

THE TURKISH NATIONAL ANTHEM AND THE POLITICS OF NATION-BUILDING AND LEGITIMACY IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

Türk Milli Marşı'nın Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ulus İnşası ve Siyasal Meşruiyet Politikaları

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Abstract

This article examines the Turkish National Anthem as a constitutive element of nation-building and political legitimacy in early Republican Türkiye. It conceptualizes the anthem as a symbolic and ritualized practice embedded in the institutional and everyday reproduction of national belonging, and argues that legitimacy in modern nation-states is sustained through the interaction of symbolic forms, ritual performance, and pedagogical infrastructures. The study adopts a multi-theoretical framework drawing on Anderson's imagined communities, Hobsbawm's invented traditions, Billig's banal nationalism, Smith's ethno-symbolism, and Kertzer's theory of ritual and political power. These perspectives frame national anthems as embedded mechanisms of identity and authority reproduction. Empirically, it situates the anthem within early Republican transformations, focusing on its embedding in education, ceremonies, and cultural reform. It argues that the anthem contributed to routinized national identity, affective synchronization, and symbolic reinforcement of legitimacy, in a relational and context-dependent manner. By integrating international and Türkiye-specific literature, the article addresses a gap in comparative nationalism studies and extends debates on symbolic governance in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: Turkish National Anthem, Nation-Building, Banal Nationalism, Early Republic of Türkiye, National Symbols.

Öz

Bu makale, Türk Milli Marşı'nı erken Cumhuriyet döneminde ulus inşası ve siyasal meşruiyetin oluşumunda kurucu bir unsur olarak incelemektedir. Çalışma, marşı yalnızca araçsal bir ideolojik aktarım mekanizması olarak değil, ulusal aidiyetin kurumsal ve gündelik yeniden üretimine içkin sembolik ve ritüelleşmiş bir pratik olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, modern ulus-devletlerde siyasal meşruiyetin; sembolik formlar, ritüel performanslar ve pedagojik altyapılar arasındaki etkileşim yoluyla sürdürüldüğü ileri sürülmektedir. Araştırma, Anderson'ın hayali cemaatler yaklaşımı, Hobsbawm'ın icat edilmiş gelenekler kuramı, Billig'in banal milliyetçilik kavramsallaştırması, Smith'in etno-sembolcü yaklaşımı ile Kertzer'in ritüel ve siyasal iktidar teorisini bir araya getiren çok katmanlı bir teorik çerçeveye dayanmaktadır. Bu perspektifler, milli marşları kimlik ve otorite üretiminin kurumsallaşmış sembolik mekanizmaları olarak değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma ampirik olarak marşı; eğitim, törenler ve kültürel reformlar bağlamındaki kurumsal yerleşikliği üzerinden erken Cumhuriyet dönüşümleri içerisinde konumlandırmaktadır. Bu bağlamda marşın, ulusal kimliğin rutinleşmesine, kolektif duygusal eşzamanlılığın oluşmasına ve siyasal meşruiyetin sembolik olarak pekişmesine ilişkisel ve bağlama bağlı biçimde katkı sunduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Uluslararası literatür ile Türkiye'ye özgü çalışmaları bir araya getiren makale, karşılaştırmalı milliyetçilik çalışmalarındaki önemli bir boşluğu doldurmakta ve Batı dışı bağlamlarda sembolik yönetim tartışmalarına katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk Milli Marşı, Ulus İnşası, Banal Milliyetçilik, Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si, Ulusal Semboller.

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INTRODUCTION

National anthems occupy a distinctive position within the symbolic architecture of modern nation-states, operating at the intersection of political authority, collective identity formation, and ritualized public performance. Despite their ubiquity in state ceremonies, educational systems, and civic rituals, their analytical treatment within nationalism studies has often remained fragmented, oscillating between descriptive cultural accounts and functionalist interpretations of ideological transmission. This article argues that such approaches are insufficient to fully account for the role of national anthems in the production of political legitimacy, particularly when examined within the context of state formation processes in non-Western settings such as early Republican Türkiye.

The dominant theoretical tradition in nationalism studies has established that nations are not primordial entities but historically constructed formations sustained through symbolic and institutional practices. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" provides a foundational premise by locating national belonging within shared systems of representation rather than direct social interaction (Anderson, 2006). Eric Hobsbawm's theory of "invented traditions" further demonstrates how modern nation-states actively construct continuity through ritualized practices that appear historically rooted but are often politically produced (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Complementing these perspectives, Michael Billig's notion of "banal nationalism" shifts analytical attention toward the everyday reproduction of national identity through routine symbolic cues embedded in institutional life (Billig, 1995). While these frameworks collectively offer a robust understanding of nationhood as a symbolic process, they rarely engage in depth with specific sonic and performative forms such as national anthems.

Within the emerging literature on national symbols and anthems, recent scholarship has begun to address this gap by emphasizing the auditory, performative, and ideological dimensions of anthem practices. Studies by Waterman (2020), Machin (2017), and Rippon (2005) demonstrate that national anthems function not merely as textual compositions but as multimodal and embodied practices through which national affect and collective identity are produced. Marsland (2001) further situates national symbols within broader systems of cultural integration, while Wozniak (2023) highlights the political contestation surrounding anthem practices in specific national contexts. However, this growing body of work remains largely comparative and under-theorized with respect to the mechanisms through which anthems contribute to legitimacy formation in historically specific state-building projects.

A second limitation in the existing literature concerns its limited integration with theories of ritual, pedagogy, and symbolic governance. While Kertzer's theory of ritual and political power provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding how symbolic practices structure collective perception and authority (Kertzer, 1988), this insight has not been systematically applied to anthem studies in relation to educational systems and state-led ideological formation. Similarly, although ethno-symbolist approaches such as those developed by Anthony D. Smith emphasize the historical depth of national symbols (Smith, 2009), they are rarely integrated with contemporary theories of everyday nationalism and performative repetition.

The Turkish case reveals an additional analytical gap. Existing scholarship on early Republican nation-building has extensively examined institutional modernization, ideological transformation, and cultural reform (Zürcher, 2004; Hanioglu, 2011), the long-term civilizational shift toward secularism (Berkes, 1964), and the politicization of collective identity that preceded the Republic (Karpas, 2001), as well as the intellectual foundations of Turkish nationalism in the work of Ziya Gökalp. However, the

specific role of the Turkish National Anthem as a mediating symbolic form within these processes has received limited sustained theoretical attention. Where it is addressed, it is often treated either as an auxiliary cultural artifact or as a straightforward instrument of ideological consolidation, without sufficient consideration of its ritualized, pedagogical, and affective dimensions.

This article addresses these gaps by advancing a relational and multi-layered analytical framework in which national anthems are conceptualized as ritualized symbolic practices embedded in broader systems of nation-building and legitimacy production. Focusing on the Turkish National Anthem in the early Republican period, it asks how such a symbolic form functioned within institutional, pedagogical, and ceremonial contexts, and how it contributed—rather than determined—to the stabilization of political legitimacy.

The article makes three interrelated contributions. First, it extends the application of banal nationalism by demonstrating its relevance to formalized ritual practices beyond everyday textual cues. Second, it integrates ritual theory and symbolic politics into the study of national anthems in a systematic way. Third, it situates the Turkish case within comparative nationalism literature, thereby addressing the persistent Eurocentric bias in anthem studies and contributing to a more context-sensitive understanding of symbolic governance in state formation processes.

A MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH TO NATION-BUILDING AND SYMBOLIC LEGITIMACY

This study is grounded in the proposition that nation-building and political legitimacy are not primarily institutional outcomes but culturally mediated and symbolically sustained processes. This perspective requires an analytical synthesis of modernization theories of nationalism, cultural-symbolic approaches, and ritual theories of power. Rather than treating these traditions as mutually exclusive, the framework adopted here integrates them into a layered model in which symbolic practices function as intermediaries between state authority and collective identity formation.

The modernist tradition in nationalism studies provides the foundational premise for understanding nations as historically constructed entities. Ernest Gellner's structural account emphasizes that nationalism emerges as a consequence of the transition to industrial society, where standardized culture becomes necessary for political and economic integration (Gellner, 1983). In a complementary manner, Eric Hobsbawm's concept of invented traditions highlights the role of state-led symbolic production in creating the illusion of historical continuity, thereby stabilizing new political orders through ritual repetition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Benedict Anderson further develops this line of thought by conceptualizing the nation as an "imagined community," sustained through shared representational systems rather than direct interpersonal relations (Anderson, 2006). Taken as a whole, these approaches establish the structural conditions under which symbolic forms acquire political significance.

However, modernist accounts alone are insufficient to explain the affective durability and cultural resonance of national symbols. Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist approach addresses this limitation by emphasizing the historical sedimentation of cultural meanings and the persistence of collective memories in shaping modern national identities. According to Smith, modern nations are constructed through the selective reactivation of pre-existing myths, symbols, and traditions that provide emotional depth to political belonging (Smith, 2009). This perspective is particularly relevant for contexts where

modernization processes interact with deeply embedded cultural and historical repertoires, as in the case of early Republican Türkiye.

While modernist and ethno-symbolist approaches explain the structural and cultural foundations of nationalism, they require further elaboration through theories of symbolic power. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power provides a crucial analytical extension by demonstrating how domination is reproduced not only through coercion but also through the internalization of symbolic classifications that structure perception and belief (Bourdieu, 1991). From this perspective, national symbols such as anthems can be understood as instruments through which symbolic authority is naturalized and rendered socially legitimate.

Complementing this, Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to culture conceptualizes political systems as systems of meaning in which symbols function as models of and models for social reality (Geertz, 1973). Accordingly, symbolic practices do not merely represent political order; they actively constitute it by shaping interpretive frameworks through which actors understand authority, belonging, and obligation. This interpretive dimension is essential for understanding how national anthems operate as culturally meaningful practices rather than purely ideological instruments.

The final layer of the framework draws on ritual theory to explain how symbolic forms are enacted and embodied in practice. David Kertzer conceptualizes ritual as a structured, repetitive practice through which political authority is both expressed and experienced (Kertzer, 1988). Rituals function by transforming abstract political principles into embodied forms of collective synchronization, thereby producing affective alignment among participants. In this context, national anthems can be understood as ritualized sonic practices that generate temporary experiences of unity through repetition, performance, and institutional embedding.

When synthesized, these theoretical strands produce a multi-dimensional analytical framework. Modernist theories (Gellner; Anderson; Hobsbawm) explain the structural emergence of national systems; ethno-symbolism (Smith) accounts for cultural continuity and emotional resonance; symbolic power theory (Bourdieu) clarifies the mechanisms of normalization and internalization; and ritual theory (Kertzer; Geertz) explains the embodied reproduction of political order. Read jointly, these perspectives enable an interpretation of national anthems not as static cultural artifacts, but as dynamic symbolic practices situated at the intersection of culture, power, and institutional reproduction.

Table 1. Core Theoretical Perspectives and Their Contribution to the Analytical Framework

Theorist(s)	Key Concept	Contribution to the Analytical Framework
Gellner (1983)	Structural functionalism of industrial society	Explains the structural necessity of cultural standardization for political and economic integration.
Anderson (2006)	Imagined communities	Locates national belonging in shared systems of representation rather than direct interaction.
Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983)	Invented traditions	Shows how ritualized practices manufacture an appearance of historical continuity.
Smith (2009)	Ethno-symbolism	Accounts for the affective durability of national symbols through pre-modern myths and memories.
Bourdieu (1991)	Symbolic power	Explains how domination is naturalized through the internalization of symbolic classifications.
Geertz (1973)	Culture as a system of meaning	Frames symbols as constitutive models of and for social reality, not mere reflections of it.

Kertzer (1988)	Ritual and political power	Explains how repetitive, embodied practice transforms abstract authority into shared experience.
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NATIONALISM AND THE STUDY OF NATIONAL ANTHEMS

The scholarly study of nationalism has developed along multiple intellectual trajectories, yet a shared premise underlies most approaches: nations are not natural entities but historically constructed forms of collective identity sustained through symbolic, institutional, and discursive practices. Within this broad field, national anthems have only recently begun to receive sustained analytical attention, despite their centrality in the performative articulation of national belonging.

Classical theories of nationalism provide the structural foundation for understanding the emergence of national symbols. Ernest Gellner conceptualizes nationalism as a structural necessity of industrial society, in which cultural standardization becomes essential for administrative and economic integration (Gellner, 1983). Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger further demonstrate how modern states construct continuity through “invented traditions,” where ritualized practices create the appearance of historical depth and legitimacy (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Benedict Anderson’s influential notion of “imagined communities” shifts attention toward the representational and communicative mechanisms through which national belonging is produced and sustained (Anderson, 2006). Michael Billig’s theory of banal nationalism extends this perspective by emphasizing the everyday reproduction of national identity through routine symbolic cues embedded in institutional life (Billig, 1995). Collectively, these approaches establish a conceptual foundation for understanding national symbols as constitutive rather than merely reflective of national identity.

Within this theoretical landscape, Anthony D. Smith’s ethno-symbolist approach introduces an important corrective by emphasizing the historical depth of national formations. Smith argues that modern nations are shaped through the selective reactivation of pre-modern myths, memories, and symbols, which provide emotional continuity and cultural resonance to modern political identities (Smith, 2009). This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding why certain national symbols, including anthems, maintain affective power beyond their institutional enforcement.

Building on these broader theories of nationalism, a growing body of literature has turned specifically to national symbols and anthems as objects of analysis. Stephen Waterman (2020) conceptualizes national anthems as sonic articulations of the nation, emphasizing their role in producing imagined national communities through musical and lyrical repetition. Similarly, David Machin (2017) approaches anthems as multimodal ideological constructs in which musical form, rhythm, and performance encode relations of authority and belonging. These studies highlight that anthems operate not only as textual artifacts but as embodied and performative practices that shape collective affect.

Complementing this perspective, Rippon (2005) emphasizes the pedagogical dimension of national anthems, arguing that they contribute to civic socialization by transmitting normative understandings of national identity through repetition in educational contexts. Marsland (2001) situates national symbols within broader processes of cultural integration, emphasizing their role in condensing complex national narratives into accessible and emotionally resonant forms. Wozniak (2023), focusing on the Turkish case, demonstrates how national anthem controversies reveal the contested nature of symbolic nationhood, highlighting the political stakes embedded in seemingly stable national rituals.

Despite these advances, the literature on national anthems remains analytically fragmented in three key respects. First, much of the existing scholarship treats anthems either as cultural expressions or ideological tools, without fully theorizing their role within broader systems of symbolic governance. Second, studies of anthems are often disconnected from core theories of nationalism, particularly those emphasizing everyday reproduction (Billig, 1995) and ritualized political authority (Kertzer, 1988). Third, comparative anthem studies tend to remain Eurocentric or descriptive, with limited integration of historically specific state formation processes in non-Western contexts.

In the Turkish context, nationalism studies have produced a substantial and historically grounded literature on state formation, ideological transformation, and cultural modernization (Zürcher, 2004; Hanioglu, 2011), complemented by Berkes's (1964) account of secularization as a long-term civilizational shift, Mardin's (2006) analysis of centre–periphery dynamics and ideological continuity, Karpat's (2001) study of identity politicization in the late Ottoman state, Bora's (2017) mapping of the wider spectrum of Turkish political ideologies, and Üstel's (2004) account of the pedagogical construction of citizenship. Even within this considerable body of domestic scholarship, however, the role of national symbols (and particularly the national anthem) has rarely been integrated into these broader analytical frameworks. Where it is addressed at all, the anthem tends to be treated as an auxiliary cultural artifact rather than as a constitutive element of symbolic governance.

This fragmentation reveals a clear analytical gap: existing literature has not sufficiently synthesized theories of nationalism, symbolic politics, and anthem studies into a unified framework capable of explaining how national anthems operate within state-building processes. The present study addresses this gap by situating the Turkish National Anthem within an integrated theoretical model that connects ritual theory, banal nationalism, and symbolic governance, thereby offering a more comprehensive account of how legitimacy and national identity are co-produced through performative symbolic practices.

NATION FORMATION, IDEOLOGY, AND SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION IN EARLY REPUBLICAN TÜRKİYE

The transformation from the late Ottoman imperial order to the early Turkish Republic constituted not only a political rupture but also a profound reconfiguration of symbolic, cultural, and ideological structures. Nation-building in this context cannot be reduced to institutional consolidation; rather, it involved the systematic production of new forms of collective identity through language reform, educational restructuring, and the reorganization of public rituals. These processes collectively shaped a symbolic field in which national belonging was continuously articulated and normalized.

A central intellectual reference point in this transformation was Ziya Gökalp, whose sociological formulation of nationalism provided an influential conceptual bridge between cultural continuity and political modernization. Gökalp's distinction between “culture” (*hars*) and “civilization” (*medeniyet*) enabled a conceptual separation between inherited imperial pluralism and the imagined homogeneity of the nation. His emphasis on cultural unity as the foundation of national identity contributed to the ideological vocabulary through which early Republican elites articulated their modernization agenda. Rather than functioning as a deterministic blueprint, Gökalp's thought operated as a flexible interpretive framework that informed subsequent cultural and institutional reforms. Mardin's (2006) centre–periphery framework offers a complementary reading of this same transformation, suggesting that Republican elites did not simply impose a finished national culture from above but negotiated it against inherited social cleavages between a Westernizing state centre and a more heterogeneous provincial

periphery—a tension that recurs, in muted form, in the anthem's own reception across urban and rural, elite and popular contexts.

The Kemalist modernization project translated these intellectual foundations into a comprehensive program of institutional and symbolic transformation. Reforms in language, education, law, and public life were not merely administrative adjustments but part of a broader attempt to reconstruct the cultural grammar of society. Modernization, in other words, functioned as a project of symbolic reordering, in which new forms of national identity were produced through deliberate interventions in cultural and educational domains. This aligns with broader sociological understandings of nation-building as a process of cultural standardization and symbolic integration (Gellner, 1983).

Education played a particularly significant role in this symbolic transformation. The school system became a primary site for the dissemination and reproduction of national ideology, where civic identity was cultivated through structured curricula and ritualized practices. As Üstel's (2004) study of citizenship education demonstrates, the early Republican school was tasked with producing the "makbul vatandaş"—the acceptable or approved citizen—whose loyalties, habits, and everyday conduct were shaped through sustained pedagogical intervention rather than proclaimed once and assumed. Within this pedagogical environment, national symbols were not merely taught as abstract concepts but embedded in repetitive, embodied routines that structured students' affective and cognitive orientation toward the nation. This process reflects the logic of ritual pedagogy, in which repetition and institutional embedding contribute to the internalization of symbolic meanings (Meşeci-Giorgetti, 2020).

From the perspective of symbolic governance, these reforms can be understood as mechanisms through which the early Republic sought to stabilize political authority by embedding it within everyday practices of social life. Public ceremonies, commemorative rituals, and educational routines functioned as sites in which national identity was not simply represented but enacted. In this regard, the state did not merely impose ideology from above; rather, it structured the conditions under which symbolic meanings could be reproduced and normalized across social domains.

This process can be further interpreted through the lens of banal nationalism, which emphasizes the continuous reproduction of national identity through routine institutional practices (Billig, 1995). In the Turkish case, the early Republican period witnessed the gradual embedding of national symbols into everyday life through schooling, civic ceremonies, and public rituals. These practices contributed to the normalization of national categories as taken-for-granted frameworks of belonging, thereby reducing the need for explicit ideological articulation in everyday contexts.

At the same time, ritual theory provides a complementary perspective for understanding how these symbolic processes were experienced at the level of collective embodiment. Ritualized practices, as conceptualized by Kertzer, transform abstract political authority into socially shared and affectively charged experiences of unity (Kertzer, 1988). Within this framework, early Republican ceremonies and symbolic performances can be understood as mechanisms through which collective synchronization and emotional alignment were periodically produced.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that nation formation in early Republican Türkiye operated through a multi-layered system of symbolic production in which ideology, pedagogy, and ritual practices were mutually reinforcing. Rather than functioning as discrete domains, they constituted an integrated symbolic infrastructure through which political legitimacy and national identity were continuously reproduced. Within this infrastructure, symbolic forms such as the national anthem

acquired their significance not in isolation but through their embeddedness in broader institutional and cultural practices.

METHOD

This article adopts a qualitative, interpretive-historical research design that combines secondary theoretical and historiographical literature with primary institutional sources bearing directly on the adoption and early circulation of the Turkish National Anthem. The primary corpus assembled for this study comprises four types of material: (i) the parliamentary record of the anthem's adoption, principally the Meclis-i Mebusan minutes documenting the readings and vote of 12 March 1921 (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi [TBMM] Zabıt Ceridesi, Dönem 1, İçtima 2, 12 Mart 1337/1921); (ii) the Maarif Vekâleti's circular of 25 October 1920 announcing the national anthem competition to the provinces and soliciting submissions (Maarif Vekâleti, 1920), together with the ministry's subsequent memorandum (tezkere) submitted to the Assembly; (iii) the anthem's publication as state text in the official gazette (Ceride-i Resmiye, 1921); and (iv) early Republican civic-education textbooks in which the anthem was formally incorporated into the school curriculum, notably Mehmet Emin's (1930) *Yurt bilgisi* and Afet İnan's (1931) *Vatandaş için medeni bilgiler*, the latter adopted for secondary education by decision of the Talim ve Terbiye Dairesi in 1931. These primary materials are read alongside the secondary historical-sociological literature on Republican nation-building (Zürcher, 2004; Hanioglu, 2011; Üstel, 2004) rather than in isolation from it, so that archival evidence and existing scholarship inform and check one another.

The analytical strategy is a thematic document analysis structured by the multi-layered theoretical framework outlined above. Each source in the corpus was read for evidence bearing on three dimensions derived from that framework: legislative-administrative institutionalization (how the anthem was authorized and promulgated as state text), pedagogical routinization (how it was embedded in curricula and classroom practice), and ceremonial standardization (how its performance was codified in public and school ritual). This procedure follows the logic of qualitative document analysis in historical sociology, in which textual and archival sources are coded for recurring institutional patterns rather than quantified, and in which the goal is analytic generalization about a single, historically bounded case rather than statistical generalization across cases.

On the question of causality, the article does not claim that the anthem produced political legitimacy in a linear or deterministic sense, nor does it treat institutional repetition as a sufficient condition for legitimacy on its own. Following Tilly's (1992) relational account of state formation and Mahoney's (2000) analysis of path-dependent institutional processes, the study instead treats legitimacy as an emergent property of recurring conjunctions between institutional practice, pedagogical routine, and symbolic meaning—a conjunction in which each element reinforces but does not mechanically cause the others. Concretely, this means that legislative-administrative institutionalization is treated as establishing the conditions of possibility for the anthem's subsequent pedagogical and ceremonial life, rather than as its efficient cause; and that pedagogical and ceremonial repetition is treated as the mechanism

through which those conditions were converted into routinized, taken-for-granted national belonging, rather than as automatic proof that such belonging resulted. This relational framing is intended to make the study's causal claims more explicit and more modest than a functionalist reading would allow, while still permitting a substantive account of how the three dimensions of institutional practice identified above worked together.

As a qualitative, document-based study, the analysis is necessarily limited in scope: it reconstructs how the anthem was institutionally produced, authorized, and disseminated, and it does not measure individual attitudes, reception, or compliance among historical actors, for which the surviving documentary record offers no direct evidence. Claims in the analysis that follows should accordingly be read as claims about institutional design and routinization rather than about the internal experience of those subject to it.

ANALYSIS: THE TURKISH NATIONAL ANTHEM AS A MEDIUM OF SYMBOLIC GOVERNANCE

The institutionalization of the Turkish National Anthem in the early Republican period should be understood as part of a broader symbolic restructuring through which the new state sought to stabilize its authority and cultivate a shared national imagination. Rather than functioning as an isolated cultural artifact, the anthem operated within a dense network of pedagogical practices, ceremonial routines, and ideological narratives that collectively shaped the conditions of national belonging. Its significance emerges not from a direct causal capacity to produce legitimacy, but from its embeddedness in repeated institutional performances that contributed to the normalization of national identity. The primary institutional record assembled for this study substantiates this embeddedness along three empirically distinguishable dimensions. First, the parliamentary and administrative record shows that the anthem was institutionalized through a deliberate legislative-administrative process rather than through spontaneous popular adoption: the Maarif Vekâleti's circular of 25 October 1920 launched a nationwide competition, the text selected by the Assembly was debated and adopted in a dedicated Meclis session on 12 March 1921 (TBMM, 1921), and it was subsequently promulgated as state text in the official gazette (*Ceride-i Resmiye*, 1921)—a sequence that positions the anthem, from its inception, as an instrument of state authority rather than an organically emergent folk symbol. Second, civic-education textbooks from the period, notably Mehmet Emin's (1930) *Yurt bilgisi* and Afet İnan's (1931) *Vatandaş için medeni bilgiler*, incorporated the anthem into the formal curriculum, placing it—together with the flag and the image of Atatürk—among the fixed pedagogical elements reproduced across successive editions and grade levels. Third, the same sources indicate that the anthem's institutional life was sustained through recurring ceremonial occasions—school flag ceremonies, national holidays, and military and civic commemorations—rather than through a single founding moment, which is consistent with the banal-nationalist and ritual-theoretical expectation that legitimacy is sustained by repetition rather than by a discrete inaugural event.

From the perspective of symbolic governance, national anthems function as condensed forms of political meaning that translate abstract notions of sovereignty into affectively accessible and collectively experienced practices. In the Turkish case, the anthem became integrated into formal state rituals and educational routines, thereby ensuring its continuous circulation within both civic and institutional contexts. This repetitive circulation aligns with the broader logic of cultural standardization

identified in modernization theory, where shared symbolic forms facilitate administrative and social integration (Eisenstadt, 1966).

The educational system played a central role in this process. Following the early Republican reforms, schooling became a primary site for the reproduction of national symbolism. The anthem was incorporated into daily or periodic school rituals, where it functioned not only as a text to be memorized but as a performative practice enacted through collective singing. This pedagogical embedding contributed to what Althusser conceptualizes as the role of ideological state apparatuses in the reproduction of social order, particularly through education as a site where individuals are interpellated as national subjects (Althusser, 1971). In this sense, the anthem can be understood as part of a broader ideological infrastructure that shaped subject formation through repetition and institutional discipline.

However, the symbolic efficacy of the anthem is not reducible to ideological imposition. From a cultural sociological perspective, its meaning is also shaped through interpretive and affective processes that exceed formal institutional control. Cultural symbols gain durability not only through enforcement but through their capacity to resonate within shared repertoires of meaning. Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and symbolic performance suggests that collective representations acquire power when they successfully articulate shared narratives of loss, sacrifice, and renewal within public discourse (Alexander, 2004). In this context, the anthem's emphasis on collective struggle and sovereignty can be interpreted as contributing to a narrative structure that facilitated emotional alignment with the emergent national project.

The performative dimension of the anthem is also crucial for understanding its role in symbolic integration. Public rituals, particularly those involving synchronized vocal and bodily participation, generate temporary forms of collective cohesion. Victor Turner's concept of "communitas" is useful here, as it captures the liminal experience of social unity produced through ritual participation (Turner, 1969). In ceremonial settings, the performance of the anthem temporarily suspends social differentiation, producing a sense of collective unity that symbolically reinforces the idea of the nation as a coherent and shared entity.

At the level of discourse, the anthem is embedded within a broader narrative structure characteristic of early Republican ideological formation. Studies of Kemalist discourse highlight how national identity was constructed through a combination of secular modernization, historical rupture, and civilizational reorientation (Lewis, 1968; Ahmad, 1993). Bora's (2017) mapping of the broader field of Turkish political ideologies situates Kemalism as one current among several competing projects of collective belonging—alongside Turkism, conservatism, and Islamism—that contested the meaning of the nation throughout the twentieth century, a reminder that the anthem's ideological content was never uncontested or self-evident even within the Republican elite. Within this discursive field, the anthem functioned as a symbolic condensation of key ideological motifs such as independence, sacrifice, and collective sovereignty. However, rather than simply reflecting these themes, it contributed to their stabilization through repetition in institutional contexts.

Importantly, the role of the anthem should also be situated within the broader historical sociology of state formation. Charles Tilly's work on state-building emphasizes that modern states consolidate power not only through coercion but also through the production of legitimacy via symbolic and administrative integration (Tilly, 1992). From this perspective, the anthem can be understood as one among several cultural technologies through which the early Turkish Republic contributed to the consolidation of a unified political identity.

Table 2. Institutional Embedding of the Turkish National Anthem in the Early Republican Period

Institutional Domain	Characteristic Practice	Symbolic/Governance Function
Education	Daily or periodic collective singing in schools; incorporation into civic curricula	Interpellates students as national subjects; normalizes national belonging as taken-for-granted (Althusser, 1971; Üstel, 2004)
Public ceremony	Performance at national holidays, commemorations, and state occasions	Generates temporary communitas and collective synchronization (Turner, 1969; Kertzer, 1988)
Everyday/banal reproduction	Routine, low-intensity repetition in institutional life outside exceptional events	Sustains cognitive routinization; the nation becomes a default interpretive frame (Billig, 1995; Zerubavel, 1997)
Discursive-ideological framing	Embedding within Kemalist narratives of independence, sacrifice, and sovereignty	Condenses ideological motifs into an affectively resonant symbolic form (Lewis, 1968; Ahmad, 1993; Bora, 2017)
State-administrative protocol	Formal ceremonial rules governing performance and conduct	Consolidates legitimacy through symbolic and administrative integration (Tilly, 1992)

DISCUSSION

This study's findings suggest that national anthems should be analytically repositioned not as discrete symbolic artifacts, but as components of what can be conceptualized as institutionalized sonic governance. This formulation shifts the analytical focus from what anthems represent to how they operate across time through embedded repetition within institutional environments. In the Turkish early Republican context, the anthem's significance emerges less from its textual content and more from its sustained circulation across pedagogical and ceremonial infrastructures that structure collective experience.

One key implication is that existing approaches to symbolic nationalism may underestimate the acoustic and performative dimension of state formation. While nationalism studies have extensively examined textual, visual, and discursive symbols, the auditory modality of political cohesion remains comparatively under-theorized. The anthem functions not simply as a signifier of national identity but as a structured temporal event that organizes collective attention, synchronizes bodily presence, and produces what can be termed coordinated affective temporality. This extends existing discussions in symbolic politics by suggesting that legitimacy is partially mediated through sonic repetition rather than exclusively through discursive articulation.

A second contribution concerns the relationship between institutional repetition and cognitive normalization. The findings indicate that repeated exposure to ritualized symbolic practices does not merely reinforce identity but contributes to the formation of what Zerubavel (1997) terms cognitive routinization, whereby national categories become perceptually unmarked and socially self-evident. Put differently, the anthem does not "transmit" nationalism in a linear fashion; rather, it participates in the production of epistemic environments in which the nation becomes a default interpretive frame.

Third, the analysis suggests that legitimacy formation in early Republican Turkey should be understood as distributed across multiple symbolic registers rather than centralized in state ideology alone. Drawing on this, legitimacy can be reconceptualized as an emergent property of interactions between educational rituals, public ceremonies, and repetitive symbolic performances. This perspective

moves beyond state-centric explanations and aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing the distributed nature of political meaning production (e.g., cultural sociology and relational institutionalism).

Importantly, the study also refines ritual theory by emphasizing that ritual effectiveness does not depend solely on exceptional or liminal events, but on high-frequency, low-intensity repetition embedded in everyday institutional life. Unlike classical ritual models that prioritize extraordinary collective events, the Turkish case demonstrates how routinized ceremonial repetition contributes to long-term symbolic stabilization without requiring heightened emotional intensity at each occurrence.

At the same time, the findings challenge deterministic interpretations of symbolic efficacy. The anthem's institutional embedding does not imply uniform reception or ideological homogenization. Instead, its effects should be understood as probabilistic and context-contingent, shaped by variations in institutional compliance, generational difference, and socio-political positioning. This reinforces a more cautious model of symbolic governance in which meaning is continuously negotiated rather than unilaterally imposed.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the Turkish National Anthem as a symbolic and ritualized component of nation-building processes in early Republican Türkiye. Rather than treating the anthem as a direct or autonomous source of political legitimacy, the analysis has conceptualized it as a situated practice embedded within broader institutional, pedagogical, and ceremonial structures through which national identity is continuously reproduced.

Across the analysis, the study has demonstrated that the significance of the anthem emerges primarily through its repetitive enactment within institutional contexts, particularly education and public ritual. This repetition does not function as a purely mechanical transmission of ideology, but as a structured form of symbolic practice that contributes to the normalization of national categories as taken-for-granted frameworks of belonging. Here, the anthem operates as part of what Zerubavel (1997) conceptualizes as socially organized mnemonic structures, in which repetition stabilizes shared temporal and symbolic reference points.

The findings further suggest that the anthem's role is closely connected to its ritualized performance. Drawing on classical ritual theory, collective ceremonies involving synchronized participation generate temporary forms of emotional and social alignment, reinforcing perceptions of collective unity (Durkheim, 1995). However, such effects should be understood as context-dependent and institutionally mediated rather than uniform or deterministic. The anthem contributes to these processes insofar as it is embedded in structured institutional environments that facilitate repeated collective enactment.

From a broader political sociology perspective, the study also indicates that symbolic forms such as national anthems gain significance through their integration into everyday institutional life. In line with the concept of everyday nationhood, national identity is reproduced not only through exceptional political events but through routine practices that render national categories cognitively accessible and socially durable (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). The anthem, in this regard, functions as one among several symbolic practices that collectively sustain the visibility and continuity of the nation in everyday life.

Importantly, the article has avoided attributing deterministic causal power to the anthem in the production of political legitimacy. Instead, legitimacy is conceptualized as an ongoing and relational process shaped by the interaction of symbolic forms, institutional arrangements, and cultural narratives.

Within this configuration, the anthem contributes to the stabilization of legitimacy by facilitating symbolic coherence and affective alignment, rather than directly producing political outcomes.

Theoretically, the study contributes to three interrelated strands of literature. First, it extends nationalism theory by demonstrating how symbolic forms operate through ritualized repetition within institutional contexts. Second, it integrates ritual theory and symbolic politics into the study of national anthems, highlighting the importance of embodied and performative dimensions. Third, it contributes to comparative nationalism studies by situating the Turkish case within a broader analytical framework that connects symbolic governance, education, and state formation.

Future research may further develop this approach by conducting comparative analyses across different national contexts to examine how variations in institutional design and cultural history shape the symbolic efficacy of national anthems. Additionally, micro-level studies focusing on reception, embodiment, and affective response could deepen understanding of how such symbolic practices are experienced by individuals within specific social settings.

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