Inside India, *Outside* of Kemalism: Analysis of Halide Edib's Writings on Anti-Colonialism

Alparslan Nas
Research Assistant
Faculty of Communication
Marmara University
Nisantasi, 34365, Istanbul, Turkey.

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the significance of Halide Edib's works that she wrote during self-imposed exile. Edib (1882-1964) is a female scholar who took important role in the Turkish War of Independence after the First World War (1914-1918). She had gained nation-wide recognition as a novelist. After the foundation of the republic in 1923, Edib got disillusioned with Kemalist regime and went to Britain for self-imposed exile. Throughout 1930s, she made frequent visits to India where she had the opportunity to closely monitor the anti-colonial resistance led by Gandhi. Edib published three books during this period, "Turkey Faces West", "Inside India" and "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" where she compared Indian experience of decolonization with Turkish experience. This paper engages to a critical analysis of her writings, pointing at Edib's unique position as anti-colonial activist and critique of Kemalism.

Keywords: Colonialism, Halide Edib, Hybridity, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Kemalism, Mahatma Gandhi, Nationalism, Postcolonialism.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates particular works of Turkish female author Halide Edib (1882-1964) from the perspective of postcolonialism and anticolonial nationalism. The analysis provided by this paper mainly focuses on the significance of Edib's following works with regard to postcolonial studies. Halide Edib's first visit to India took place in 1935, when she was invited to deliver lectures at National Muslim University in New Delhi. At January 1935, Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of Indian independence movement chaired one of Edib's lectures at the university. Gandhi also gave an interview to Edib about the conditions and phases of the independence movement in India (Hasan, 2002). Among Indian intellectual community, Halide Edib was the center of attention. She worked as visiting professor at Columbia University during the 1931-32 academic year. During her stay, she was presented as an "exotic, woman revolutionary" by the American press (Hasan, 2002, xxvi). Edib wrote many commentaries in English during her self-imposed exile between 1926-1939. Her first work, "Turkey Faces West" (1930) was published in USA, with a preface by Edward Mead Earle, associate professor of History at Columbia University. Her second work, "Inside India" (2002) is Edib's autobiographical travel accounts, which was published in 1937. While *Inside India* consists of Edib's observations of Indian independence movement in 1935, the collection of her lectures, delivered at National Muslim University in New Delhi around that time was published in 1935, under the title "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" (1935).

For many aspects, Halide Edib is a controversial figure in Turkish history, literature and social thought. Born in 1882 at Istanbul during the reign of Ottoman Empire, Edib went through a Westernized educational career, graduating from Uskudar American College at 1901. Since then Edib's career as an intellectual began as she wrote daily articles in national newspapers, worked as an educator and ran activism in Ottoman women's feminist organizations. Inspired by the Turkist ideology of the time, she took active role during the War of Independence as an integral part of Turkish resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal. After the declaration of the republic, which signaled the end of the Ottoman dynasty, Edib felt disillusioned with the republican regime. She left Turkey and remained in self-imposed exile in Britain. She decided to end exile at 1939, following Ataturk's death at 1938. Until her death in 1964, she worked as a professor of English literature at Istanbul University.

In addition to her articles and essays, Edib is a prominent figure in Turkish literature and famous for her novels like "Seviye Talip", "Yeni Turan", "Ateşten Gömlek", "Vurun Kahpeye" and "Sinekli Bakkal". Unlike her novels, which are still widely read in Turkey, Edib's travel accounts and essays consisting of the comparative studies of India and Turkey were published in English. The works that Edib wrote on exile went unnoticed since they have never been translated into Turkish.

Previous academic enquiries on Edib focused extensively on her novels and essays that she wrote in Turkish. Among these studies, Adak (2003, 2004, 2012) analyzed Edib's stance as a politician and an intellectual, by focusing on her memoirs regarding the First World War. Eningün (1975) and Çalışlar (2011) wrote detailed biographies of Edib, yet their works do not include any critical approaches. Durakbaşa (2002) mainly focused on the significance of Edib as a feminist author during the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. İleri (2005) pointed out Edib's talent as a prolific author in Turkish literature with the analysis of her novel "Handan". Kazan (1995) wrote about Edib's experiences at USA during her self-imposed exile, when she worked as visiting professor in Columbia University. While Uyguner (2012) introduced the ways Edib addressed Western civilization in her literature, Ugurcan (2004) engaged to a close reading of her novels and traced the significance of the city of Istanbul in her fictional accounts. Regarding Edib's writings during her self-imposed exile, Bilkan (2011) focused on Edib's lectures delivered National Muslim University in New Delhi, which was published under the title "Conflict of East and West in Turkey". This paper aims to contribute to the literature on Edib by developing a critical approach towards her works that she wrote during self-imposed exile. Close reading of Edib's works, "Turkey Faces West" (1930), "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" (1935) and "Inside India" (2002) reveals Edib's resistant stance against early republican regime in Turkey, founded on the principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Her works also show her different perceptions on anti-colonial struggle of the era. Edib's works are crucial in the sense that they have never been translated into Turkish. They constitute a particular "doxa" among Turkish nationalist project in Bourdieu's terms (1977). This paper investigates the challenges that Edib introduces with regards to Turkish anticolonial nationalism during 1930's.

2- Inside India

Halide Edib's "Inside India" (2002) is made up of her travel accounts during her visit to India in 1935. The book includes narrations of participant observation among Indian intellectual community. It further poses theoretical issues regarding Indian independence movement against British colonialism. *Inside India* attempts to portray the intellectual basis of Indian Muslim community towards independence. Intellectuals from Hindu community also take part in her narrative. The book is not merely a collection of interviews with intellectuals. It is rather written in the form of an autobiography, presenting Edib's subjective elaboration of her surroundings throughout her stay.

The first chapter of the book is named "India Seen through Salam House". In this chapter, Edib makes observations about the conditions of Indian Muslim intellectuals in the process of independence movement. She forefronts important intellectuals including some women activists and analyzes their relations to Gandhi by referring to the specific conversations she had with those intellectuals. The second chapter of the book is called "India Seen on Highways and Byways" in which she gives an extensive account of important Indian cities such as Bombay, Lahore, Calcutta and Hyderabad. She recounts the Indian way of life as it is lived in 1935 and relates her observations and sociological analysis to the conditions of Indian Independence movement leaded by Mahatma Gandhi. In the last and the third section of the book named "India in the Melting-Pot", she develops a more historical and political analysis regarding the independence movement. Edib comments on important figures of the movement such as the Hindu leader Gandhi, the socialist leader Jawaharlal, Abdul-Gaffar Khan who proposes the idea of single-nationhood and lastly the position of the British in 1935. Halide Edib's account proceeds with references to the ideas and comments of these intellectuals. Edib doesn't produce an imaginative account of India, which would fit into definitions of *Orientalism* as Said (1979) propounds. She rather manifests the active agency of the Orient, which was taking place in India at 1935. She provides an intellectual and a scholarly space for the active agents to express their struggle and legitimize their resistance against the colonial rule.

Inside India introduces to the reader the important agents of Indian independence struggle such as Gandhi, Dr. Ansari and Jawaharlal. The preface of the book begins with Edib's meeting with Dr. Ansari. Edib met Dr. Ansari for the first time in Constantinople at 1913. She mentions that since then, she planned to write a book on India in the future.

Dr. Ansari was an influential intellectual of Muslim community in India and he was present in Turkey during 1910's. During the First World War (1914-1918), a group of Indian Muslims arrived at Turkey to assist the Turkish army, so that they can secure the Caliphate against the enemy. In 1924, one year after the declaration of the republic, the institution of Caliphate was abolished. When Edib visited India in 1935, she observes that Indian Muslims were still shocked due to the abolition of the Caliphate. Edib's status as a self-imposed exile, disillusioned with Kemalist republicans who took negative measures against Islam, reckoned the sympathy of Indian Muslim community. Edib was perceived as an Islamist female intellectual, who took an active stance against British colonialism.

The fact that Edib wasn't present in India as the representative of the Turkish/Kemalist government, secures her a charming position within intellectual circles. Edib's stay in India enabled her to closely monitor an anti-colonial struggle, other than the Turkish case. Her presence in India paved the way for her to compare the two anti-colonial movements in different contexts. In *Inside India*, Edib does not engage to deep theoretical discussions regarding the characteristics of anti-colonial nationalisms. Nevertheless, she cites Lenin and Gandhi as the two great leaders of their countries, whereas Mustafa Kemal doesn't occupy her interests (2002: 201). *Inside India* can be considered as the sum of Edib's observations, by which she would later produce criticisms regarding the anti-colonial struggle in Turkey, especially in her book "Conflict of East and West in Turkey".

Mushirul Hasan notes that Edib's account of India was dismissed due to various reasons: "Presumably, the reflections of Halide Edib are ignored simply because she asks disturbing questions – questions that do not fit into established historical canons." In the preface that he wrote for *Inside India*, he further explains:

> The neglect of so important a work is largely due to our dependence on intellectual resources from the West, our anxiety to adopt their frameworks and models, and in some cases, to assiduously nurture the Orientals vision and representation of India. (2002, ix)

It is probable that Edib's *Inside India* remained *doxic* due to Edib's disillusionment with the Kemalist regime. In India, Edib manages to distance herself from the Kemalist anti-colonial regime and attempts to search for alternatives. In "Conflict of East and West in Turkey", Edib provides a more detailed analysis regarding the Kemalist project.

3- Gandhi: Between East and West

Despite her criticisms against the Kemalist regime and status as self-imposed exile, Edib does not reject the idea of nation as a category. She rather aims to rework on its possible definitions. For her, the idea of nation is necessary for an anti-colonial struggle. Edib's theorization and problematization of the nation can be found in the writings of Frantz Fanon as well, who argues that "the nation is not only the condition of culture, its fruitfulness, its continuous renewal, and its deepening. It is also a necessity." For Fanon, founding a nationalist cause and following the nationalist movement is a necessary step on the road to the anticolonial struggle. According to him, the sense of a nation "is the fight for a national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation" (2001: 1592). "The door of creation", which the nationalist struggle lead the anticolonial nationalist movement of the Turks, was apparently not compatible with Edib's perception. Thus she needs the urge to rewrite the history of the independence movement. In a self-imposed exile, she attempts to re-theorize the Turkish experience of anti-colonial nationalism by critically interrogating the concepts of East and West.

Edib's theoretical findings in "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" proceed through the colonial dichotomy. With clear-cut distinctions between East and West, Edib tries to locate the characteristics which would distinguish East from West and eventually empower East over West. For this purpose, she distinguishes the Eastern mind from the Western mind, as the former maintains *spirituality* while the latter's unique characteristic is *materiality* (1935: 224-225). Similar to Edib's findings, Partha Chatterjee also distinguishes the "material domain" from the "spiritual domain", in describing the advance of anticolonial nationalisms. The material domain is occupied with Western ideals of economy, statecraft, science and technology; the spaces where "West had proved its superiority and East had succumbed." As opposed to the material domain dominated by those Western ideals, Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalisms reserve room for the "spiritual" in order to maintain its own domain of sovereignty. For Chatterjee, the spiritual is "an 'inner' domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity."

What he further proposes as the fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa is that; "the greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture." In this respect, she illustrates the ways in which the spiritual domain is constituted and maintained by means of three main areas: language, school and family (1993: 6)

In a similar fashion, Edib distinguishes the Eastern mind from the Western mind as the former maintains spirituality while the latter's unique characteristic is materiality. Moreover according to Edib, "the individual of the East is the possessor of a marked and unique personality." The individual of the East managed this "simply by detaching his mind from material worldly realities."(1935: 3) Despite their differences, Edib acknowledges that the East and the West should cooperate. She intends to reconcile the crucial distinction between East and West: materiality (of the West) and spirituality (of the East). According to Edib, this cooperation can occur when the East "feels itself equal with the West…" In addition to the necessity of equality, the two "must also possess mutually valuable things to exchange." Edib further remarks that this reconciliation or cooperation is taking place since a group of people in the West began to realize the superiority of Eastern philosophy. At the same time, the East began to take steps for improvement of its material life, due to its realization of the lack of materiality as opposed to the West (242).

In her aims to reconcile the conflicts inherent between East and West, Edib supports the policies of Gandhi. For her, Gandhi is "trying to regenerate the Eastern villager economically and morally", but at the same time "he is fighting against a too rapid industrialization." (245). Edib notices that Gandhi manages to work through the both ends of the colonial dialectic, between materiality and spirituality. She observes that Gandhi performs an anticolonial nationalism not only on the basis of spirituality but also on material/economic relations. Edib insists that Gandhi's operation within that material domain is a unique approach. Gandhi not only operates within the domain of the spiritual in his revolutionary ideals, but also within materiality, to the extent that it becomes useful in encountering Western domination and power. Her admiration for Gandhi is significant for her to state that Gandhi is more than a local revolutionary:

> Both the Eastern and the Western world should study him seriously for he is offering one of the ways which may lead to the salvation, not only of the East but also of the West, by enabling it to cooperate with a free, strong, moral and peaceful East. (1935: 247)

In sum, Gandhi proposes a new understanding of materiality, which is distinct from the Western one. Edib analyzes that Gandhi's model resembles the "Ahi" organization in 13th century Anatolia (246), suggesting that his motives have their roots in the East for long centuries. Regarding the contemporary society, Edib depicts the ideal figure of an anticolonial revolutionary as the leader, who combines the materiality of the West with the spirituality of the East.

Edward Said defines orientalism "as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and "the Occident" (1979: 2). Aijaz Ahmad interprets Said's approach, by stating that Said speaks of "the West, or Europe, as the one which produces knowledge, the East as the object of that knowledge." For Ahmad in other words Said seems to "posit stable subject-object identities, as well as ontological and epistemological distinctions between the two." (1992: 183) Edib's writings regarding India display reversal oriental dynamics as Said propounds since an Eastern scholar produces knowledge on the East without any Western-centric presuppositions. Edib is not an orientalist in the sense that she does not represent the East as passive, colonized and stable subjects. She rather draws attention to the active agencies of anti-colonial nationalisms. As Hasan remarks, "she (Edib) sums up aspects of Indian nationalism, points to its strengths and weaknesses, underlines its encounters with colonialism, and explores the rising tide of Muslim nationalism." (2002: x) While producing knowledge on the East, Edib engages to a comparison between two anti-colonial nationalisms, Turkish and Indian independence movements. Edib's observations regarding Kemalist policies of nationalism is determinate in the ways she favors nationhood with a *hybridity*-oriented approach.

The unique position that Edib maintains regarding the nature of anti-colonial struggle can be considered as proto-*hybrid*. Edib's idea of nationhood, which welcomes the multiplicity of actors within the anti-colonial struggle and her endeavor to look for a mutualities between the East and the West welcomes hybridity, in contrast with the clear-cut boundaries of the colonial dialectic. Bhabha defines the term hybridity as follows:

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority. (Bhabha, 1995: 34)

Bhabha's understanding of *hybridity* (1994) offers "mutualities and negotiations across the colonial divide". It refuses to solely assume the binary oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, 116). According to Huddart hybridity, "on one level simply refers to the mixed-ness, or even 'impurity' of cultures—so long as we don't imagine that any culture is really *pure*." For Huddart, the term points at the particular approach, which reveals that, "cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness." (2006: 4) Edib's self-imposed exile provided her with the opportunity to interact with other cultures under colonialism. The formula of nationhood that she comes up with clearly illustrates her approach towards hybridity of cultures and civilizations. Indian case becomes the decisive experience for Edib to fully develop criticisms. For her, interaction between various communities, socialists, Hindus, Muslims and many other religious/ethnic groups during Indian anti-colonial movement sets up a contrast with totalitarian tendencies of the Kemalist republic.

4- Critique of Kemalism

Edib's lectures delivered at National Muslim University in New Delhi, is collected and published under the name, "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" in 1935. In her lectures, Edib provides an alternative historical narrativization of Turkish independence movement. She also criticizes the social reforms undertaken between 1919 and 1935 by the Kemalist project of modernization. What is unique in her accounts is that she doesn't abide the norms of Kemalism as the official ideology of the republic. For example, she refuses to mention the existence of Mustafa Kemal as the *holy* leader of the nation, who brought salvation for whole country. Rejecting the official ideological "one-man" narrative, which attaches certain valor to Mustafa Kemal, Edib characterizes Turkish anti-colonial independence movement and the reform acts throughout 1920's as the work of "the people".

With her focus on *the people*, Edib seems to be celebrating Gramscian "national-popular" (Gramsci: 1992, Brandist: 1996), the idea of active agency of the masses for revolution for anti-colonial struggle. Commenting on the foundation of Turkish Constituent Assembly in 1923, Edib observes: "It was the first government in the East created by *the people* and acting for *the people*." (1935: 110) With the Turkish case of anti-colonial struggle, Edib points out the active agency that East displays against the West. Further, she makes a crucial remark about the national-popular. She suggests that anti-colonial struggles should proceed through the idea of "nationhood" rather than "nationalism". For Edib, the term nationhood "brings into play and harmonises inner forces in all their variety from a utilitarian and an aesthetic point of view"; whereas she stays critical against nationalism by stating that "the latter may cause inner disintegration and create conflict with the surrounding peoples" (243). By distinguishing nationalism from nationhood, Edib points at the remarkable differences between the anti-colonial experiences of India and Turkey. From there on, she manages to elaborate the Turkish anti-colonial movement from a critical perspective.

In "Turkey Faces West" which Edib wrote five years before her visit to India, she develops the critique of Kemalism. The book signals the first instance where Edib's proto-hybrid ideas regarding the anti-colonial struggle appear. According to Edib, "no forecast of a single nation is possible without some knowledge of the world which surrounds it, immediate or remote." Consequently, Edib draws a portrait of a postcolonial world where the clash of the East and the West eventually results in hybrid state of existence: "By the time the clash begins, they will have taken so much from each other, will be so much intermixed, that it will be almost impossible to tell who is who and what is what." (1930: 239) Furthermore, Edib insists that a prominent characteristic of the Turks has been their ability to make a synthetic and harmonious whole out of very diverse elements, both of thought and of human material." (250) However, she claims that the conditions of anticolonial nationalist struggle led by Mustafa Kemal produced regime with systemic totalitarianism.

Researches on early republican regime show that Kemalist project of modernization aimed to "Turkify" the ethnic minorities with various cultural and militaristic policies, such as "Citizen, speak Turkish" campaigns, the violent repression of Kurdish and Alevi oppositions, the mass deportation of Kurds and pressures against the non-Muslim populations (Akçam, 2004; Bora, 1996; Heper, 2007; Meho & Maglaughlin, 2001; Uçarlar, 2009; Yıldız, 2001).

Edib situates that, around 1925 when Kemalism totally seized the state apparatus, the republican regime was transformed into a "dictatorship". This authoritarian state was more or less "a repetition of Young Turk dictatorship in the Great War." (255-256) Edib further recognizes that although Kemalism declared itself to be nationalists, it was exactly the contrary:

> Although it also is called nationalist, it has in truth, apart from Turkish economics, a very anti-nationalist spirit. The Turkish dictatorship has made the next greatest effort after the Soviets to cut its people off from their past. (1930: 258)

By cutting of from the past, Edib refers to the suppression of Ottoman traditions and values by the republican regime, such as the transition to the Latin alphabet from Ottoman script, the expulsion of the members of the Ottoman dynasty, the imposition of Western lifestyle on the public living Islamic lifestyles and writing of a mythological history of Turkish ethnicity which is freed from Ottoman and Islamic past. For Deniz Kandiyoti, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk dismantled the central institutions of Ottoman Islam. The early republicans abolished the Caliphate and secularized the public and private spaces. Kandiyoti also remarks that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk also "took measures to heighten Turkey's 'Turkish' national consciousness at the expense of a wider Islamic identification" (1991:4). As a result, Edib shows that Kemalists failed to actualize the spiritual "doors for creation" for the nation from its ruins. By rejecting what Chatterjee calls "the essential marks of cultural identity", Edib points out how Kemalists refuse to establish a *spiritual domain*, which leads their cause to be *antinationalist* as Edib argues. Plus, since the idea of "nation" with hybrid connotations has not properly been established, the struggle against colonialism is unfulfilled. For Edib, Kemalist project becomes merely a project of Westernization. The anticolonial cause diffuses into the colonial will of domination. According to Chatterjee (1986), nationalism is a *derivative discourse* inherited from European political ideas by means of the civilizing mission of colonialism. Eventually, Edib's theoretical propositions suggest that nationalism as applied by Kemalist paradigms becomes a *derivative* of colonialism.

5- Conclusion

This article aimed to introduce Edib's critical interrogations of anti-colonial nationalisms active in India and Turkey throughout 1920s and 1930s. A self-imposed exile disillusioned with the Kemalist project of anti-colonial nationalism and modernization, Edib endeavored to problematize the anti-colonial struggle in Turkey. In "Turkey Faces West" which she published in 1930, she identified the paradoxes inherent in Kemalism. Edib categorically believed in the decisive utility of the "nation" in anti-colonial struggle against the colonial domination. However, she believed Kemalism to become instrumentalized, as the derivative discourse of the colonial will. Kemalism preferred certain form of nationalism on the basis of homogenizing the society and assimilating the multiplicity of ethnic, religious and cultural actors into national whole. Such policy attached to the anti-colonial nationalism resulted in a totalitarian dictatorship, which imitated the West by cutting off its Ottoman and Islamic past. Leaving aside the spiritual domain, Turkish anti-colonial nationalism merely operated on the material domain. Yet, Kemalism felt the necessity of some kind of spirituality and tried to establish it by westernizing the lifestyle and turning back to mythologies of ethnic Turkish history before Ottoman and Islamic past.

Edib's visit to India in 1935 paved the way for her to locate the alternatives for Kemalist nationalism. Her first book "Inside India" consists of Edib's interactions with and observations of Indian intellectual circles. Her second book "Conflict of East and West in Turkey" is a collection of lectures she delivered at National Muslim University in New Delhi. Edib's books are not merely representations of Indian society. Rather, they are manifestations of active resistance of a Muslim, anticolonial, female author. Rejecting an orientalist perspective, Edib depicts on the active agency of Indian intellectuals during the independence movement. Rather than historicizing the events, she rather focuses on the "now". Edib celebrates the figure of Gandhi as a leader who reconciles the colonial dichotomy characterized by the spirituality of the East and the materiality of the West. She observes that anti-colonial nationalism in India is based on the multiplicity of agents from different cultural, ethnic and religious belongings. Therefore she carefully distinguishes the Indian experience of anti-colonial nationalism as "nationhood", in opposition to the Turkish experience of "nationalism" with totalitarian tendencies. Edib's analyses maintain a proto-*hybrid* character; a term useful to define postcolonial condition which was defined by Bhabha and reworked by other postcolonial theorists throughout 1990s. Rather than normalizing and legitimizing the distinctions between the East and the West, she attempts to reconcile the colonial dialectic by unfolding the mutualities across the colonial divide.

Contrary to Kemalism, which fails to reconcile the spiritual with the material, Edib finally argues that Gandhi is truly the revolutionary figure to come up with the perfect synthesis of the East and the West. While Mustafa Kemal was ruling the country as a dictator, referring to Gramscian terminology, Gandhi succeeded to establish the *consent* of different social classes. Edib's intellectual works that he wrote during 1930s comprised of a radical critique of Kemalism. Furthermore, Indian case of anti-colonial resistance encouraged Edib to manifest her proto-hybrid ideas regarding postcolonial condition. It is significant that Edib's works are not still translated into Turkish. As Kemalist project still maintains its hegemony, Edib's critique of Kemalism continues to occupy a *doxic* position.

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