



## INTRODUCTION

This book focuses on the formation of the Turkish national movement in occupied Istanbul between November 1918 and October 1923.<sup>1</sup> As Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar implies in the title of his great novel, *Those Outside the Scene* (*Sahnenin Dışındakiler*), Istanbul was outside the military confrontation zone between the Turkish national forces and the Greek occupation army. The scene actually centered in Anatolia, where the military phase of the Turkish National Struggle (*Millî Mücadele*) unfolded. During the Armistice period (October 1918–October 1923), however, a national resistance movement was organized in Istanbul to protect the Muslim population from both the occupation forces and possible reprisals by the city’s Christian elements. In this volume, I discuss how the resistance movement took shape and evolved, which social and political forces were involved in its rise, and how they contributed to the movement.

To address these topics, I first examine the organization of the armed committees of resistance that emerged across Istanbul’s Muslim-populated neighborhoods following the Mudros Armistice, signed on 30 October 1918. I then concentrate on the period between September 1922, when the Greek occupation army was defeated in Anatolia, and October 1923, when the Allied occupation forces evacuated from Istanbul and the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed shortly after. I will show that the resistance movement, represented by the National Defense Organization (*Müdafaa-i Milliye Teşkilatı*), considerably broadened its social base during this period by incorporating large segments of Muslim artisans, workers, and merchants.

The involvement of these elements in the Turkish resistance movement was not coincidental. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had singlehandedly ruled the Ottoman Empire from January 1913 until the end of

World War I. In the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18), the CUP had built an extensive network of relations with artisanal and labor unions, using them to acquire social, economic, and political power. The CUP's Istanbul organization was particularly influential over those grassroots organizations that had been well-integrated into the CUP's single-party regime.<sup>2</sup> During the Armistice period, the Muslim members of such organizations contributed greatly to the resistance movement along with the Unionists (i.e., former CUP members) as well as military officers and police forces that formed the leading cadres of the armed neighborhood committees.

By the time the Greco-Turkish war ended in Anatolia, however, the resistance movement in Istanbul had divided into rival factions, which is the main issue discussed in this book. I will show that the grassroots organizations of artisans, and especially workers, became the major sites where the power struggles between the various tendencies involved in the national movement, from the Unionist factions to the communist and socialist groups, unfolded toward the end of the Armistice period. More importantly, I will argue that these struggles both played a crucial role in the transformation of Istanbul's administrative status and demographic structure and were also among the major factors that determined the new Republic's political and ideological character.

## BACKGROUND

World War I ended with the collapse of many of Eurasia's existing imperial states, with Russia being the first to dissolve. After the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917, the Russian army gradually withdrew from all fronts. The Bolsheviks eventually signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in March 1918. Although this development temporarily helped the Ottoman Empire and Germany, especially in the Caucasus, they eventually had to surrender. Following the fall of the Romanovs in Russia, the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and German Empires then disintegrated. Having been part of the same military alliance during the war, the fate of these empires was determined in the Paris peace negotiations and the treaties signed afterward.

The Allied powers had already laid the foundations of the postwar order in the Ottoman Middle East with the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot agreement, which split Arab-populated provinces from the Ottoman Empire. The mandate regimes created after the war reflected the compromise the Allies had reached regarding the fate of the region. This compromise betrayed the expectations of the Arab leaders who had headed a revolt against the Ottomans. The Arab Kingdom proclaimed in Damascus in March 1920 turned out to be a short-lived, unsuccessful attempt to form a state.

The Middle East's postwar order was shaped at the San Remo Conference of April 1920. Resistance to the mandate regimes in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq was not strong enough to prevent the Allied powers' postwar arrangements.

However, resistance was better organized in Anatolia and Thrace. After the British and the Ottoman delegates signed the Mudros Armistice in October 1918, the Allies began to occupy parts of Anatolia while the Greeks occupied Izmir (Smyrna) in May 1919, which shocked the Empire's Muslim population. The response, which became known as the National Struggle (*Millî Mücadele*), began with the formation of regional resistance movements.<sup>3</sup> Then, in September 1919, a general congress convened in Sivas centralized these local movements under the Society for the Defense of National Rights in Anatolia and Rumelia. The new organization's Representative Committee (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*) commanded the initial stages of the war against the Greek army that was occupying parts of Asia Minor. In Ottoman-Turkish historiography, this war is widely known as the (Turkish) War of Independence (1919–22). Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) established himself as the principal leader of the National Struggle after moving from Istanbul to Samsun in May 1919, and he was elected President of the Society for the Defense of National Rights at the Sivas Congress. In April 1920, the (Turkish) Grand National Assembly (TGNA) was formed in Ankara, then a provincial town located in the heart of central Anatolia. This assembly became the National Struggle's main executive and legislative organ.

Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire's capital city, remained under Allied occupation during the Greco-Turkish War.<sup>4</sup> The British, French, and Italian forces started a de facto occupation shortly after the Armistice was signed, with the Allied authorities establishing military control over the city by formally occupying it on 16 March 1920. Only after the Greek army was driven out of Anatolia in September 1922 did the national government in Ankara gradually seize control of Istanbul. On 19 October 1922, Refet (Bele) Pasha entered the city at the head of a mission representing the Ankara government. On 1 November, the Ottoman sultanate was dissolved. Three days later, the Ankara government declared its sovereignty over Istanbul. The Allied forces had completely evacuated the city by 3 October 1923, only a couple of weeks before the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed on 29 October. However, Ankara rather than Istanbul was made the capital of the new Republic.

## ARGUMENTS AND ORGANIZATION

There is considerable scholarship on the formation of the Turkish national movement, with one of the most important studies being that of Eric Jan Zürcher.<sup>5</sup> First published in 1984, Zürcher's book, *The Unionist Factor*, criti-

cally engages with Turkish official historiography, which attributes a central role to Mustafa Kemal in the rise of the National Struggle. Zürcher, however, demonstrates that it was the CUP that laid the movement's foundations. The CUP, which had ruled the Ottoman Empire in an authoritarian manner during World War I, was formally dissolved in November 1918, after which, as Zürcher shows, CUP cadres, that is, the Unionists, took the initiative in organizing the resistance movement. However, they were constantly divided between those supporting Mustafa Kemal's leadership and those opposing him.<sup>6</sup> This dichotomy characterized the power struggles within the national movement until an attempt to assassinate Mustafa Kemal in 1926. After this, the Unionist opposition to his leadership was eliminated.

In this volume, I take Zürcher's thesis regarding the CUP's role in the formation of the national movement as a departure point, while also suggesting a partial revision of his narrative. More specifically, following Zürcher, I trace the organization of the resistance movement back to the *Karakol* Society, founded in Istanbul by the CUP's leaders at the beginning of the Armistice period. Zürcher convincingly argues that the *Karakol* Society, whose operational base was Istanbul, represented the first dissident tendency within the national movement. The leaders of this underground organization insisted on preserving their autonomy from the Anatolian movement over which Mustafa Kemal presided. Where I disagree with Zürcher concerns the end of *Karakol*. In Zürcher's estimation, the tension between the *Karakol*'s Unionist leaders and Mustafa Kemal was resolved after the Allies formally occupied Istanbul in March 1920. He argues that the occupation resulted in a purge of *Karakol*, many of whose activists were arrested by the Allied authorities, before the organization was disbanded on 23 April 1920, on the same day as the National Assembly's inauguration.<sup>7</sup> This organization was then "replaced with the *Millî Müdafaa* (National Defense) organization, also known by its Ottoman initials as *Mim-Mim*." The Ankara government effectively controlled this organization, which "functioned as a part of the nationalist army."<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that this argument runs through much of the existing literature on the subject. Unlike Zürcher, for example, Nur Bilge Criss emphasizes in her important research on the social and political history of occupied Istanbul that the *Karakol* Society continued operating under the name of *Zabitan* (Officers) after March 1920. According to Criss, however, this organization could no longer play an effective role in the resistance movement as the National Defense group assumed its functions.<sup>9</sup> In a more recent study on the resistance movement in Istanbul, Asaf Özkan argues that although the National Defense Organization was built on the organizational capacity and networks of the *Karakol* society, it was distinct from the latter in terms of its absolute loyalty to, and dependence on, the Ankara government.

My narrative in Chapter 1 differs from this argument that the Ankara government seized control of the resistance movement through the National Defense Organization after the *Karakol* Society was disbanded in the spring of 1920. First, I argue that the *Karakol* Society, which was reorganized as *Zabitân*, continued to be an effective organization of the resistance movement after the Allied powers' military occupation of Istanbul. Second, although the National Defense Organization was linked to the national government, more specifically the General Staff headed by Fevzi (Çakmak) Pasha, Ankara's authority over this organization was limited. In fact, the Ottoman (or Istanbul) government had more influence over the Central Committee of the National Defense (*Müdafaa-i Milliye Heyet-i Merkeziyesi*) because the majority of its members were in contact with the Istanbul government's ministers who supported the National Struggle. Third, the *Karakol* Society also maintained its influence in the Central Committee. For a long time, the cadres that were politically loyal to Ankara and the General Staff of the national government were a minority in the National Defense Organization and its executive organs. They were involved in the *Mim-Mim* group, an intelligence group associated with the National Defense Organization, and were opposed to the National Defense's prevailing leadership.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the political and ideological context of the power struggle within the national movement. My argument is that the factional conflict within the National Defense Organization acquired an ideological character after the Unionists split into two rival camps. This division originated as much from a disagreement over the character of the regime to be formed after the National Struggle as discontent with Mustafa Kemal's leadership. One side supported maintaining the sultanate, whereas the other favored popular sovereignty. By spring 1922, this split had led to the emergence of the National Defense and the Union and Progress as two separate networks in Istanbul. The former incorporated the Unionists who joined in the opposition to Mustafa Kemal. The Union and Progress network, on the other hand, remained loyal to the prevailing leadership in Ankara. These two factions would later form two rival coalitions that incorporated various social and political forces.

To make better sense of this polarization in Istanbul, we need to keep in mind that many of the Unionists who emphasized saving the Ottoman sultanate participated in the Second Group of the Defense of National Rights in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Although the Second Group did not have a distinctly royalist political program, it emerged as a platform of opposition to the Defense of National Rights Group (i.e., the First Group) led by Mustafa Kemal. A similar coalition simultaneously arose in Istanbul, where a Unionist circle formed alliances with diverse political groups that had ties to the Ottoman palace and the Ottoman government. It developed a significant

following among the Ottoman officer corps and became a dominant faction in the Central Committee of the National Defense. Even after the General Staff in Ankara forced the Central Committee members to resign in December 1922, this coalition preserved its political influence and formed the base of the Second Group's Istanbul organization during the initial months of 1923. Another coalition arose almost simultaneously to counterbalance the Second Group's Istanbul organization. One of its components was created by radical members of the *Mim-Mim* group who formed an informal alliance with the Union and Progress network that remained outside the National Defense organization.<sup>10</sup> Some of this network's leaders espoused a corporatist program called the Representation of Professions (*Temsil-i Meslekî*), which was one of the major ideological references of the political and ideological tendency that historian Mete Tunçay aptly describes as the "Unionist left."<sup>11</sup>

Chapter 3 deals with the Turkish communist movement and the emergence of an anti-communist tendency within the national movement. After looking at the origins and development of Turkish communism, I focus on the International Union of Workers (IUW), whose activists and leaders were mainly Ottoman Christians and Jews, and the Istanbul Communist Group (ICG), also known as the *Aydınlık* (Clarity) group. In this chapter, I reveal a set of complex relations between these communist groups and the diverse factions of the Turkish national movement. I discuss how the IUW and the ICG contributed to efforts to found a labor confederation in July 1922 and how the *Mim-Mim* group got involved in this enterprise through a radical group of its members collaborating with communists. In October 1922, the Istanbul police cracked down on the labor movement by shutting down all communist-controlled labor unions. I argue that this operation was initiated by the leadership of the National Defense Organization, which controlled the Ottoman police forces, as a result of the power struggles within the national movement. It was carried out in cooperation with the anti-communist cabinet that had come to power in Ankara in July 1922 with the support of the Second Group. This cabinet was formed by Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay), who represented the anti-communist wing of the First Group and had close relations with the Second Group.

In Chapter 4, I discuss how the communists were de facto incorporated into the loose coalition formed by the Union and Progress network and the *Mim-Mim* group against the right-wing bloc that evolved into the Second Group's Istanbul organization. I argue that this radical coalition developed within two large confederations that unified the majority of the artisan corporations and worker unions in Istanbul. These confederations were founded right after a series of mass demonstrations that celebrated the defeat of the Greek army in August–September 1922 and then, in November, the shift in the seat of governance from Istanbul to the Turkish Grand National Assem-

bly in Ankara. During this process, a national regime loyal to the Ankara government was being gradually established in Istanbul, while thousands of non-Muslims, especially Orthodox Greeks, were leaving Istanbul in fear of their security or even life. In this chaotic atmosphere, the labor movement provided a convenient platform for the cooperation of the populist, socialist, and communist groups operating in Istanbul.

Chapter 5, the last part of the book, examines how this radical coalition broke up because of competition between the *Mim-Mim* group and the Union and Progress network. By the March 1923 municipal elections, efforts to merge them under the First Group had failed. While the Istanbul branch of the First Group was organized after the municipal elections anyway, this had nothing to do with the radical and populist groups of the resistance movement. Indeed, this branch's central bureau even included certain figures who had previously collaborated with the Second Group. In June 1923, the major anti-communist leaders of the First Group were elected to parliament from Istanbul. The purge of the left was a direct outcome of this political shift, with many communists being arrested immediately following May Day 1923. Following the general elections in June, this purge was extended to populist and socialist leaders. Meanwhile, a xenophobic tendency was consolidated within Istanbul's worker and merchant confederations. Prior to the promulgation of the Republic, the leaders of these unions launched a widespread campaign to eliminate Christians from the economy. This nationalist movement from below provided the initial popular base of the Turkification policies that targeted non-Muslim communities during the 1920s and 1930s.

## SOURCES

This study draws on archival research in Turkey, France, and Britain. In Turkey, I conducted research in the Directorate of State Archives—the Ottoman Archive in Istanbul (BOA, *Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*) and the Directorate of State Archives—the Republic Archive in Ankara (BCA, *Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi*). I also used many primary sources from the Institute for the History of the Turkish Revolution Archives in Ankara (TİTE, *Türkiye İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Arşivi*). Most of the documents I obtained from these archives were correspondences between the nationalist agents operating in Istanbul and the General Staff in Ankara, including reports written by *Mim-Mim* group members, some of which elaborated on the power struggles within the National Defense Organization. These correspondences were intended to inform Ankara about the leaders of the resistance movement who had collaborated with the Ottoman government and/or the opposing Second Group. The TİTE archives

also had documents referring to the activities of communists, socialists, and populists. I also drew on Comintern documents held in Istanbul by the Social History Research Foundation of Turkey (TÜSTAV, *Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırmaları Vakfı*). The majority of these were reports prepared by the communist leaders, which provide useful information about communist activities and labor movements in Istanbul. Mete Tunçay and Erden Akbulut have published many such reports in their joint studies.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the documents I obtained during my own research in the TÜSTAV—Comintern archives, I make great use of the reports published by Akbulut and Tunçay.<sup>13</sup>

I also use documents from the Defense Historical Service Archives (SHAT, *Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre*) and the French Foreign Ministry Archives (AMAE, *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*) in Paris, as well as the Foreign Office Catalogs of the National Archives in London (FO). Apart from consular reports from Turkey, some of which are used in this study, these archives hold the correspondences of the British and French occupation forces. Many of the correspondences I draw on are either summaries or complete reports written by various informants who were working for the Allied authorities. Such reports provide detailed information about the political circles and organizations involved in the resistance movement and their relations with the Ankara government.

Many of the documents obtained from the archives are intelligence reports prepared for the Allied authorities, the Ottoman government in Istanbul, or the national government in Ankara. In terms of their general characteristics, the other reports and correspondences addressed to the Comintern, the Soviet government, or the Turkish Communist Party headquarters in Baku are not very different from these intelligence reports. What needs to be emphasized here is that the objective of this volume is not to construct a narrative about the history of intelligence in occupied Istanbul. Of course, I refer to some of the intelligence networks that were active in Istanbul during the Armistice period, especially the *Mim-Mim* group, whose leaders played crucial roles in the resistance movement. Rather, my objective is to draw on the reports and correspondences of such circles to shed light on the complex political atmosphere of occupied Istanbul. There is a challenge in pursuing this goal in that many of the archival sources I use in my narrative are intelligence reports based on personal observations about specific developments or more general social and political trends. Therefore, such documents are often biased, reflecting the individual judgements of the informants and the way they perceived the developments surrounding them.

While constructing my narrative, I used various strategies to cope with this challenge concerning the objectivity and reliability of these archival sources. First, I focused on the question of representation. Instead of seeking to elicit objective and reliable information from certain reports and



correspondences, I determined which faction or political tendency these sources represent. By tracing these struggles in the archival material, I try to analyze the power struggles between different circles involved in the national movement. Thus, a report of a member of the *Mim-Mim* group about the Unionists' efforts to control the artisan unions tells us much about the political struggles of the time, even if this report is partial or exaggerated. My second strategy was to confirm, as much as possible, the reliability of a piece of information provided in one archival source by reference to other available primary sources. Therefore, aside from crosschecking between different archival materials, I support my narrative by employing other sorts of materials acquired from court records, memoirs, and periodicals.

The court records of the Ankara Independence Tribunals in 1926 (1926 *Ankara İstiklal Mahkemleri*) form a very useful source of information for this study.<sup>14</sup> The Unionist leaders who were charged with attempting to assassinate Mustafa Kemal made detailed statements in court concerning their activities and political engagements after World War I. I also drew on a group of newspapers and periodicals published in Istanbul during the Armistice period. Of these, the daily *Tevhid-i Efkar* was particularly important because it represented the national movement's anti-communist wing. From the second half of 1922 onward, this newspaper came to the forefront of an anti-communist campaign in Istanbul. The journal *Aydınlık* was a fruitful source for understanding how the communist movement operated in Istanbul. This journal was published by the Istanbul Communist Group (ICG), which would form one of the constituent elements of the Turkish Communist Party in 1925. *Aydınlık*'s articles provided significant insights into diverse subjects, including the development of the labor movement.

Finally, I drew on the memoirs of certain individuals associated with the resistance movement in Istanbul or Anatolia. A critical analysis of their individual narratives provides crucial details that cannot be acquired from archival material and periodicals. These narratives provide useful insights into the formation of the resistance movement by indicating which elements of the population and which political circles participated. These memoirs also often reflect the perspectives of certain competing factions and political tendencies. Thus, the comparative analysis of these narrative sources contributes to this study by identifying the political rivalries within the national movement and revealing their broader implications for the transition from imperial to national rule in Istanbul.

## NOTES

1. For a comprehensive bibliography of occupied Istanbul in multiple languages, see the recently published study of MacArthur-Seal and Tongo, *A Bibliography of Armistice-Era Istanbul*.
2. Ülker, *Meşrutiyet'ten Cumhuriyet'e*, 29–71.
3. For an analysis of these local movements and their importance for the Turkish independence movement, see Tanör, *Türkiye'de Kongre İktidarlari*.
4. Ibid, 177–78. Nur Bilge Criss provides a comprehensive account of the social and political conditions of Istanbul under occupation. See Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*.
5. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor*.
6. See the chapter of the same book by Zürcher, “Unionist Attempts to Regain Control,” 118–41.
7. Ibid., 122.
8. Ibid., 122.
9. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 113–17.
10. I deliberately avoid referring to this organization as the CUP because it was far from uniting all the Unionist groups that emerged in the Armistice period.
11. Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, 258–326.
12. Akbulut and Tunçay, *İstanbul Komünist Grubu'ndan*, vol. 1: 1919–1923; Akbulut and Tunçay, *İstanbul Komünist Grubu'ndan*, vol. 2: 1924–Mart 1926; Akbulut and Tunçay, *Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadi*.
13. If a Comintern document I use in this study is published in one of Tunçay and Akbulut's studies, I cite both the book and the catalog number of this document in the TÜSTAV–Comintern archives when I first refer to it. If I use the original document, I cite only the catalog number when I mention that document again. I cite only the catalog numbers of the documents that are not published by Tunçay and Akbulut.
14. İlkan and İlhan, *Ankara İstiklal Mahkemesi*.