# The Kurdish Question:
# The Black Holes of Democracy

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### Introduction

The Kurdish Question is one of those continuities of violence, protest, and repression that persist in history even though everything speaks in favor of a simple solution: to put down the arms and begin living together. All would have little to lose and much to gain. The Kurdish Question is one of those unresolved problems of national integration inherited from the state-building era of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, when territorial borders were justified by ethnic, religious, and linguistic homogeneity, and negotiated through historical continuities and economic interests. Similar problems remained unresolved in the Basque region between France and Spain, in the Caspian region, and in the Balkans, as well as in the more peaceful North, where the Sami Question also persists as an example of unrealized national integration. The Yalta Pact and the Cold War froze the integration process for decades in the Soviet-dominated area.

Currently the Kurdish Question is not directly related to world politics, although nothing in the eastern Mediterranean region is immune to it. The Syrian conflict will soon involve and complicate this issue also, as it does for any political problem in the area; Syria is a neighbor to Turkey, with its substantial Kurdish population. The Kurdish Question arose when the Republic of Turkey was formed after the First World War, covering a territory with a significant part of the Kurdish ethnic population. Ernest Gellner showed that modern nation-states had to be built in areas he called "Ruritanias," rural areas with weak or non-existent aristocracies, on the basis of cultural identities that were only in the process of formation.[1] Language, mythical genetic histories of national origins, folklore, and religion

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1. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

were all key elements of this formation, which is why the educated middle class (teachers, clergy, and civil servants), who joined forces with artists and intellectuals, enjoyed a key position during the "discovery" of these imagined communities of nations. The Republic of Turkey, built on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, was a typical case, but it had important special features, one of which is Kurdish Question.

In this article, I analyze the Turkish nation-building process and compare it to other similar ones, especially those of the Nordic countries. As even the present Turkish government, led by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, accepts, the solution to the Kurdish Question depends on the general democratization process of Turkish society. The question is: Why has a solution to the issue of national integration seen no progress in Turkey, as it has in other newly built nation-states since the beginning of the twentieth century? The argument suggests that on both the Turkish and Kurdish sides of the conflict, there are "black holes," cultural perceptions of the "other" (Kurds and Turks respectively) with a gravity so strong that they absorb all efforts to negotiate and to build democratic institutions. The argument rests on Gellner's nation-building theory and on Jacques Donzelot's Durkheimian view of republicanism.

### The Will of the People

According to Gellner's theory, the Ruritanias, having become nations, were by definition states of the people, which is why most of them were republics. In the remaining monarchies the power of the sovereign was and remains weak. The state had to be governed by law, bureaucracy, and independent courts, not by the will of the sovereign, military force, or mafias. In a republic, the law represents the Will of the People or, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau called it in the eighteenth century, the General Will (*volonté générale*). That will is sacred, and no one who wishes to belong to the Nation can defy it. It is the sacred, unifying, and universalistic republicanism of the new nations that gave rise to policies that we in Western Europe would now see as repression of the autonomy of individuals. This is a paradox that is in no way unique to Turkey. The extreme form of unifying republicanism was Jacobinism, an individualistic egalitarianism that continued long after the French Revolution, also among the English working class when it was developing into a political force.[2] Traces of it were evident even in late eighteenth-century Sweden. Ronny Ambjörns-

2. Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1991).

son, a historian on the Swedish working class, describes how the workers in an industrial town in northeastern Sweden organized reading clubs and meetings where everyone had the right to speak, but speakers were not to stand while taking the floor because "nobody should be above the others."[3]

The flip side of egalitarianism was loyalty to the nation, even in cases where such loyalty limited individual autonomy, such as alcohol prohibitions, control of sexuality, normative family politics, and nationalistic "high culture." All of these were nationalistic projects widely shared by the socialist labor movements in the new small nation-states. In the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland), the Lutheran state churches merged nationalism and its moralities. Of course, the nation imposed on its male citizens the obligation to go to war to defend the national interest. Nationalism does not allow for exceptions; it assures legal and political equity, but it requires sameness, conformity, and loyalty to the will of the people in return. Jacques Donzelot has shown in his important book *L'invention du social* that, without mediating social structures between the individual and the state, such a requirement of unity tends to lead to a form of republican terror.[4] Although the General Will emanates from society, it acquires absolute power and subsumes everyone, even the lawmaker. The General Will can exist only if it is total and executed with despotic power. Thus the belief that the state and the law represent the will of the people, to which all must submit, leads in the end to totalitarianism and terror. This was also Reinhard Koselleck's conclusion in his classic *Kritik und Krise* almost thirty years earlier: the Enlightenment critique of absolute sovereignty in Europe established the supremacy of the social over the political order in modern society, but this led to total morality and in the end was the root cause of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and the Cold War.[5] Donzelot argued that the risk of a totalitarian General Will is real as long as no social structures mediate between the individual and the state, as in Rousseau. It was Émile Durkheim's idea of crisscrossing solidarities and the primacy of the social over the state in modern society that opened the way to the politics of representation. In Durkheim, the social has primacy over not only the state, but also over the

3. Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren: Idéer och idealer i ett norrländskt sågverkssamhälle 1880–1930* [The conscientious worker: Ideas and ideals in a northern sawmill community 1880–1930] (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1988).

4. Jacques Donzelot, *L'invention du social: Essai sur le déclin des passions politiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1984).

5. Reinhard Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988).

individual. It is the social that creates the autonomy of the individual in its solidarities with other individuals. As groups they act as political agents, citizens of the republic. This argument, "solidarism," proved central in French debates about republicanism in the Third Republic, which I argue is the heart of the Kurdish Question in Turkey today.

In most European nation-states, the stress for unification was relaxed by the early 1980s. The idea of a republic involves the autonomous citizen, who is expected to defend his and, from early on, her interests in the parliamentary process through associations and political parties. Universal suffrage was extended to women in most nation-states with the establishment of their parliamentary institutions in the early twentieth century. The Nordic welfare states explicitly sought to assure such autonomy, not only in the political arena but also by liberating individuals from paternalistic control as well as economic and social dependencies on traditional family ties. The Nordic welfare states were intended and successful as individualizing projects,[6] but when people take individual autonomy for granted, they begin claiming the right to difference also. This is what occurred throughout the entire Western world with the student radicalism of the 1970s. Many felt the normative conservatism of the nation-state was too homogenizing and morally repressive. As a consequence, the restrictive policies of consumption, sexuality, family, and cultural nationalism dissolved, as did the close tie between the state and the national Lutheran (Protestant Christian) churches in the Nordic countries. The international youth culture of the 1960s played an important role in this new pluralism, which reached the Nordic countries first as a protest against civil rights violations, and somewhat later as mounting demands for sexual freedom and rights to personal intimacy in general.

As is commonly known, the nation-building project of Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk" (Father of the Turks) was also modern, republican, and secular. The project proved successful in unifying a multicultural heterogeneous population, but it failed, largely for social, territorial, and cultural reasons, to integrate the largest minority in the southeastern part of the territory, the Kurds.[7] Kurds are concentrated in a large mountainous area straddling the Turkish Republic, Iran, Iraq, and the northeastern corner of Syria;

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6. Pekka Sulkunen, *The Saturated Society: Governing Risk and Lifestyles in Consumer Culture* (London: Sage, 2009).

7. Ahmet Insel, "Giris," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Süsunce, cilt 2. Kemalism*, ed. Ahmet Insel (Istanbul: Iletism, 2001), pp. 17–27. Finnish translation in *Turkki Euroopan rajalla*, ed. Anu Leinonen et al., trans. Tuula Kojo et al. (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2007), pp. 121–35.

their social organization is based on a kind of tribal feudalism, and their languages (there are several) are incomprehensible to Turkish speakers. On the Turkish side, Kurds are mostly Sunni Islamists. In modern Turkish politics, the Kurds have always represented all that is traditional and anti-modern. Turkey's assimilation policy, as in many Western European states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, led to decades of separatist attempts. Since the 1980s, Kurdish separatism has developed broader anti-capitalist overtones; the Kurdistanian Workers Party (PKK), now more or less marginalized from direct political influence but still an existing political fact, employs terrorism to further its cause.

### Integration without Assimilation

The Kurdish Question is symbolic and categorical. To be a Kurd is based on ascription, and to be a faithful Kurd is based on belief. The same goes for extreme Turkish nationalism, but for moderates, the Turkish identity is inherently composed of people with several national and cultural origins. It is well known, and now also recognized by the Turkish government, that denial of the Kurdish Question in Turkey was repressive and, in the end, led to violence, tens of thousands of deaths, and economic underdevelopment as well as human rights abuses and diplomatic problems. The current government has introduced a package to recognize Kurds' rights to language and culture as well as local and regional autonomy, but many Kurds consider this insufficient, with some of them seeking separation.[8] But the belief that social reforms alone can solve the problem, without acknowledging that it is a *Kurdish* question, is problematic. Respectively, to dream of a solution to "liberate the Kurds" in one large political stroke is equally problematic.

Democratization must be the answer. This is commonly accepted in Turkey, but what can it mean today? Democracy in the republican sense means that different groups defend their interests in political movements that attempt to gain parliamentary power, form a government with or without others, and rule by law. The political movements must represent interests that are negotiable between groups with boundaries that also are negotiable, but not completely fluid, and the constellations of interests must cover a number of policy areas and issues, not just one, such as the environment, animal protection, or the right to use one's own language. The political process must be based on individual autonomy to participate in elections

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8. Geoffrey Gresh and Matan Chorev, "Turkish–Kurdish Reconciliation: Promise and Peril," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2006): 106–19.

according to the interests and boundaries that voters define for themselves free of force and oppression. This means that political formation cannot be grounded on ascription and belief, at least not by themselves alone.

The traditional approach to the Kurdish Question violates these principles on both sides. The nationalist denial entails the refusal of even the possibility of negotiating either the boundaries or the interests of groups. The Kurdistanian separatism, on the other hand, boils the differences down to ascription, both ethnic and regional, alone. Is any escape from this deadlock at all possible, and if so, what then are the key issues?

The PKK has failed as a political movement not because its anti-imperialism lost credibility and international support when Soviet socialism collapsed, but because it failed to match the ascribed Kurd identity with negotiable interests and territorial boundaries for the Kurds. Their tribal feudalism is a hierarchical and essentially non-republican social system intertwined with tribal structures and religious authority. Any idea of a socialist/anti-imperialist people's republic fundamentally contradicts this insofar as it still holds true. This is why the PKK adopted a "Marxist-Leninist" ideology, in seeking support from landless agricultural workers, young people from poor families, and women. The tribal chiefs, large landowners (*ağa*), and religious leaders (*şeyh*) would not have supported them in any case.[9]

Separation in *any* form is an unlikely option, not solely for the reasons usually cited, namely, the mixing of populations in and outside of Turkey and the mixing of the economy between the Turkish and Kurd territories. There is no reason why nation-states should have homogeneous populations, and purely national economies are nowadays non-existent. Poland need not be annexed to Germany simply because it has been rebuilt with German capital and because mobility and intermarriages have mixed the German and Polish populations. The same goes for the Nordic countries and many other areas both in and outside the European Union. Rather, the more likely reason why separation is impossible is that the Kurdish state would have to be a national republic built on the economic, legal, and political autonomy of its citizens. This would require a revolution within the Kurdish region and a cultural change that would take a long time in order to adapt Kurdish institutions to the requirements of the nation-state. Failing that, the utopia of a free Kurdistan would turn into the dystopia of

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9. Doğu Ergil, "The Kurdish Question in Turkey," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (2000): 122–35. Finnish translation in *Turkki Euroopan rajalla*, ed. Anu Leinonen et al., trans. Tuula Kojo et al. (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2007), pp. 264–96.

yet another case of Islamic despotism, too weak to defend itself and prey to all manner of predators and exploitative interests from the outside with a high risk for tribal conflicts within the area. The vast majority of Kurds do not desire separation.[10]

As many Turkish experts have suggested,[11] the only possible solution is integration without assimilation, but how is that possible? The present government has already taken symbolically important steps, the most important of which is to recognize that the Kurdish Question itself exists. That protest foments against insufficient measures to solve such iniquities is not in itself alarming and bad; rather, it is merely a sign of a shared critical awareness of the present, not a denial of the promise of progress.

Now that the legitimacy of the Kurdish Question has been recognized, it is time to break the issue down into negotiable elements. Much of this work has actually been done already. Government reports, experts, and politicians have a fairly clear and largely shared view of the necessary steps required to reach development goals: constitutional, legal, educational, and economic reforms; social policy; security; elimination of the paramilitary village guards; internal displacement, such as the safe return of forced emigrants; and strengthening of the local government.[12] Some of these steps, such as the proposed and ongoing constitutional reform, may be tough, but political solutions can still be reached. The question is: What will Turkish society receive in return for its concessions? Economic growth, approaching accession to the EU, more efficient use of natural resources, political stability, and national unity are desirable benefits from peaceful integration, but these may prove too abstract for many voters. However, as long as the industrial progress in Turkey continues, at least the growing middle class in the major cities in the West that profits from it will be more interested in their own future and living standards than in regional policy in the East or in the Kurdish Question in general. One major stumbling block on the Kurdish side will be the internal organization of the traditional hierarchies of patriarchal Kurdish society. With time, however, capitalism has a great capacity to incorporate feudal and semi-feudal structures in its

10. Murat Somer, "Why Aren't Kurds Like the Scots and the Turks Like the Brits? Moderation and Democracy in the Kurdish Question," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 43 no. 2 (2008): 220–49.

11. E.g., Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı [TESEV]), *A Roadmap for a Solution to the Kurdish Question: Policy Proposals From The Region For The Government* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2008), available at http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Editor/Report%20on%20Kurdish%20Question.pdf.

12. Ibid.

operation. As an example, note how easily the French and British aristoc-racies were embedded into capitalism. In theory, this incorporation may be possible in the Kurdish case also, but much depends on the pace of economic development in the area. The commercial interests of Kurdish businessmen in cross-border trade, especially with Iraq, are already draw-ing their attention away from Kurdistanian politics in the area.[13]

### The Black Holes

The big question is: Which issues, if any, are *purely* symbolic and cultural, beyond any possibility of political compromise? How are the Turks and the Kurds different from the Brits and the Scots[14] or from the Samis and Swedes or Finns? Something buried deep in their conflicting identities seeks to preclude negotiation and compromise, perhaps a long shadow from their past that amplifies the gloom cast by contemporary grievances. These obscurities are black holes that absorb the power of negotiation and cooperation, regardless of how strongly the majority supports them.

Though it may seem so, religion is not the root of the problem. The Constitution has repeatedly been (ab)used to define political differences in terms of religion versus secularism, as several Islamic parties, nota-bly the Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan, which had to step down in 1997 by order of the National Security Council, have been banned as unconstitutional.[15] Several Kurdish parties have fallen under the same verdict. Religion and republicanism are not incompatible in principle, however. Most European nation-states, notably the Nordic countries, had a close affinity with their national churches long before the formation of the modern nation-states, and this affinity remains even today, though in a much weaker form. French *laïcisme* is rather an exception than the rule. In many Western European nation-states, Protestantism and Lutheranism in the North, were considered to be the people's religion, as opposed to the Roman Catholic Church and the aristocracy in the sixteenth and sev-enteenth centuries.[16] For example, the Kings of Denmark–Norway joined

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13. Ergil, "The Kurdish Question in Turkey"; Atlantic Council of the United States, *Confidence Building Between Turks and Iraqi Kurds*, Project Director David L. Phillips (June 2009).

14. Somer, "Why Aren't Kurds Like the Scots and the Turks Like the Brits?"

15. Binnaz Toprak, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 167–86.

16. Bo Stråth, "Nordic Modernity: Origins, Trajectories, Perspectives," in Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Nordic Paths to Modernity* (New York and Oxford:

forces with Lutheran Pietism in 1660, a union that lasted until the mid-nineteenth century and laid the foundations of the Nordic welfare state.[17] Nation-building in the late nineteenth century again required the support of the people, and as Rune Slagstad has shown of Norway, the universalist ideology of the Rechtstaat proved essential to gaining this support. The same was true in Finland.[18] Indeed, the words engraved on the wall of the Copenhagen courthouse state: *Med lov mo landet bygges* ("With law the country must be built"). The national churches consolidated this support, because they accepted the separation of religion from political, juridical, and legal (as well as economic) power. Most political parties in Western Europe, except perhaps the heirs of the earlier Communist parties, are not opposed to Christian religion, and the Christian Democrats in many countries have repeatedly formed coalition governments with other parties, including the Social Democrats.

In Turkey, the secularism of Kemalism was never anti-religious either, although it firmly kept religious leaders out of the chambers of political power. Indeed, religion was a *uniting* factor in the young Republic of Turkey, especially after the massive population switch with Greece after Turkey's independence. More than 90 percent of the current population in Turkey, including the Kurds, are Sunni Muslims. Of course, Islam never experienced a reformation, but no international Islamic Catholic Church ever existed either. Being a Muslim in contemporary Turkey does not necessarily imply strong faith and unrelenting religious practice. A vast majority of the population (91.5 percent) believe that religious tolerance is necessary for social order, and only 20 percent of the population supports parties committed to religion, whereas 61 percent are against them.[19] Religion is much more than faith and moral norms. One reason for the Islamic scare among Turks, especially the army, is the frightening experience of Iran and the fear of secret networks or institutional influence in religious guise. This may indeed be a real threat within Turkey, but Iranian Muslims are Shi'as and therefore unlikely to interfere. However, the threat should not be exaggerated: similar networks and semi-public institutions exist in the West as well. So something else must be the critical factor.

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Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 25–48.

17. Aage Sørensen, "On Kings, Pietism and Rent-seeking in Scandinavian Welfare States," *Acta Sociologica* 41 (1998): 363–76.

18. Henrik Stenius, "Paradoxes of the Finnish Political Culture," in Árnason and Wittrock *Nordic Paths to Modernity*, pp. 207–28.

19. Toprak, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey."

The republican quest for unity is the heart of the black hole on the Turkish side. During the nation-building process, the republican quest for unity as such was not a problem. Finland had a civil war between the socialist landless peasantry, allied with the rising industrial proletariat organized as the Socialist Party, against bourgeois nationalists, but subsequent events and conscious attempts at political pluralism kept this division in check. Most scholars today agree that the Western European welfare states have been national and unifying projects. Their success has required a great degree of national solidarity that cuts across class conflicts, regional differences, and other political divisions, including language rights.

In Turkey, unity has been a problem from the start. A strong source of power for the black hole on the Turkish side comes from the fact that the republic was built on the remains of the Ottoman state, with a single central power in the person of the sultan. Unlike in Western European feudalism, the Ottoman Empire had no aristocracies competing with the sovereign. The army was largely recruited as slaves from annexed territory outside Anatolia to form the famous institution of the Janissaries in the service of the sultan. Although the Janissaries wielded political power, they were detached from any tribal or feudal ties that could threaten the authority of the sovereign. When the republic was founded, the same centralism developed around the "Father of the Turks," with close relationships to the army, from whose ranks Atatürk himself rose to power. Few civil society organizations were available to serve as a foundation of democratic republican politics. The courts' repeated banning of political parties has kept the political map unstable and scattered. Such banning not only frustrates the politically active citizenry but also, more importantly, disrupts interest articulation, destroys social group solidarities, and disconnects social groups from the parliamentary legislative process.

The weakness of the rule of law, due partly to Turkish republicanism itself, seriously obstructed the transmission of the Will of the People through its various solidarities and representative interest groups. Francis Fukuyama has argued that, in fact, the gradual weakening of religious law in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, and finally its complete dissolution with the abolition of the caliphate in the Republic of Turkey, left the secular state power uncontrolled without its traditional religious foundation.[20] In the Muslim world, as in Christian Europe, the power of

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20.  Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2012), pp. 283–87.

the sovereign never originated from the monarchs themselves. Rather, the sovereign was a representative of God, who delegates His power through scriptures and specialized legal institutions. Thus, the power of the sultan was not unlimited; religious/legal experts interpret God's law and apply it to the sovereign. In the Ottoman Empire, the legal experts were called *ulamas*. With their power gone, legal and especially constitutional institutions became the instruments of secular power rather than the controllers of it. This phenomenon has occurred several times in the political history of the republic until quite recently, when the army, loyal to the Kemalist republican tradition, actually controlled the high courts rather than vice versa. The power of the army led to a coup in 1980–83 that resulted in the extreme repression of the Kurds, a ban on their language, and the establishment of "village guards." These paramilitary groups soon began using their unrestrained force to pursue their self-interest and inflame tribal feuds, to loot and confiscate property, and to perpetrate numerous other acts of violence. As a consequence, the PKK arose and soon garnered the support of nearly 1.5 million Kurds. The army quickly seized power to save the republic, but with a weak rule of law and a dearth of Kurdish political institutions, it aggravated the most important division within the nation.

The most poignant problem of the Turkish republican state is its inability to handle difference. The weakness of the rule of law exacerbates this inability to a degree that is difficult to understand for anyone looking at the Turkish political drama from a Western perspective. This Turkish fear of "divisions" blocks the path toward the autonomy of citizens within the state, and thus toward democracy and the politics of representation. A dramatic example was the minority rights report of 2004, commissioned by the prime minister in an attempt to meet the Copenhagen Human Rights Criteria as a step toward accession to the EU. The seven-page report, essentially a legal review of the constitutional inconsistencies that impede the implementation of human rights, and especially the use of minority languages, led to the prosecution of its principal authors, Professor Baskim Oran and Professor Ibrahim Kaboglu, the Chair of the entire Human Rights Commission, of which the minority commission was a part. The process cost them their university posts in Turkey.

Turkish difficulty in dealing with differences is not limited to the constitutional issues of "indivisibility," "secularism," "nationalism," or language. To see the problem clearly, we must view it from a higher level of abstraction. It is no coincidence that alcohol policy and the head

scarf remain among the most politically divisive issues in decades. For example, Prime Minister Erdoğan's government proposed that beer could be sold only under a special license and restaurants could not sell alcohol on street terraces. This aroused an enormous political debate in which the government was accused of imposing Islamic, anti-republican policies. A similar debate arose in May 2013 with the Erdoğan government's proposal of a law restricting alcohol advertisements that closely resembles the current French legislation on this same issue.[21] The Turkish problem is not the alcohol issue; the problem is the quick identification of alcohol policy with religion, and religion with national unity. Such bans are not unfamiliar in the Nordic or North American context. Alcohol was one of the most controversial political issues in Sweden, Finland, and Norway in the period of student radicalism in the 1960s. For example, between 1964 and 1967 a literary magazine edited by a famous Communist author published three special issues on alcohol policy, criticizing the state's alcohol monopoly as paternalism. In these countries, the national interest, continental European alcohol culture, modernization, and constitutional civil rights were essential arguments in favor of a more liberal alcohol policy.[22] The quest was not for more alcohol but for the realization of the individual autonomy that the postwar generation had come to take for granted, but which was found wanting in this particular area, as well as more generally in paternalistic Lutheran society.

Turkish "secularism" is about not only the constitution but also individual autonomy, the right to self-rule and to a lifestyle of one's own choosing. The Taksim Square occupation in May 2013, although in protest against the current Islamic government, was not really about religion but about individual autonomy. The protesters announced claims of concern for the environment, free speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of lifestyle. Students played a prominent role in this protest, as they have in similar protests both before and since. Although the government's alcohol policy was framed as an index of its anti-secularism rather than of its public health or commercial policy (which is mainly neoliberal), the protest against it was not about religion but about individuals' freedom to choose their identity and lifestyle. The head scarf, on

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21. Humeyra Pamuk, "Turkey Considers Tighter Limits on Alcohol Sale and Consumption," *Reuters*, May 13, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/13/us-turkey-alcohol-restrictions-idUSBRE94C0P820130513.

22. Pekka Sulkunen et al., *Broken Spirits: Power and Ideology in Nordic Alcohol Control* (Helsinki: Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research [NAD], 2000).

the other hand, now legalized by the government, is a sign governed by a mixed code, only one of which is religion. Other codes include politics, fashion, and individual and family autonomy—including the autonomy of women. Legislation introduced by Erdoğan's government to permit the head scarf in public institutions (schools, universities, hospitals, offices) is not a stand on religion, even if this were one of its motives, and interpreting it as anti-secularist identifies the interpreter more than the legislation itself in the secular–religious divide. Like the liberal protests of young generations in the West in the 1960s and since, the question is not about the issues under their isolated codes, whether they be consumption, sexuality, concern for the environment, or any other matter of lifestyle and identity. Religion and secularism as a frame of interpretation only confuses the essence of the conflict, which is autonomy and the right to difference within a single common national society.

The police violence against the Taksim occupation crushed neither a political opposition nor a threat to national unity nor any of the issues of protest that were debated in that context. It attacked one of the essential elements of republicanism: the autonomy of citizens. To be a republic, a state needs citizens who embrace their solidarities based on differences. These differences must be negotiable with regard to both their boundaries and their interests. These negotiable differences must be represented through the political process, which turns them into law, and the law—not the constitution or whoever interprets it—represents the Will of the People. To be negotiable, such solidarities must be organic, arising from social differences rather than from merely symbolic or ascribed ties such as religion, ethnicity, or language. Democratization is not possible if the organic differences are overshadowed by misleading symbols. This is the black hole of the Kurdish Question on the Turkish side.

The Kurdish side also harbors a similar incapacity to deal with difference. The power of the PKK has no constitutional checks and is regulated by no legislative mechanism. The movement requires homogeneity and absolute loyalty. Although the PKK has since 1999, with the imprisonment of its founder and unquestioned leader Abdullah Öcalan, presented a compromising and peaceful face, its military wing still exists and occasionally becomes active, threatening the Turkish government with a new civil war.[23] The most daunting problem, however, is the silence about differences in Kurdish society, the tribal organization of power and wealth, and the economic and social interests as well as group boundaries related

23. *Al Jazeera*, October 22, 2013.

to them. This silence is the heart of the black hole of the Kurdish Question on the Kurdish side, as it suppresses the autonomy and difference that are necessary for representative democracy to function. The problem is further aggravated by the massive emigration of young people who refuse to tolerate this silence.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The conclusion from this analysis may seem pessimistic, as the black holes on both sides of the Kurdish Question (i.e., the denial of difference and of citizen autonomy on the Turkish side, and a similar denial of differences among the Kurds) feed both themselves and each other. The negotiable issues are not too difficult to resolve; rather, it is the requirement of unity on both sides that builds the solutions into symbolic issues that suffocate the potential for negotiation and compromise. On the other hand, the analysis also indicates the direction in which political decisions can and should go to remove the power of this requirement. Fortunately, steps have already been taken in this direction. Progress must and can be made to eliminate the paramilitary village guards in the Kurdish communities, to stop the use of the Constitution to ban political parties, to extend the use of one's language in official communication, to ensure independent and fair court procedures, as well as other key improvements. More difficult are the human rights issues that arise from Kurdish traditional practices such as honor killings, forced marriages, and other forms of violence against women. Other countries, such as Sweden, have successfully criminalized such violations. To the extent that the Turkish government is serious about its democratization effort, it can serve as assets in negotiating relevant legislation on traditional Kurdish violence against women in Turkey. The anthropological function of assuring patriarchal family reproduction will gradually fade with capitalist development in Turkey; the problem may already be more difficult in areas of Islamic immigration in Western Europe. The legal struggle against violence within intimate relationships continues everywhere, including the Nordic countries, and international human rights conventions have proved helpful on this important issue. The importance of constitutional change is often exaggerated; the decisive improvement is to stop the use of the Constitution as if it represents the Will of the People, which must be vested with law processed through a parliamentary system of representation, at least as long as the Constitution is written like a literary declaration rather than as a legal text. This change may take a long time to reach fruition.

The black holes remain, however, with no easy solutions in sight as long as the requirement of unity dominates the criteria of belonging to Turkish society as a full member or, correspondingly, as a member of the Kurdish communities. The power of this requirement is characteristic of radical Turkish nationalism, which seems to be approaching populist far right movements in Western Europe, except that its abject others are groups living in Turkey, not immigrants or people living elsewhere in the world. Its political influence extends far beyond its electoral weight due to its capacity to impose a secular–religious code on almost any symbolic issue. Governments can, if they so desire, neutralize this effect by bearing in mind that other codes are more important in Turkey, especially among students and other young adults. The most significant of these codes, and the most useful in ongoing efforts toward democratization, is the code of individual autonomy and personal integrity as a citizen of Turkey and as a member of the (imagined, perhaps, but nevertheless real) cultural community of Western Europe and the United States. On the Kurdish side, the parallel symbolic power of the PKK is much weaker because the principles of justification on which it depends are far less legitimate and mutually contradictory; the only political option it has is republicanism. On the other hand, the only resources of justification it has at its disposal are charismatic and military, not electoral. The greatest risk is Kurdish nationalism abroad, fed by the understandable bitterness of forced emigrants. Because the PKK is losing its political grip within the country, this problem may not prove insurmountable to integration, especially if it remains unconnected to important sources of wealth and power, as is the case with Irish and Israeli nationalism in the United States.

In conclusion, the solution of the Kurdish Question depends on more than the success of social and material reforms in the Kurdish area. Its precondition is, as is widely agreed, the democratization of the entire society. This, in turn, will depend on how well the requirements of representative democracy are met: the Will of the People must be articulated in law, not in the Constitution, and be constantly tested in the parliamentary process. For this to be possible, citizens must enjoy individual autonomy, which implies that they will claim the right to be different, yet remaining equal as legal subjects and as competitive political actors. The boundaries and interests of the constituent groups must be negotiable, and their interests must overlap, not vary from one issue to the next or be fixed by ascription or faith.