomic dislocation, thereby generating widespread grievances that drive individuals toward revolutionary mobilization (Goldstone, 1982). While the second-generation theories have the merit of transcending the under-theorized perspective of the first-generation theories, a significant drawback lies in their inability to tackle the intermediate determinants bridging mass grievances and the onset of revolutionary action, which are reduced to irrational endeavors.

The third-generation theories of revolution can be broadly categorized into two groups, namely those that adopt a class-analytical approach and those that adopt state-centered perspectives. Theda Skocpol emerges as a seminal figure within the state-centered literature on revolutions. In her elucidation of revolutionary phenomena, Skocpol (1979: pp. 17, 33) draws upon Wendell Phillips’ maxim, “revolutions are not made, they come”, contending that revolutions transpire subsequently to the breakdown of state mechanisms

across administrative, military, and economic spheres. Amidst these revolutionary dynamics, the configuration of global geopolitical forces and the escalation of international military and economic rivalries arise as pivotal catalysts in eroding the foundations of state institutions within countries susceptible to revolutions (Skocpol, 1979). This is perfectly exemplified by the Ottoman involvement in World War I and the subsequent state breakdown. Overall, one could argue that Skocpol's framework presents the benefit of offering a systematic study of the state's role in revolutions. However, it falls short of properly addressing the class dynamics and the subjective factors that also play a crucial part in shaping revolutionary processes.

Eric R. Wolf, Jeffery M. Paige, and Barrington Moore Jr. are notable figures in class-analytical literature. Wolf (1973) emphasizes the significance of the small and medium-sized peasantry in revolutionary movements due to their economic and cultural autonomy, isolation from elites, and strong ties to land and community. In turn, Paige (1978) focuses on the most impoverished segments of the peasantry, such as migrant workers and sharecroppers, who are vulnerable and appear to be more receptive to radical ideas. Unlike Wolf and Paige, Moore Jr's (1974) perspective extends beyond agrarian capitalism as the primary catalyst for revolutions. In particular, his exploration of cultural dynamics bridges structuralist viewpoints and fourth-generation theories by emphasizing paternalistic relationships between landowners and peasants as a factor that may limit revolutionary potential. Overall, these class-analytical perspectives are valuable for discerning the bourgeois character of the Turkish Revolution.

The fourth generation of revolution studies offers a multidimensional framework that takes into account the processual interplay between structural factors, as emphasized by class-analytical and state-centered theories, and subjective determinants, such as the role of agency, coalition dynamics, social networks, leadership characteristics, ideology, and cultural politics (Foran, 1993, 1997; Goldstone, 2001). In this context, structural factors refer to the fundamental and systemic aspects of political and socioeconomic organization shaping the environment in which social agents operate, whereas their subjective counterparts concern the role of collective agency, decision-making, and the influence of individuals or groups within a society. Relatedly, class-structural factors speak the social-class environment, or conditions shaping the environment in which social agents operate. As an example of how structural and subjective factors are addressed in the literature, Goodwin (2001) argues that revolutions necessitate political regimes prone to violence and sidelining mainstream opposition, akin to the Ottoman monarchy under Abdulhamid II's oppressive rule. Such regimes exhibit weak, under-bureaucratized state

structures and disintegrating militaries, often stemming from patrimonial state systems that fuel revolutionary movements. Goodwin combines these structural factors with subjective dynamics. For example, successful revolutions require diverse coalitions encompassing different classes, elites, and, if necessary, religious and ethnic groups. These coalitions can be strengthened through robust international backing (Goodwin, 2001). This framework will guide us in contextualizing the Soviet support and Mustafa Kemal's efforts at extending his revolutionary coalition to the Muslim merchant bourgeoisie, as well as Kurdish tribes and religious authorities.

In a similar vein, Goldstone (2016) highlights four key drivers of revolutionary conditions, namely economic crises, divisions among ruling elites, sociodemographic strains, and effective deployment of popular demands amidst declining official ideologies. Regarding the fourth factor, Goldstone (2016) emphasizes the importance of intellectual movements that can appeal to wider society, leveraging unifying ideologies like folk culture and nationalism. In Turkey's case, the ideological pragmatism of the Young Turk and national liberation movements, embracing both modernization efforts and Islamic values, is emblematic of these dynamics.

Foran explains revolutions by reference to political-economic, cultural, and international factors (Foran, 2005). Economically, the integration of Third World countries into global capitalism, exemplified by the Ottoman capitulations and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, leads to socio-economic disparities and popular discontent, especially under repressive regimes and economic crises. Culturally, a revolution's success hinges on accumulated struggles from historical contexts and a well-established tradition of popular resistance. A robust organizational structure, blending revolutionary ideologies with folk culture, as was the case in revolutionary secret organizations in the Ottoman Empire and grassroots organizations during the national struggle era (1918–1923), propels the revolutionary struggle's trajectory upward. Internationally, a conducive global environment with external pressures on oppressive states can trigger reforms, creating openings for revolutions (Foran, 2005). In the context of Turkey's War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal's advantage stemmed from several relevant factors, such as war fatigue among the Allied powers, discord among imperialist nations over Ottoman territories, and Soviet support.

According to Eric Selbin (1999: p. 66), "revolutions do not happen but are made," hence the pivotal role of leaders who possess both organizational acumen and forward-looking insight. Broadly speaking, effective revolutionary leaders, such as Mustafa Kemal and his commanders, combine strategic expertise, cohesive political agendas, adept organizational structures, cadre development, charismatic presence, and unifying ideologies that align

with broader societal aspirations, encouraging popular engagement. Selbin differentiates between organizational and visionary leadership, as part of a revolutionary vanguard organization. The latter is an idealist and charismatic variant that “combines a critique of the previous regime and society with a compelling vision of the future,” whereas the former has a more realistic disposition and can work “with the visionary leaders to create the social revolutionary strategy and to implement it” (Selbin, 1999: p. 68). While diverse leaders may manifest distinct traits, it is equally plausible for an individual figure to embody both traits to varying extents. This being said, Selbin cautions that a lack of balance between these two elements generates vulnerabilities in the longer term. Echoing Foran’s perspective, moreover, Selbin (1999) also underscores the catalytic influence of past national-democratic and revolutionary struggles as a historical legacy, which, in the case of Turkey, concerns the continuity of the Young Ottoman legacy in both modern and Islamic undertones. Notably, the success of a revolution significantly relies on the revolutionaries’ ability to rejuvenate collective societal memory deeply rooted in historical contexts.

Overall, the fourth-generation theories offer valuable insights into the subjective factors driving revolutions. However, many of these insights have emerged from isolated pursuits, lacking coordination and appearing somewhat “fragmented” (Beck, 2017: p. 183). This poses a potential challenge to constructing a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the history and political sociology of revolutions. Overcoming this challenge requires the development of a critical synthesis aimed at establishing a cohesive and unified theoretical framework. Within this framework, our theoretical review suggests categorizing the driving forces behind revolutions primarily into two clusters: institutional crises and collective agency (GürCAN, 2017, 2019).

Firstly, institutional crises represent the structural dynamics of revolutions arising from the convergence of two interrelated sub-factors. Regarding *administrative breakdown*, arbitrary practices such as excessive corruption and taxation under dictatorial regimes, combined with state repression and foreign pressures, amplify the revolutionary context. Feeble state institutions struggle to maintain order and legitimacy. During administrative crises, the weakened status of dominant classes and the disintegration of elite unity, including the military, significantly contribute to the revolutionary situation. Turning to the sub-factor of *socio-economic breakdown*, one must acknowledge the catalytic role of deepening economic disparities, class inequalities, economic crises, natural disasters, and indirect catalysts, such as mass migration and inter-communal conflicts. Additionally, the presence of strong community bonds, such as Islamic ties among Turkish communities, and demographic

concentration may play a significant role in reaction to these strains (Gürcan, 2017, 2019).

Secondly, collective agency addresses the subjective facet of revolutions, grouped into two sub-factors, namely leadership structure and ideational, or cultural, dynamics. Firstly, a cohesive collective leadership, endowed with strategic resources such as dedicated professional cadres, diverse collective action repertoires including conventional warfare and guerilla tactics, external resource support (e.g., the Soviet support in Turkey's case), an accumulated experience of political mobilization (e.g. secret societies and media mobilization), a robust popular base, and broad coalitions, is imperative. Secondly, successful revolutions often draw power from collective memory, a strong historical legacy of popular resistance, and the incorporation of folk elements, ultimately creating an appealing popular identity and ideology (Gürcan, 2017, 2019).

4 Structural Dynamics of the Turkish Revolution in the *Longue Durée*: Towards Administrative and Socio-Economic Breakdown in the Late Ottoman Era

Ottoman history spans six centuries, marked by distinct periods (Inalcik, 1997). The classical era (1300–1600) featured relatively centralized governance and a command economy, while the 17th century acted as a transitional period. The 18th century saw a more decentralized rule by local powers, embracing liberal policies of decentralization and Western influence. This shift increased Ottoman reliance on the West, or what Foran (2005) calls “dependent development,” culminating in the 19th century with heightened dependence and accelerated Westernization reforms (Inalcik, 1997: p. 1).

During the 16th century, trade played a pivotal role in Ottoman dominance on the world stage. The empire's extensive ventures, spanning regions like the Volga, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean, held significant economic importance. Military actions were intertwined with fiscal control over vital trade routes and resources, such as silk, construction materials, and food sources. However, the Ottoman Empire's position changed with the rise of the Atlantic economy, the advent of the English and Dutch in the Mediterranean, Europe's assertive mercantilism, and Ottoman military setbacks, exemplified by the pivotal 1571 Battle of Lepanto. The Ottoman monetary system declined due to the influx of cheap silver, cotton, and sugar from America, leading to a decline in its global economic significance in the 17th century (Inalcik, 1997: p. 4). As the 18th century progressed, moreover, the Ottoman Empire

struggled to match the swift technological progress of a burgeoning West, both economically and technologically, which led to a significant decline in Ottoman military capabilities, lagging behind Europe in various aspects of warfare. This discrepancy prompted a growing reliance on foreign military technology (Lewis, 2001: pp. 226–227). In response, the Ottomans sought reforms in their military and administrative structures. Sultan Selim III (1789–1807) initiated the first Ottoman reform endeavor, the *Nizam-i Cedid* (New Order), upon the Ottoman military defeats during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792. This program aimed to strengthen the central state organization, but its effectiveness proved limited. Subsequent reform efforts unfolded during Sultan Mahmud II's reign from 1826, followed by the *Tanzimat* period under the rule of Sultan Abdülmecit from 1839. These periods witnessed expanded secular education, the rise of modern intellectuals, and the growth of a nascent model bureaucracy (Koray, 1983; Ahmad, 1993; Zürcher, 2004; Çağan, 2012; Özkan and Gökğöz, 2014).

One could therefore argue that the Ottoman Empire's decline in both trade and military supremacy culminated in the erosion of its hegemonic as well as financial stature, causing it to be excluded from the broader trajectory of capitalist development witnessed in Europe. Notably significant in delineating how the Ottoman economy became locked in a path of *dependent development* is the 1838 Treaty of Balta Limanı with the United Kingdom. This treaty removed the Ottoman market monopoly, enabling British capitalists equal access under the same taxation terms as domestic investors. The Ottoman Empire's limited industrial capacity could not compete with British capitalism, impeding its endogenous growth. The failure of industrialization was compounded by substantial external borrowing, particularly during military involvements in the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Russo-Ottoman War (1877–1878). To manage Ottoman debts, the European-controlled Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) was established in 1881 (Noviçev, 1979; USSR Academy of Sciences, 1979; GürCAN and Mete, 2017: p. 39). By 1914, the Ottoman and Western economies were intricately linked, and the Ottoman Empire had transitioned from a dominant to a secondary and subordinate economic and military position, despite the Ottoman reformation efforts (Inalcik, 1997: p. 4).

Besides these reforms, the 1908 Revolution, whose agential dynamics will be explored in the next section, marked a pivotal moment in Turkey's endeavors to initiate a far-reaching socio-economic transformation within Ottoman society, while confronting, albeit unsuccessfully, the *dependent development* model that emerged in the reform era. Led by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), colloquially referred to as Unionism or the Young Turk movement, the revolution primarily aimed to reinstate the constitution against Sultan

Abdulhamid II's repressive rule, showcasing how Goodwin (2001) explains revolutions by reference to the catalytic role of patrimonial regimes (Gürcan and Mete, 2017: p. 40). Seen from the narrative of class-analytical theories of revolution, furthermore, one could argue that the CUP was primarily comprised of individuals with a "petit-bourgeois" class disposition. This encompassed disenchanted state elites originating from the lower echelons of the contemporary bureaucracy and intellectual circles. Additionally, modern professional groups, Anatolian shopkeepers, and small-scale Muslim capitalists formed part of this composition. Their involvement stemmed to a large extent from their class-structural position and concomitant resentment toward the prevailing prominence of non-Muslim capitalists (Petrosyan, 1974; Ergil, 1978: p. 19).

A core tenet of the Young Turk revolutionary agenda was the construction of a capitalist "national economy" via state-guided industrialization, exemplified by the *Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu Muvakkati* (Incentive for Industrialization) law in 1913. Therefore, the 1908 Revolution, whose organizational dynamics will be explored in the next section, sought to inaugurate a new phase of social reforms, albeit partially disrupted by the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the First World War (1914–1918). These conflicts deepened the Ottoman Empire's reliance on Western capitalism through heightened borrowing and foreign investments. Eventually, World War I precipitated a swift administrative and socio-economic breakdown within the Ottoman Empire, compounded by the profoundly negative impact on the agricultural sector as the backbone of the Ottoman economy. The aftermath bore witness to widespread famines and epidemics. These developments culminated in the Ottoman defeat in World War I and the ensuing Armistice of Mudros, ultimately sealing the empire's fate. The subsequent Western invasion of Anatolia further solidified the empire's downfall, which showcases how Skocpol (1979) associates revolutions with state breakdown (USSR Academy of Sciences, 1979, pp. 11, 19–20; Gürcan and Mete, 2017: pp. 40–41).

In a comprehensive assessment, we thereby propose a historical narrative that attributes the administrative and socio-economic breakdown within the Ottoman Empire to profound structural shifts spanning several centuries, starting from the late 17th century. This trajectory aligns with the prognostications of both first- and second-generation theories of revolution regarding the catalyzing role of modernization. The Ottoman decline instigated efforts toward modernization reforms, which ultimately proved unsuccessful and resulted in severe socio-economic dislocations. This disruption was particularly notable in the domains of military modernization and costly warfare efforts. Furthermore, these circumstances exacerbated the

fragmentation of Ottoman elites, amplifying the discord arising from elevated expectations. From a class-analytic perspective, the post-1908 revolutionary era displayed a distinct class orientation, marked by the petit-bourgeois drive to foster indigenous capitalism and replace the non-Muslim capitalists as the dominant bourgeois stratum within the Ottoman Empire. In line with the narratives of third-generation theories, moreover, these developments find their locus in the long-term trajectory of the state. The implementation of Ottoman modernization as “dependent development” provided fertile ground for inciting revolutionary upheavals. These spanned from the strain imposed by excessive government expenditures to flawed fiscal policies and incessant wartime mobilizations. Furthermore, the Ottoman state’s patrimonial nature, marked by an exclusionary approach, compelled the reformist elite—chiefly the CUP—to pursue revolutionary means in their endeavor to overhaul the regime. Nonetheless, the outcome of the 1908 Revolution, despite its ambitions to modernize the Ottoman Empire, proved inadequate, pushing the state perilously close to financial insolvency. Coupled with the escalation of geopolitical rivalries preceding World War I, our historical narrative suggests that the revolutionary path emerged as the sole recourse to address the Ottoman Empire’s decline.

5 Subjective Dynamics of the Turkish Revolution: Collective Agency and Cultural Mobilization

From the perspective of fourth-generation theories, intellectual movements and revolutionary organizations play a pivotal role as catalysts for successful revolutions, spurring the collective agency indispensable for socioeconomic transformation. Moreover, such organizations’ adeptness in orchestrating change often mirrors the historical experience and accrued legacy of their antecedents. In the context of the Turkish Revolution, it is thereby imperative to acknowledge the historical continuum linking the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements to the emergence of the modern Turkish Republic. Strongly influenced by European intellectual currents such as the 1848 movements, liberalism, and nationalism, the Young Ottoman movement was driven by its dissatisfaction with the limited scope of the reforms within the Ottoman Empire (Koray, 1983; Ahmad, 1993; Zürcher, 2004; Çağan, 2012; Özkan and Gökgöz, 2014). Employing journalism as their medium of expression, they embarked on a quest to navigate the confluence of European liberal tenets and the intricate fabric of Islamic traditions, with their underlying aspiration rooted in the establishment of a constitutional and parliamentary system (Petrosyan, 1974; Zürcher, 2004; Çağan, 2012).

Central to this movement was the pivotal role of intellectuals, such as Namık Kemal, Şinasi, Ziya Paşa, and Ali Suavi, whose profound influence was channelled into a broad narrative that bridged the chasm between European liberal thought and the spiritual ethos of Islam. The seminal inception of the *İttifak-i Hamiyet* (Alliance of Patriotism) in 1865, modelled along the contours of Italy's Carbonari, marked a significant milestone. This clandestine society embarked on an ardent mission to manifest a constitutional and parliamentary order, providing an intellectual and organizational foundation for progressive change (Petrosyan, 1974; Zürcher, 2004; Çağan, 2012).

As the 19th century progressed, the Young Turks emerged as a new cohort of Turkish modernizers, driven by a strong faith in modern science and biological materialism as well as a belief that modernization and Westernization were the sole avenues to material progress and political strength. The Young Turks, despite not being ardent ideologues, demonstrated pragmatic effectiveness in using an eclectic discourse influenced by Turkish nationalism, Islamic unity, Westernism, liberalism, and statism to galvanize resistance during and after World War I (Zürcher, 2010). Continuing the trajectory set by the Young Ottoman legacy, albeit with a diminished Islamic discourse that accommodates more secular manifestations of secularism and nationalism (Akşit and Akşit, 2010: p. 75), *İttihad-ı Osmanî Cemiyeti* (Committee of Ottoman Union) was established in 1889 on the centenary of the French Revolution. The primary goal of this movement was to overthrow Sultan Abdülhamit II's autocratic rule and establish a constitutional and parliamentary system, aligning with the Ottoman Empire's prior experiment with suspended constitutionalism in 1878. During Abdülhamit II's reign, rigorous censorship stifled political discourse within Ottoman media. In its early phase of about 15 years, the Young Turk movement focused on gatherings, pamphlets, and secret newspapers. In 1906, the "Ottoman Freedom Society" emerged, mostly led by civilian founders and later gaining prominence among officers in the Third and Second Ottoman Armies stationed in Macedonia and Thrace. Initially the Ottoman Freedom Society, it became "Society for Progress and Union" prior to the successful 1908 revolution, later rebranded as the CUP. Initiation into the organization was meticulously regulated, involving a guide sponsoring a prospective member, the member's interrogation by masked men in gowns, and a solemn oath using a Quran and revolver, akin to Western secret societies, such as the Italian Carbonari and the Freemasons (Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

From a structural perspective, the 1908 Revolution, often seen as a response to the Sultan's repressive rule, was influenced by a variety of different factors, including a deep-rooted economic crisis sparked by price increases since

1894 and compounded by adversities like Anatolian crop failures and the Greco-Turkish War of 1897. This created a fertile ground for popular unrest, notably in eastern urban centers. Amid the economic crisis, shared demands emerged for the removal of arbitrary officials, curbing corruption, and easing tax burdens. Concurrently, the Young Turks escalated propaganda efforts between 1905 and 1908, inciting uprisings with local associations, clandestine publications, and newspapers. Exiled Young Turks established strong domestic communication networks, even collaborating with Armenian groups to extend their influence, which set the stage for the revolution (Petrosyan, 1974; Kansu, 2002).

On July 23, 1908, Sultan Abdülhamit II was forced to reinstate the suspended parliament and constitution, when the insurrection gained increasing traction within the Ottoman military ranks (Findley, 1986; Kars, 1997; Kansu, 2002). However, the Unionists were divided among themselves, and the Unionist section led by Enver Pasha, who insisted on the need for consolidating the CUP's power and pursuing a militarized foreign policy, orchestrated a military coup in 1913. After the coup, the CUP gained greater control of the state, pushing for further secularization, eroding religious authority, and launching the *Millî İktisat* [National Economy] initiative to create a national bourgeoisie under state guidance. Muslim traders, guild members, and bureaucrats were recruited for this purpose (Ahmad, 1993; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Therefore, one could argue that the cultural-ideological and organizational dynamics that drove the Turkish Revolution were rooted in the legacy of the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements. A strong case in point is Mustafa Kemal, whose revolutionary outlook was strongly shaped by Namık Kemal's work during his studies at the War College in Istanbul (Mango, 2004). Moreover, most Young Turks came of age in the 1880s and 1890s in the Balkans, Aegean, or Istanbul, where they closely witnessed the ascent of the Christian bourgeoisie. This proximity to European economic integration since the late 18th century exposed them to the cosmopolitan modernity embodied by the Ottoman Christian bourgeoisie. However, the Young Turks, acutely aware of their financial struggles as young officers and bureaucrats compared to the prosperity of non-Muslims, fostered a collective identity in opposition to them. This is exemplified by the Ottoman Freedom Society's exclusion of non-Muslims when founded in Salonica in 1906. The profound trauma of losing Balkan provinces and Aegean islands, regions deeply cherished by half of the Young Turk leaders, left an indelible mark. To them, Anatolia emerged as the last bastion, a homeland to be safeguarded at any cost. Mustafa Kemal specifically worked to anchor Anatolia as the historic heartland of the Turks (Zürcher, 2010).

From a class-structural perspective, Feroz Ahmad (1969) suggests that the Young Turks were primarily from the “lower middle class,” forming part of the emerging professional strata. As pointed out by Toprak (1995), relatedly, the Young Turks also played a pivotal agential role in the expansion of incorporated companies, which points to how these structural dynamics translate into agential practices. Prior to 1908, the number of such companies stood at a mere 86. However, with the advent of the period between 1908 and 1918, there was a notable surge, witnessing the emergence of 236 new companies, the majority of which originated in the Turkish-Islamic community (Toprak, 1995). Moreover, Thessaloniki and Istanbul held strategic significance as bastions of the CUP, with the backing of the local merchant bourgeoisie serving as a pivotal factor in the party’s expansion. Following the Ottoman Empire’s loss of Thessaloniki in 1912, also known as Mustafa Kemal’s hometown, the locus of the CUP’s influence shifted to Istanbul, where it garnered backing from Islamic shopkeepers. Notably, this shift spurred the proliferation of shopkeepers’ associations, challenging the dominance of the non-Muslim-oriented Istanbul Chamber of Commerce. These associations were subsequently consolidated under the banner of the *Esnafklar Cemiyeti* (Shopkeepers’ Society) (Toprak, 1995; Tomali, 2022). One should also note that the Young Turks’ bourgeois class position is also evident in their restrictive approach to labor, as seen in the 1909 Strikes Law, which curtailed the rights to strike and unionize in response to the post-1908 revolution strike wave across the Empire (Bübül, 2010).

Regarding ethno-religious cleavages, it is pertinent to highlight that Ottoman Muslim nationalism gained momentum in 1912 due to the influx of refugees following Ottoman territorial losses in the Balkans, exacerbating ethnic tensions. In the aftermath of the 1913 coup, Armenian nationalists hoped for an independent state in eastern Anatolia after a potential Russian victory, further fueled by World War I-era Russian propaganda. Amid these circumstances, large numbers of Armenians joined the Russian army, leading to Ottoman deportations and subsequent massacres, which are often depicted as *genocidal*. By mid-1915, Armenians were forcefully displaced from eastern and central Anatolia. Estimates of Armenian casualties vary, with Turkish sources suggesting around 200 000 deaths and Armenian sources indicating higher figures. The Turkish perspective attributes inter-communal violence to a lack of Ottoman government control rather than orchestrated policies, while Armenian sources allege systematic government involvement and support the genocide thesis (Petrosyan, 1974; Zürcher, 2004).

The CUP’s authority was further consolidated against the backdrop of World War I. As highlighted by Toprak (1995), the Unionists viewed this global conflict as an opportunity to launch a war of independence. This was also seen as a

strategic window to diminish the Ottoman Empire's economic dependency, which led to the abolition of the capitulations, the introduction of protectionist trade policies, the imposition of more robust regulatory controls on Western enterprises, and even nationalizations, notably concerning enterprises linked to the British and French capital (Toprak, 1995). In this context, one could depict the 1908 Revolution as a protracted bourgeois-revolutionary progression that extended from the early 1900s through the era of World War I.

Regarding military conflicts, one should also address the military aspects of the CUP leadership. Roughly two-thirds of the early Unionist members had a military background, which significantly shaped their approach to problem-solving due to their experiences in the military (Zürcher, 2004, 2010). Among the CUP-affiliated officers, a distinct subgroup formed, including elite figures such as Enver, Kâzım, Fethi and Mustafa Kemal, who developed personal connections with lower-ranking officers. A considerable number of CUP-affiliated officers served with the Third Army, stationed in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia, where they accumulated a diverse range of experiences that would prove extremely valuable during the post-World War national struggle period. Their time in these regions exposed them to modern European culture, as well as the persistent guerrilla warfare waged by Greek, Serbian, Albanian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian bands. Before the eruption of the Balkan Wars, the CUP had decided to establish "Ottoman national bands" modelled after Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian counterparts. They even adopted the Serbian and Bulgarian terms for guerrilla bands, namely *Çete* (bands) and *Komitacı* (Committee advocates). Echoing with fourth-generation narratives on the legacy of past struggles and experiences, *Çete* actions played an igniting role in the early phases of the national struggle era, branded as the *Kuva-yı Milliye* (National Forces) movement. During Italy's invasion of Tripolitania in 1911, when regular Ottoman forces could not reach the region, Unionist officers like Enver, Fethi and Mustafa Kemal, along with Unionist *fedaiin* (Men of Sacrifice), organized guerrilla units comprising Arab tribes. Similarly, when the Balkan War erupted in 1912, the *fedaiin* were tasked with initiating guerrilla operations in Western Thrace, an area disputed among the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, and Greece (Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Eventually, this group of Young Turk officers and *fedaiin*, who were involved in guerrilla efforts, formed the core of the *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa* (Special Organization), officially founded in 1914. During the Italian invasion of Tripolitania in 1911, many officers had volunteered for anti-Italian guerrilla efforts, operating under staff officers like Enver, Fethi, and Mustafa Kemal. A year later, amid the Balkan War, these officers were tasked with establishing a guerrilla movement and even creating an ostensibly independent Muslim

republic in Western Thrace. In the face of imminent allied advancement at the Dardanelles in 1915 and the inevitability of World War I defeat in 1918, the CUP leadership laid the groundwork for a guerrilla war in Anatolia. When this guerrilla war began in 1919 under the banner of the *Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti* (Society for the Defence of the National Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia, or Defense Societies), the Special Organization's volunteers and provincial CUP leaders took a leading role, applying the insights they had gained in the Balkans. Simultaneously with Mustafa Kemal's widely publicized arrival in Samsun on May 19, 1919, the second key figure in the resistance, former Navy Minister Hüseyin Rauf Orbay, undertook a comparatively discreet journey across Western Anatolia. During this journey, he quietly visited Special Organization veterans who, like him, were Circassians. Additionally, he provided these veterans with access to arms caches associated with the Special Organization (Masngo, 2004; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Therefore, from the perspective of fourth-generation narratives, the profound historical continuity between the leadership structures of the Young Turks and the Kemalist Revolution cannot be emphasized enough. The Young Turk officers who had shaped their careers over the past decade rallied behind the war of national resistance upon Turkey's invasion in the aftermath of World War I (1918–1922). To put it differently, nearly all the Kemalist figures who succeeded the Unionists after World War I and went on to establish the new Turkish Republic were former CUP members. A significant portion of the political leadership driving the Kemalist Revolution were acquainted with one other from the Istanbul War College and had actively participated in pivotal events: the constitutional revolution of 1908, the quelling of an Islamist counterrevolutionary attempt in April 1909 by the *Operational Army* (*Hareket Ordusu*) whose Chief of Staff was Mustafa Kemal, the coordination of Bedouin resistance in Tripolitania against Italian invaders in 1911, the adversity of the Balkan War in 1913, and the experiences during and after World War I (Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Following the Armistice of Mudros in 1918, the Unionist leadership took a pivotal step before the war's end by establishing *Karakol*, a defensive group meant to shield Unionists from potential retaliation in the postwar period, while fortifying resistance efforts in Anatolia and the Caucasus. This initiative, led by Talât and Enver Pashas, found its founders in Colonel Kara Vasif and Kara Kemal. Their strategy involved forming regional Defense Societies and *Çetes* to champion a nationwide struggle, starting in late 1918. Between November 1918 and March 1920, *Karakol* covertly transported a significant number of Unionist officers to Anatolia. This group also supplied arms and resources to the budding resistance movement. *Karakol*'s intelligence network gleaned

information from government offices in Istanbul after the British occupation of Istanbul (Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

As the resistance grew, the need for authoritative leadership emerged. Mustafa Kemal, a former middle-ranked CUP member with a strong military background, proved to be an ideal candidate. Local *Müdafaa-i Hukuk* societies were established across Turkey, often led by local notables and religious figures. Congresses were organized to reinforce the *national* character of these *local* societies and establish a hegemonic sense of unity (Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2004, 2010). These organizations grew from the spontaneous local support of Muslim merchants and landowners who merged their forces with veterans and Unionists, given their vested interests in opposing Greek and Armenian claims (Mango, 2004). As such, Taner Timur (2013: p. 21) depicts the national struggle movement (1918–1923), from a class-analytical perspective, as a revolutionary war characterized by the “vanguard role of petite-bourgeoisie [including the Anatolian merchant bourgeoisie and the civil-military intellectual strata] and feudal landlords.” This trend continued throughout Anatolia and Thrace between November 1918 and June 1919.

Mustafa Kemal emerged as a realist and experienced leader reputed for his exceptional organizational abilities, charismatic stature, and visionary traits (Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004). He was involved in conspirational activities during his time at the Staff College. He had been active in early secret societies, both in Damascus in 1905 and Salonica in 1906. During this time, he co-founded the *Vatan ve Hürriyet Cemiyeti* (Fatherland and Freedom Society) with former classmates, who were to later join the CUP. His involvement in the CUP began in 1907. His leadership talents shone during various critical junctures. He remained a CUP member for a brief period, because he maintained a critical stance towards CUP policies and was later marginalized as a dissenter. He initiated autonomous efforts during the War of Independence, although he did have close interactions with CUP officials in the post-1908 period. Prior to the War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal had played a significant role in suppressing the counterrevolution of 1909, and his military success during the Dardanelles campaign in 1915 had further solidified his reputation. Notably, his lack of political involvement during World War I due to his critical stance against the CUP and subsequent political isolation, made him an appealing candidate for post-war leadership. In fact, Mustafa Kemal's critique of the CUP had begun soon after he spent a few months within its ranks. His criticism primarily centered on the party's shortcomings as to its absence of a well-defined leadership structure, undermining the chain of command due to military involvement in politics, pursuing excessively violent tactics, and lacking a broader vision beyond the restoration of the constitution. Over time,

these critiques also extended to encompass doubts about forging a closer alliance with Germany (Tevetoğlu, 1989; Kinross, 2001; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Mustafa Kemal's authority over the armed forces remained strong despite his dismissal by the Istanbul government and political isolation within the CUP, thanks to the support of loyal commanders. However, during the national struggle, friction arose with the Unionist cadres who had organized regional resistance movements. These cadres, particularly those from Istanbul-based Karakol, showed some degree of independence, conducting their own negotiations and considering alternatives to Mustafa Kemal's leadership which was overshadowing their authority. In the meantime, the revelation of the cooperation between Karakol and Anatolian nationalists played a pivotal role in prompting the British to officially occupy Istanbul in 1920. While underground activities in Istanbul persisted after the occupation, the subsequent detainment and deportation of prominent *Karakol* figures to Malta served to consolidate Mustafa Kemal's leadership at the expense of the CUP (Tevetoğlu, 1989; Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2004, 2010).

Even before Karakol's suppression, the turning point in the national liberation movement came when Mustafa Kemal was dispatched to Anatolia by the Ottoman War Ministry in 1919, ostensibly to assess the prevailing circumstances and establish the general order. Showcasing Mustafa Kemal's political leadership skills in addition to his military and organizational genius, this crucial assignment materialized "after five months of politicking in Istanbul [and through] his links with the palace and his contacts with ... Freedom and Concord Party" (Mango, 2004: p. 235). Mustafa Kemal arrived in Samsun on May 19, 1919, initiating efforts to unify the various regional organizations into a cohesive national movement. In June 1919, Mustafa Kemal met with his commanders in Amasya to draft up a circular calling for national congresses. In line with how fourth-generation narratives attribute a chief role to the formation of broad coalitions in successful revolutions, one should emphasize that these congresses played a pivotal role in unifying diverse elements of the national resistance movement, encompassing local merchant bourgeoisie, religious leaders, military figures, and civil officials. They were recognized as the primary conduit for consolidating the unified efforts of the national resistance and building the broadest coalition possible (Çevik, 2002). In addition to engaging the local merchant bourgeoisie, religious figures, and officials, Mustafa Kemal gave particular emphasis to the incorporation of Kurdish tribes into the movement, notably during his time in Samsun. Consequently, a substantial majority of Kurdish tribes are documented to have aligned themselves with the cause of national liberation. Their involvement was evident not only in congresses and the mobilization of Defense Societies

but also in the *Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Grand National Assembly) and the armed resistance (Perinçek, 1999: pp. 113–114, 117–122).

A significant milestone in this pursuit was reached with the convening of the Erzurum Congress in July 1919. Erzurum's strategic importance came from its status as “the ‘capital’ of eastern Turkey ..., placed where its mountain barriers converge in the direction of the Persian and Transcaucasian frontiers ... [as] a military stronghold ... [and] a bastion of Turkish defence against a series of Russian invasions” (Kinross, 2001: p. 220). In closer proximity to the Soviet Union, the city was situated at a considerable distance from the zones under Western occupation, controlling both western regions and coastlines. With Mustafa Kemal being elected as the chairman, the Erzurum Congress brought together representatives from various resistance organizations in the Black Sea region and eastern Anatolia (Kinross, 2001). Worthy of note regarding the class composition of this congress is that the Erzurum Congress is estimated to have had 54 to 56 delegates. Of the 54 known delegates, 17 were well-off farmers, merchants, and notables, representing the petty bourgeoisie and making up the largest group at around 30.4 to 31.5%. The other groups included 5 retired military officers (8.9–9.3%), 4 retired officials (7.1–7.4%), 5 teachers (8.9–9.3%), 4 journalists (7.1–7.4%), 5 lawyers (8.9–9.3%), 2 engineers (3.6–3.7%), 1 doctor (1.8–1.9%), 6 religious leaders (10.7–11.1%), 3 former parliamentarians (5.4–5.6%), 1 commander (1.8–1.9%), and 1 former minister (1.8–1.9%) (Ersal, 2016: p. 28). If one includes in the petty bourgeois category the new professional groups such as lawyers, engineers, teachers, doctors, and journalists, the representation of the petty bourgeois sectors could be estimated to be even larger, further highlighting the bourgeois composition and influence within the congress.

In this period, the national struggle relied on a flexible approach that included elements of “diplomacy, planned popular rising, guerilla and open warfare” (Kinross, 2001: p. 232). In September 1919, yet another congress convened in Sivas, deemed the safest city in Anatolia, with the hope of consolidating fragmented wartime endeavors and securing the allegiance of commanders at a national echelon. The congress fostered a deliberative and inclusive atmosphere that cultivated some sense of hegemonic consent within the national movement. Eventually, these congresses became the national executive of the resistance movement and drew up the strategic blueprint for the national struggle (Ahmad, 1993; Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2004). One should note that the delegates of the Sivas Congress, which included former military officers, religious authorities, and Ottoman officials, also notably featured intellectuals, such as writers Emir İsmail Hami Bey and Hakkı Behiç Bey, as well as representatives of a emerging professional groups,

like lawyer Osman Nuri Bey, law student Necip Ali Bey, and medical student Hikmet Bey, and a significant number of merchants and wealthy farmers, such as Halil İbrahim Efendi (quarry owner), Mehmed Şükrî Bey (merchant), Yusuf Bey (wealthy farmer and merchant), Macid Bey (merchant), Ratibzade Mustafa Efendi (merchant), Bahri Bey (merchant), Süleyman Bey (merchant), and Katibzade Nuh Naci (merchant) (Sancaktar, 2020: pp. 490–491). This composition highlights the growing representation of bourgeois elements within the congress, reflecting the rising influence of new professional and commercial classes in the political arena.

As highlighted by fourth-generation narratives, therefore, the political-cultural dynamics of revolutionary processes should not be overlooked. Whilst manufacturing hegemonic consent is part of such dynamics, these hegemonic efforts were also extended to press activism in the case of the Turkish Revolution. During the Sivas Congress, for example, Mustafa Kemal encouraged the publication of a newspaper called *İrade-i Milliye* (National Will). Right from the outset, Mustafa Kemal had discerned the crucial significance of newspapers in the context of revolutionary struggles. This understanding was evident even during his time as a student at the Military Academy (1899–1902), where he keenly observed the deteriorating condition of the nation. In response, he took the initiative to create a critical newspaper in his own handwriting, a move that led to disciplinary measures when the school administration unearthed his activities. In November 1918, during his stay in Istanbul, he embarked upon the establishment of a newspaper titled *Minber* (Tribune) (Özkaya, 2001a: pp. 16–17). At the Sivas congress, Mustafa Kemal proposed the resolution to launch a newspaper with the intent of clarifying the essence of the National Struggle to the public and effectively responding to the propagandistic endeavors of those who were against the cause. Additionally, this newspaper assumed a diplomatic role by providing backing for endeavors aimed at fostering positive relations with France. Beyond its critique of the monarchy and fingering the sultanate as the main culprit, the newspaper also elaborated on the benefits of modernization, consequently propelling the cultural dynamics of the revolution forward. The majority of the newspaper's content was generated based on directives issued by Mustafa Kemal (Özkaya, 2001b; Çağdaş, 2020).

Accompanied by a combination of press activism as well as regular and guerilla forces, the culmination of national resistance efforts was the formation of the Great National Assembly in April 1920, another significantly hegemonic attempt to consolidate consensual unity. Shortly before the establishment of the Grand National Assembly, moreover, Mustafa Kemal played a pivotal role in the inception of the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (National Sovereignty) newspaper. The prevailing belief is that the majority of the editorials featured in this newspaper

were either authored by Mustafa Kemal or drafted under his direction. This newspaper not only framed the struggle for national independence as a confrontation against capitalism and imperialism, but also highlighted the Soviet governance model as an exemplar, albeit discursively. Beyond its function as a vehicle for advancing the cause of the National Struggle and galvanizing public support by also appealing to Islamic values, the newspaper served as a diplomatic instrument aimed at nurturing relations with the Soviet Union (Özkaya, 2001b; Milliye, 2004; Dođramaciođlu, 2021).

Speaking of Islamic values and their role in manufacturing hegemonic consent, the objective of preserving the independence and unity of Ottoman Muslims was evident in Mustafa Kemal's eyes at the outset of the national resistance in 1918. When Istanbul was occupied by the Allies in 1918, he appealed to *Allah* (Muslim God) and called for a holy war to liberate the caliph. Religious rituals accompanied major events during this period, with even alcohol being prohibited by the Great National Assembly, showcasing a strong religious facet in order to build a broader coalition of revolutionary forces. When his authority and the decisions of the Grand National Assembly came under challenge, Mustafa Kemal mobilized the *ulema*, the religious authority in Ankara, to issue *fetvas*, which are religious opinions promulgated by esteemed religious authorities. Mustafa Kemal concealed the full extent of his revolutionary design until the victory of the national struggle. Ultimately, after the victory in 1922, a swift ideological shift occurred. With the conclusion of the national emergency, the need for mass mobilization diminished, leading to a departure from the Muslim nationalism championed from 1912 to 1922 (Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2010).

Eventually, the Great National Assembly, together with representatives from the local branches of Defence Societies, established Ankara as the headquarters of the nationalist movement and effectively transitioned the resistance movement into a functioning government and a regular army to oppose the Greeks. Ankara stood out as the sole secure Anatolian city with railway connections to the West, while also experiencing substantial public backing for the national liberation movement. Against his backdrop, domestic issues hindered the Western powers from direct involvement in Turkey. As a result, the Italian and French governments gradually settled with Turkish nationalists, dissolving the pretense of Allied collaboration. The British found themselves alone in backing an overextended Greek army struggling to maintain conquered land. The Turkish-Greek war persisted until 1922, when Turkey retook Izmir in September. This paved the way for the Turkish victory over the Greek forces and ultimately led to the signing of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, effectively concluding the National War of Independence in favor of

Turkey (Gençosman, 1980; Ahmad, 1993; Kinross, 2001; Mango, 2004; Zürcher, 2010).

On October 29, 1923, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* (the Republic of Turkey) was officially declared. However, almost a year prior, on November 1, 1922, the Ottoman sultanate had been abolished. This late strategic move, guided by Mustafa Kemal's hegemonic vision, aimed to prevent fractures within the national resistance movement. The dynasty itself was not entirely dissolved until March 1924. Following the removal of the last sultan in November 1922, his cousin Abdülmecit Efendi was appointed as the caliph, maintaining a link to the previous regime. This sequence of events vividly underscores Mustafa Kemal's strategic acumen as the leader of the Turkish Revolution (Zürcher, 2004).

Finally, Mustafa Kemal's strategic leadership skills are also evident in his diplomatic efforts towards the Soviet Union. As emphasized by third- and fourth-generation narratives, external support constitutes a pivotal element in revolutionary dynamics. This aspect is equally applicable to Turkey's case, notably in terms of Soviet aid that extended to geostrategic, financial, and logistical domains. Between 1920 and 1922, Mustafa Kemal initiated diplomatic appeals to Soviet Russia for an uneasy alliance, aligning against perceived imperialist powers just days after the Turkish Grand National Assembly commenced on April 23, 1920. Supported by the journalistic efforts of *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, this diplomatic endeavor bore fruit as the Bolshevik government extended substantial financial and military support to the Turkish national forces, effectively contributing to Mustafa Kemal's triumph. Soviet support was grounded in Moscow's commitment to anti-colonial principles and geopolitical considerations that positioned Turkey as a strategic buffer against Western influence. Notably, this assistance was pivotal in safeguarding the Turkish Revolution's eastern boundaries and fortifying the region against Western forces that held sway over the western territories and coastlines. During this period, a number of agreements were formalized between Turkey and the Soviet Union, including the Moscow Agreement on March 16, 1921, and the Turkish-Ukraine Agreement on January 2, 1922. As indicated by records from the Turkish General Staff-Military History and Strategic Study Directorate (TGS-ATASE) archives, the aid included an array of weaponry and equipment from Russia, including infantry rifles, ammunition, machine guns, cannons, grenades, and other resources. A substantial portion of Russia's annual aid of 10 million gold rubles had also been delivered, amounting to six and a half million gold rubles (Hirst, 2013; Karakuş, 2023).

Overall, our historical narrative posits that the success of the Kemalist Revolution can largely be attributed to the continued legacy of the Young

Ottoman and Young Turkish movements, which were grounded in the pragmatic and unifying tenets of a motivating nationalist ideology. This inheritance is also evident in the establishment of a robust organizational framework, tactical flexibility, and extensive collective action repertoires, encompassing secret societies, conspirational actions, mass mobilization since the 1908 Revolution, press activism, guerrilla tactics, and open warfare. Furthermore, the resilience of this organizational structure is demonstrated in the adoption of innovative and hegemonic strategies, such as convening national congresses that served as the driving force behind the revolution's executive leadership, comprising a broad coalition. Notably, the presence of a cadre of experienced leaders sharing common professional and intellectual backgrounds, combined with Mustafa Kemal's visionary and organizational leadership, played an equally pivotal role in the triumph of the Kemalist Revolution.

5 Conclusion

We began this study with a *theoretical review* of canonical literature on revolutions, aiming to construct an integrative theoretical model that surpasses the fragmented nature often found in fourth-generation theories of revolution. Our model interprets revolutionary outbursts not as single-occurring events, but rather as outcomes of an extended historical process shaped by a combination of structural factors—including administrative and socioeconomic breakdown—and subjective elements, such as leadership and cultural dynamics. This constituted the first step in our *historical narrative analysis*, followed by a narrative exploration in which we formulated conceptual narratives elucidating the core factors underlying the Turkish Revolution across a broad temporal span extending from the late 17th century to 1923.

Our narrative account offers a systematic and holistic analysis of Turkey's revolutionary process, which was shaped by the external context of dependent development arising from the Ottoman Empire's decline in both trade and military prowess since the late 17th century. The dislocating consequences of this dependency were exacerbated by a combination of military defeats, Westernization initiatives, and external borrowing. These factors heightened tensions between traditional authority and the emerging modern elites, leading to disillusionment with the monarchy. The climax of these tensions was seen during the tumultuous period of World War I, which eventually led to state breakdown.

A significant turning point conducive to revolutionary outbursts was the 1908 Revolution, characterized by a "petit-bourgeois" disposition that later came

to harbor increasing resentment towards the non-Muslim bourgeoisie. This revolution set in motion revolutionary dynamics well before 1923, fueled by a relatively robust organizational structure and intellectual underpinnings rooted in the legacies of the Young Ottomans. The same era also led to the accumulation of a diverse array of collective action repertoires, spanning secret societies and military plots to media activism, mass mobilization, guerrilla tactics, and open warfare. Notably, the thread of continuity between the Young Ottomans, Unionism, and Kemalism, as well as that connecting the Special Organization, Karakol, Defense Societies, and the Çetes, is worth underscoring in this regard.

This being said, the robust organizational structure inherited from the CUP was further fortified by a tightly knit cohort of experienced revolutionary leaders who, from a cultural perspective, merged modernist ideology with Islamic discourse, yielding a unique and compelling ideological blend rooted in Young Ottomanism. This dual appeal, bolstered by the potency of the organizational structure, specifically through national congresses, press activism, and the establishment of the Grand National Assembly, engendered a hegemonic sense of unity and inclusion. Hegemonic mobilization succeeded in rallying a diverse coalition comprising civil-military officials, the merchant bourgeoisie, religious authorities, and even Kurdish tribes. In addition to these factors, the organizational acumen and visionary leadership of Mustafa Kemal cannot be understated. He stood out among potential leaders thanks to his realism, practicality, inspiring demeanor, and charismatic presence, coupled with tactical flexibility. Finally, the support from the Soviet Union and the assurance of security on the eastern front due to its geopolitical presence played a pivotal role in the success of the Kemalist revolution.

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