Nationhood as Dialogical Entrenchment: Shifting Discourses of Turkishness and Kurdishness
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Turkish nationhood evolved through perennial clashes with the Kurdish mobilizations in the 20th century, through shifting claims, raptures and continuities in negotiations and clashes. Kurdish nationhood is now going through a critical moment of redefining and refining its sense of political collectivity regionally and globally. Cross-border Kurdish mobilizations of the 20th century have been through phases of collective identities shaped by local resistance, integrationism, negotiating cultural rights and citizenship during which Kurdish nationhood (as well as that of other national states) has been defined and redefined in dialogical struggles. My research on over 70 years of court documents showed that the idea of who Turks are and what constitutes Turkishness has been formed during ongoing dialogical conflicts with Kurdish mobilizations. These findings indicate that the construction of Turkish nationhood in the aftermath of the World War I has been through four, at times overlapping, phases: a) Territorial Nationalism as the Turkish Republic emerged from a geographical territory to state; b) Nation-Building Nationalism as the state actors purposefully attempt to forge a nation, at times expanding and limiting rights and freedoms; c) Cultural Nationalism as “nation” was defined as a cultural achievement and d) Political Nationalism, as nationhood was understood as citizens with rights. This flow was not a teleological one, and contingent upon claims of Kurdish mobilizations. When territorial nationalism attempted to incorporate diverse Kurdish speaking tribes, their local response was resistance. When resistance was suppressed by Nation-Building Nationalism, Kurds demanded national integration, and when integration was denied through repression and negligence, Kurds demanded cultural rights. The contemporary shifts in the narratives of Kurdish nationhood, from ethnic exclusiveness towards civic inclusiveness on the other hand indicate a transnational democratic entrenchment of Kurdish nationhood amidst violent clashes and contingent rearrangements of borders, identities and strategic global alliances in the Middle East.