Un/Making Mythos: Cult of Personality and Imaginative Opposition in the Kemalist Republic

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Ryan Gingeras
Eternal Dawn: Turkey in the Age of Atatürk (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 432 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19879-121-8

Christine Philliou
Turkey: A Past Against History (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 294 pp. ISBN: 978-0-52027-639-0

ABSTRACT: In Turkey the cult(s) of personality and authoritarianism have gone hand in glove since at least the foundation of the republic. Through an in-depth analysis of Ryan Gingeras's *Eternal Dawn: Turkey in the Age of Atatürk* and Christine Philliou's *Turkey: A Past Against History*, this review essay considers the republican origins of one-man rule and opposition to authoritarianism in the Turkish context. It discusses how, and why, the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk saw the light of the day even when he was still alive. It also questions how the evolving meanings and implications of *muhalefet* (opposition) could serve not only as a historical fact and analytical tool but also as a normative category in its own right to divert the public's energy from un/making nationalist mythos into consolidating basic liberal democratic values and economic justice of which Turkey is in dire need today.

KEYWORDS: cult of personality – opposition (*muhalefet*) – early republican Turkey – Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – Committee of Union and Progress – Unionists – republicanism – liberalism

In the summer of 2013 angry crowds took to the streets in Turkey. The protestors were incensed by the decision of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, prime minister then, to demolish the Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul, which was in violation of park preservation laws. First, tens of environmental and legal activists

https://doi.org/10.5325/bustan.13.1.0001
Bustan: The Middle East Book Review, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2022
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rushed to the park to prevent the demolition of this, one of the few green areas in the city center. When they were met with police violence, demonstrations grew and spread to the other areas of the city and then to almost all other major towns in the country.

The protestors' anger was about more than the demolition plans of the Gezi Park or the use of police force. At stake also was what those actions symbolized, that is, Turkey's swift slide into an authoritarian one-man rule in the past few years. Hundreds of thousands of people—leftists, liberals, democrats, Armenians, Kurds, Turks, football fans, LGBTQs, women with headscarves, Kemalists, and so on—were in the streets because their hopes for the future were shattered. They feared that the rule of law was once again being upended by Erdoğan's emblematic decision. Recent cracks among the Islamist/conservative rulers of the country, nepotism, economic/power greed, and regional effects of the so-called Arab Spring had hardened his government. Add to this the long-standing suspicions of many who were worried about the alleged secret agenda of Erdoğan and other conservatives to instrumentalize democracy for the Islamization of the peculiarly secular Kemalist republic. Amid Erdoğan's delusional statements that the mass protests were orchestrated by an "international interest lobby," the people in the street persevered despite continuing police brutality late at night. Many of them did so for their freedom and liberties. But what each of these groups understood by "freedom" was a different thing.

I was in Izmir during the Gezi Park protests and went to join the demonstrators more than once to observe for myself their demands and express my own opposition to Turkey's (yet another) authoritarian turn. The protestors in Izmir usually gathered by the Kültür Park, which used to be the Greek and Armenian quarter before the great fire of 1922. In this remarkably hardcore Kemalist city, the great majority preferred to chant for their liberties with what might appear to be a counterintuitive slogan, "We are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers!" They sang songs that said, "Long live Mustafa Kemal Paşa, long live!," seeing Kemal as the symbol of Turkish modernity and liberation after World War I. But Atatürk's modernist authoritarian rule in the 1920s and 1930s was at the same time associated with oppression on the part of nonethnic Turkish and conservative masses.

At first sight, it might seem difficult to fathom the imbroglio of Turkish politics—as to how the protestors in Izmir could embrace such a militarist language shrouded by the cult of personality while protesting for freedom and liberty. The demonstrations had begun in Istanbul to denounce the unfolding of an authoritarian one-man rule. Yet people in the streets of Izmir were chanting about another.

For anyone familiar with the idiosyncrasies of Turkish political culture this is not a novel dilemma. The mythos of Mustafa Kemal as the liberator of the Turkish society from the political, economic, and sociocultural ills associated with the ancient Ottoman order and foreign imperial domination has been a cornerstone of the republican official history. It has long been a subject of investigation in studies that focus on early republican Turkey. Ryan Gingeras's recently published book *Eternal Dawn: Turkey in the Age of Atatürk* is a fresh addition to this literature. Its rich analysis offers us a new account of how and why the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk saw the light of the day even when he was still alive.

THE NATION'S ETERNAL FATHER

Eternal Dawn unpacks the "fascinating, terrible and inspiring story" of Atatürk's Turkey "without deference to the mythology that still envelopes it" (viii, 9). According to Gingeras the book differs from past accounts by emphasizing "the interaction between the state and Anatolian society at large" (11). He delivers this not by incorporating Mustafa Kemal's biography and intellectual propensities with early republican history, as is the usual practice in historiography, but by foregrounding the making and the diverse reception of his "legend" among "the ordinary people." He crafts a rich narrative, straddling urban histories and life stories. It focuses at once on representations of spaces like the Dolmabahçe Palace (introduction) or the transformation of cities like Izmir and Ankara (chapter 4), and temporal biographies, of both opponents and proponents of Mustafa Kemal's regime that range from liberal figures like Mehmed Cavid Bey (chapter 1), Ahmed Emin Yalman (chapter 2), and Ahmet Ağaoğlu (chapter 3), to Kurdish and Turkish nationalists like Musa Anter (chapter 5) and Falih Rıfkı Atay (chapter 6), among others.

Even though more than 100,000 people poured to Dolmabahçe Palace after Atatürk passed away on November 10, 1938, to pay respect to the late president by glimpsing his body one last time, Gingeras notes that "the sadness and loss of Mustafa Kemal's death . . . did not necessarily reflect a nation united and harmonious" (5, 7). It was not just "devotion" that characterized perceptions of Atatürk at the time (11). Obviously, there was also opposition, overt and covert, vocal and silent, violent and peaceful, to his regime. It was amid, and in part because of, these tensions that a Kemalist mythos was forged and thrived in the nascent decades of the republic—a mythos that singled out and glorified Mustafa Kemal and his achievements, leaving the others in his shadow and reducing a much more complex history with multiple agents into a one-sided narrative. According to Gingeras, Mustafa Kemal's own ambitions and personality and the persistence of the perceived threats to the new regime or the ruling elites deemed the mythos a defining feature of Turkish political culture.

Of utmost importance in understanding the making of the mythos is to discern how the history of the independence movement and the early republic was (re)constructed at the hands of the Kemalist leadership, including Mustafa Kemal himself. Gingeras traces this to an early 1922 interview that Mustafa Kemal gave to Ahmed Emin Yalman (66). The interview formed the first account of what has come to be taught at schools in Turkey for generations: the Turkish leader's early childhood in the 1880s, his school years in Salonika (the hometown of both Kemal and Yalman), his growing interests in the "maladies of the country's administration and politics" at the imperial military academy during the Hamidian era, and then, after the 1908 revolution, his disassociation with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) due to his critiques on the CUP regime (67, 69). After his reassignment to command an army group in Syria in 1917, Mustafa Kemal's "frank and unmerciful" letter to Enver Paṣa, the Ottoman Minister of War, in which he complained about the mismanagement of the army and the war, made the break with the CUP complete (72, 73).

The interview, Gingeras writes,

> opened a door for what would become the making of the Atatürk myth. By the time he assumed the presidency of the young republic, the story of his journey from soldier to statesman had become indelibly linked to the country's own history. The retelling of his early life gradually took on subtle metaphoric qualities as time passed. His experiences at war, and his reading of the empire's final years, gradually became the basis for the official history written on the state's behalf. (66)

The ensuing Kemalist official history has tended to downplay the diverse transnational dynamics that campaigned, even if separately, for the sovereignty of Turkey in the aftermath of the Mudros Armistice and the occupation of Asia Minor by the Allied Powers: the former Unionists, liberals, and civil society organizations.[1] The Kemalist historiography proved to be exclusionary, disregarding this plurality, producing instead a monolithic story that began, first, with the crystallization of Mustafa Kemal's plans in Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) where he "read and kept a steady diary of his thoughts" and divulged that rather than being "forced to descend to the level of common people . . . I should raise them to my level" (74). The second beginning in this narrative is the famous May 1919 moment when Mustafa Kemal left Istanbul and launched the independence war against the occupying Allied forces (76).

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[1] Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş and Alp Yenen, "Petitions, Propaganda, and Plots: Transnational Forces of Diplomacy during the Turkish War of Independence," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (forthcoming).

In line with the revisionist scholarship of the past few decades, *Eternal Dawn* adds nuance to this conventional and often-misleading historical account. It is "more probable that [Mustafa Kemal's] fortitude and ambition . . . guided his subsequent actions." In fact, he was striving to attain a high government position, lobbying Sultan Mehmed Vahdeddin to this end in the winter of 1919. According to Gingeras, this was "one of the most critical periods in the making of the Atatürk legend" (76). He mentions that "a British journalist who met [Mustafa Kemal] shortly after the armistice reported that he was willing to accept a British mandate over the country if he was allowed a position of some authority" (78). But Gingeras does not take such postulations for granted and turns to the memoirs of the key figures of the time such as Rauf (Orbay), Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), and Rıza Nur, all of whom eventually broke away from Mustafa Kemal's inner circle, as well as the writings of those figures like Salih (Bozok), Kılıç Ali, and Falih Rıfkı who remained loyal to Kemal throughout their lives. The credibility of the often-contradictory storylines of these historical actors are constantly checked and cross-checked in *Eternal Dawn*. While Orbay's account shows that Atatürk played a central role in negating the project of a foreign mandate, something that he and his entourage discussed at length, Karabekir's journals suggest that the Turkish leader was at first "relatively inert, or perhaps ambivalent, to the notion of initiating an armed campaign against the Entente occupation" (79).

Eternal Dawn reminds us that the nationalist independence struggle from 1919 to 1922 was of a considerably fractured nature, and this was pivotal in the making of the Kemalist mythos. The breach among the leading elites in Ankara, between the Ankara and Istanbul governments, and between Kemal and the leading Unionists such as Enver Paşa, who was working with pro-Communist revolutionary groups to gain favor for the Turkish cause against the Allied Powers, all prompted the idolization of Mustafa Kemal as the eternal leader of the republic.

To be more precise, it was partly thanks to Enver's initiatives that, even if short-lived, an anti-imperialist Muslim front among the Afghan, Persian, and Turkish leaders (supported by the Bolsheviks) took form in 1920. In point of fact, such developments abroad did strengthen the hand of the Kemalists when they sat at the negotiation tables with the Allied Powers in the early

1920s. Yet the transnational struggles beyond Mustafa Kemal's nationalist movement were received with suspicion by his government in Ankara where "Enver still retained followers and enthusiasts [in Asia Minor] . . . despite his failures as the empire's minister of war." This was why the Ankara government "blocked Enver's return home in the summer of 1921" (87). He was a threat to the consolidation of Ankara's power.

The Kemalist mythos was formed not simply through discursive practices, however. The concrete military victories scored in Asia Minor and the human tragedies endured were the most instrumental to forging the Kemalist mythos. Due to the achievements of his armies against the Greek forces on the battleground in 1921, Mustafa Kemal was awarded the title of *gazi,* warrior of Islam, by the new National Assembly, an honor received by only few "in modern times." He was named among "the ranks of other venerated soldiers who had won great victories on the behalf of Islam" (90). The ultimate victory after the Greek offensive in August 1922 was followed by the disorderly fleeing of the Greek divisions, who, "either out of revenge or in an effort to slow the offensive to a crawl . . . lit fires or dynamited whole villages and town quarters in their retreat," causing great human tragedy (92). The arrival of Mustafa Kemal's armies chasing after the Greeks made the Gazi a true savior during the final moments of the war.

The "disastrous scenes" and suffering in western Anatolia culminated with an analogous calamity in the great fire that broke out in the Greek and Armenian quarters of Izmir on September 13, 1922 (92). All these developments in quick succession, victory and defeat on the battlefield, the less-acknowledged Muslim human tragedies in Asia Minor, the equally tragic humanitarian crisis suffered by the non-Muslims, and the risk of further violence hastened the armistice of Mudanya in early October, and then the beginning of peace talks at Lausanne in November. When the Allied Powers invited the Istanbul government to send a representative to the Swiss town as a tactical move, the Ankara government abolished the Sultanate on November 1, 1922, which effectively ended the six-century long Ottoman Empire, and eliminated another contender for authority in postwar Turkey (94). Public denigrations of the old imperial regime as precipitators of "decline" gained traction then. But hindsight suggests that what followed the proclamation of the republic in October 1923 in fact manifested remarkable continuities with the Ottoman past, not a "total break" as the official history would tell us.

To illustrate these continuities *Eternal Dawn* draws our attention to figures like Şükrü Kaya who, during World War I, had been the head of the Directorate for Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants and "was among the chief architects of Talat Pasha's policy of internal deportation," or, in Kaya's words, "the extermination of the Armenian race" (176). A decade later he served as the interior minister of the early republic, showing "a similar inflexibility and ferocity in leading state efforts at assimilating the country's diverse population" (176).

Crucially, Gingeras uses the life story of Mehmed Cavid Bey, the former Ottoman Minister of Finance and a leading Unionist, as a lens to explain another of these continuities between the Ottoman past and the new republic, that is, the intra-elite struggles among the (former) CUP leaders—how, even after the death of Enver, the differences between Mustafa Kemal and the Unionist leadership lingered, and how the Kemalist leadership managed to wither away the opponents.

Eternal Dawn does not mention the fact that Cavid was at Lausanne, along with the Turkish delegation, as consultant on financial issues. This was the last chance of the CUP minister, still the most experienced financier in Turkey at the time, to obtain a position among the Kemalist circle.[2] But Cavid's financial advice was not well received by the Turkish delegation, nor was his friendship with French diplomats welcome. He was sent back to Istanbul.

After this bitter experience Cavid sought from behind closed doors to rally a Unionist opposition to the Kemalist regime. He found the way the republic was proclaimed distasteful, writing in his diaries that "if not for the presence of soldiers . . . [Istanbul's streets] on October 30 were as quiet as a Ramadan evening." According to Cavid, people were afraid of protesting (107). Indeed, the half-hearted support and the criticisms to the top-down proclamation of the republic prompted the arrest of journalists that were allegedly "poison[ing] the conscience of the people" (108). Rauf (Orbay) was also embittered by the fact that Mustafa Kemal had now become "Turkey's dictator" even though the latter had sworn to Rauf that "he would step down from government service once the war against Greece had finished" (110).

By 1926 both Cavid's Unionist leadership and the new political party founded by Rauf (Orbay) and Kazım Karabekir were removed from the political scene, after being denounced by Prime Minister İsmet İnönü as "persons with crippled souls" (112). The names of both Cavid and Rauf were implicated in a planned assassination of Atatürk (125). In 1926 Cavid was executed for treason. Roaming in exile for a decade, Orbay was eventually pardoned; however, the disgraced man's ties with the regime had been irreversibly severed (127).

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[2] Ayse Köse Badur, "A Civil Unionist: The Biography of Mehmed Cavid Bey: 1876–1926," doctoral diss., Boğaziçi University, 2021.

With the elimination of the last of the opposition being complete in 1926, Gingeras observes, "Kemalism's unquestioned rise over Turkey was finally sealed . . . [and] the Gazi's central place within Turkish political culture became ever more solidified. Those who opposed him, despite the brief ability to form a rival party, never found footing to challenge his status as the nation's talisman" (110). The famous 1927 speech of Mustafa Kemal delivered over three days at the National Assembly "set in stone the reigning myths of the young Turkish republic" (132). The speech portrayed Kemal, "his will and vision" as "the main architect of the National Movement. . . . To question his centrality within this history, or challenge his revolution or its trajectory, would thereafter be deemed heresy" (132).

Gingeras places Mustafa Kemal's 1927 speech in context by pointing out how it had come amid a revolutionary fervor and during a series of reforms and developments such as the introduction of a new constitution, the abolition of the caliphate, the ban on religious orders, hat reform, and so on. Mustafa Kemal's narrative, historically incorrect and incomplete, was nothing but a means to solidify the foundations of the Kemalist revolution.

Persons close to Mustafa Kemal, such as Mahmud Esat (Bozkurt), the Minister of Justice until 1930 and a professor of the Turkish revolution thereafter, "attributed all the achievements and innovations of the young republic to Atatürk's genius" (136). This sycophant's impression became a pattern in the writings of several authors from then on. Figures like Ahmet Ağaoğlu, who was a pioneer of Turkish nationalism in the 1910s but then became a prominent liberal in early republican Turkey, likened Mustafa Kemal to a prophet leading the citizens of the republic to freedom.[3] As Gingeras concludes, such assessments were more than "the product of nostalgia."

> It was a verdict that was deliberately shaped and disseminated even as Atatürk lived. The president and his immediate disciples cultivated [the Kemalist] mythos with more than posterity in mind. Banishing the Ottoman Empire to the past, and impugning the legacies it had left behind, required a powerful counternarrative rooted in the spirit of the postwar experience. . . . Having proven himself as a general, a statesman, and a political thinker, his followers championed [Mustafa Kemal] as an imminently great man for his time, one that rivalled or surpassed the capabilities of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, or Roosevelt. (136)

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[3] Ozan Ozavci, *Intellectual Origins of the Republic: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the Genealogy of Liberalism in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 215.

The fact was that while his followers preferred to see Mustafa Kemal as a selfless and independent leader, others "clearly interpreted his behaviour as dictatorial and egomaniacal" (102). Where Gingeras, as a historian, positions himself among these contrasting interpretations is usually unclear in *Eternal Dawn*.

Yet the book offers its readers much more than the making of the Kemalist mythos. In chapters 4 and 5 we find detailed accounts of the reception of the Kemalist revolution and its key cultural reforms by the wider society, including the Kurds, Armenians, and Greeks. *Eternal Dawn* adeptly discusses the emergence of the Kurdish and religious uprisings in eastern Anatolia and how these were suppressed by the regime, with little to no involvement by Mustafa Kemal, whose focus was on the cultural/historical aspects of the revolution. Gingeras proficiently moves back and forth in time, restarting his story whenever he delves into a new domain, taking us back to the 1830s when he speaks of dress reform or to the 1910s when he looks into the purification of the Asia Minor as a Turkish territory. More often than not, the reader feels the lack of an outline of the book in the introduction, or in the beginning of each chapter, not knowing what to expect in the pages that ensue.

In addition to life stories and social interactions, *Eternal Dawn* discusses architectural developments such as the construction of Mustafa Kemal busts or the Kültür Park, which helped make the Atatürk legend (214). I wonder if Gingeras could have involved in this otherwise very comprehensive book more about other artworks such as the relationship between authoritarian rule and contemporary music, paintings, or the representation of the regime in the museums. Moreover, the central premise of *Eternal Dawn*, "the interactions between the Kemalist elites and the ordinary people," is discussed merely in passing in chapters 5 and 6. Perhaps more space could have been devoted to the voices of the ordinary people, the peasants in Asia Minor, and non-Turkish groups, as one finds in Murat Metinsoy's recent book.[4]

None of these, however, should conceal the fact that *Eternal Dawn* is an excellent overview of early republican Turkish political culture that spawned the Kemalist mythos, which still "lives on today" (66). As Gingeras writes,

> There is undoubtedly some truth to the heroic aura that envelops most depictions of [Mustafa Kemal]. Keen political and military instincts, as

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4. Murat Metinsoy, *The Power of the People: Everyday Resistance and Dissent in the Making of Modern Turkey, 1923–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

> well as his stubborn perseverance, provided him a foundation upon which he launched himself into positions of leadership. Yet once in the spotlight, he carefully cultivated an evocative public persona suited to his political ambitions. Creating and upholding the Gazi's legendary status was equally the work of his trusted friends and minions. His ability to hold on to power, as well as deflect discord and defeat opposition, was greatly beholden to a small coterie of personally loyal followers. The reforms that many today equate with Atatürk's brilliance and authority would not have been possible without their contributions. (66)

After his death the divided ruling elite Atatürk begot, their personal rivalries and ideological differences have only helped consolidate the mythos. Deifying Mustafa Kemal and his revolution has been a means of transcending these differences. It has concurrently woven "a culture of endless death and eternal mourning" around the cult of Atatürk (379).

Mustafa Kemal's mythos as such have been a spontaneous necessity bred by an anachronous mentality in pursuit of short-term interests. By unlocking its making and providing an "honest retelling" of early republican history, *Eternal Dawn* contributes a truly significant corrective narrative to the official history, which makes it a must-read for the students of early republican Turkey as well as analysts of the Middle East and cults of personality.

IMAGINATIVE OPPOSITION

How did the opponents of the Unionist and Kemalist authoritarian regimes position themselves vis-à-vis the construction of official histories and the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Turkey in the first half of the twentieth century? Christine Philliou's 2021 book, *Turkey: A Past Against History*, delves into this topic with an insightful and perceptive analysis of the notion of *muhalefet* (opposition) in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish republic. Its seven chapters chronologically discuss the life and writings of Refik Halid Karay (1888–1965) as a case study in *muhalefet*, its evolving meanings and implications (3).

In the introduction Philliou tells us that she operationalizes the term *muhalefet* as an empirical category or a historical fact, defining it as "internal opposition and dissent" (2) or liberal and partisan "principled opposition" (10), and an analytical window, "a cipher" to understand the "unique form of political authority that evolved between Ottoman constitutionalism and Turkish authoritarian democracy" (2). Just like Gingeras, Philliou points to the continuities in Turkish political culture from the empire to the republic—how the Unionist and imperial mentality actually was not altogether scrapped in 1922–23 but instead morphed into a republican, or in the case of Turkey, Kemalist ontology.

Central to the book's argument is "the rift between Ottoman liberals and the emergent CUP faction of the Young Turk movement [which] persisted into the Second Constitutional Era or 1908 and evolved long after" (6). According to Philliou, "this . . . was the birth of *muhalefet* in the twentieth century" (6), where the term was "often associated with a liberal agenda for a pluralist, parliamentary democracy" (2). Philliou's book is as much an intellectual history of a strand of liberal thought in Turkey as that of the term *muhalefet*. While the Turkish idea of liberalism has long been discussed in relation to the concepts of freedom (*serbestiyet*, later *özgürlük*) and liberty (*hürriyet*), by tracing the evolution of *muhalefet*, Philliou's analysis highlights a less-studied layer.

The *muhalefet*-liberalism nexus in the late Ottoman Empire took form in the mid-nineteenth century largely as a reaction to the mounting foreign armed, diplomatic, legal, economic and financial interventions and to Ottoman responses to these encroachments in the shape of *Tanzimat* reforms. The pioneers of this peculiar liberalism, the Young Ottomans or the so-called men of the 1860s and '70s, were opponents of Ali and Fuad Pashas, two of the leading *Tanzimat* pashas that dominated the Ottoman bureaucracy from the mid-1850s onward. The two idealized European "enlightened absolutism," seeing Austria or Prussia as models, and looked to introduce a similar governance through rule of law whereby the executive power would be controlled by a few competent ministers and the Grand Vizier.[5] An explicit antipathy to this system, as well as to foreign interventionism and finance capitalism, ran perennial in the writings of the Young Ottomans. It was in this proto-nationalist context that the leading Young Ottomans such as Namık Kemal introduced a romantic version of liberalism in the Ottoman world. They conceptualized liberty first and foremost in their poems, like an entrepreneur of emotions, galvanizing public sentiments and cementing new ties of loyalty and citizenship. The Young Ottomans called for the introduction of parliamentary and constitutional rule to put an end to enlightened absolutism. This (arguably) "Turkish" idea of liberty by no means endorsed individuality. With the exception of the introduction of parliamentary rule, whereby all religious communities' (*millets*) voice would be represented, the

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[5] Ozan Ozavci, "Namik Kemal's Constitutional Liberalism: Sovereignty, Justice and the Critique of the Tanzimat," in *Liberal Moments: Reading Liberal Texts*, ed. Alan Kahan and Ewa Atanssow (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 98–106, 102.

Young Ottomans were mostly clueless as to how to handle the aspirations of the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire in an inclusive manner in an Ottoman constitution that was inspired by Islamic thought and practice.

Philliou's analysis of the Young Ottoman *muhalefet* is somewhat thin. No mention is made, for instance, as to what it was that the Young Ottomans were specifically in opposition to. This is partly understandable because, as noted before, she situates *muhalefet* vis-à-vis the Unionist/Kemalist regimes and political culture. It originates in the split among the Young Turks that succeeded the Young Ottomans after Abdulhamid II dissolved the parliament and banished the constitution in 1877.

Although there were other, earlier moments of rupture among the Young Turks, the 1902 Paris congress of the "Ottoman liberals" (as translated from French) or *hürriyetperverler* in Ottoman Turkish was truly a milestone. It was then that the group led by Mehmed Sabahaddin Bey, the maverick nephew of Sultan Abdulhamid II, and the other camp led by Ahmet Rıza diverged around the question of whether to leverage foreign support in their plans to overthrow the sultan. While Sabahaddin's camp called for foreign (British) aid, Ahmet Rıza and his nationalist followers categorically rejected it. Five years later, "the second congress of the constitutionalists" was named the Congress of Ottoman Opposition (*Osmanli Muhalifin Kongresi*). *Muhalefet* was still an umbrella term at the time, denoting to all constitutionalists opposed to the Hamidian absolutism: Sabahaddin's newly founded Party of Decentralization and Private Initiative, Ahmet Rıza's Committee of Union and Progress, as well as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation of Khachatur Malumian (42–43).

The main story of *muhalefet*, as Philliou defines it, begins to unfold in chapter 2, after the 1908 Revolution, when one of these camps, the CUP, gradually rose to power while the other two were marginalized to different extents. "By 1913, *muhalefet* had come to mean something else altogether; it became synonymous with the opposition *to* the CUP" (44, 51). This was a gradual process of "polarization." Before the outbreak of World War I "*muhalefet* was defined—as a pretext for their banishment—as a specific group of roughly eight hundred men associated with the liberal opposition coalition, a group that included Refik Halid" (45).

That is, the term was defined through reciprocal and situational dynamics, and as much by the ruling elites as by the *muhalifs* (opponents) themselves. It was informed by the illiberal turn of the CUP, which "had to adhere to the language of constitutionalism to maintain credibility," while its leadership came to see "the constitution not so much as a supreme legal framework for the empire as an instrument to achieve their goals," which was to keep the empire territorially intact by way of centralization and bureaucratic reform

(46–47). Indeed, figures like Mehmed Cavid Bey, one of the most prominent liberals of the time yet still a leading Unionist, was an exception, not the norm, in this history of illiberalization; though it would have given Philliou's argument more nuance if Cavid's experience and that of other liberal Unionists had also been discussed in the book. Philliou describes the shift in the CUP's position as "both deeply conservative and radical," reproductive of new opponents:

> As the secret society/organization infiltrated the executive and began to dominate the legislative branches, many who had initially been affiliated with the CUP protested these developments by leaving and joining liberal opposition coalitions, including the Ottoman Liberal Party (Osmanlı Ahrar Fırkası) in 1908–9 and the Freedom and Accord Party (Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası) . . . in 1911–12, only to be shattered by 1913. As the CUP evolved from a secret society into an organization circa 1911, and then into an open political party in 1913, the body's de facto internal structure became less transparent and increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few. (47)

As a matter of fact, the freedom of press and opinion briskly introduced after the 1908 revolution were just as swiftly upended with the arrest and assassination of journalists and the censorship on journals (52–53). The CUP turned into a dictatorial party in view of several domestic and inter-imperial factors, such as the counter-revolution of 1909, which the CUP leadership believed was a conservative plot (backed by the Sabahaddinian opposition and the British); the annexation of Bosnia by Austria in October 1908 and the Bulgarian declaration of independence a few months later; the Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1911–12; and, finally, the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912–13 and World War I in 1914. Throughout this period the politicization of finances, especially during foreign loan negotiations, and economic domination further fanned nationalist sentiments. However, when the so-called liberal coalition came to power for a short period of time under the seasoned Kamil Paşa, the *muhalefet* in office pursued comparably restrictive policies, arresting and imprisoning journalists for their writings (at times under foreign pressure). A discussion of the revolving role of the CUP and the *muhalefet* would help us better understand the paradoxes of the latter (which Philliou discusses in the context of the 1950s) early on in the book.

A Past Against History shows us that Refik Halid became a prominent man of letters in this illiberal context thanks to "his sharp quills, sharp pen, and sharp wit" (209). Born into a privileged bureaucratic family in the Hamidian era, he emerged a self-proclaimed *muhalif* (opponent) in the 1910s and associated himself with the Freedom and Accord Party against the CUP (14). Since he wrote several satires and short stories with the pseudonym *Kirpi* (Porcupine) criticizing the rule of the CUP and more precisely for insulting Talaat Paşa in one of his stories, he was exiled to Sinop in 1913 along with other *muhalifs* of the regime (67–68). He spent the following five years there, and then in Ankara and Çorum. He was an eyewitness of the Armenian genocide, but he chose "to look the other way," even, or perhaps because of, making friends with one of the perpetrators, Mehmed Reşid Giray, the provincial governor of Ankara (83–86).

After he returned to Istanbul in January 1918, and as the CUP leadership was no longer in the imperial capital, Refik Halid came to serve under the new Damad Ferid Paşa cabinet as the head of the General Directorate of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone Service (92). His attempts to directly oppose Mustafa Kemal by "call[ing] for the latter's . . . arrest as a renegade, refusing to recognise the legitimacy of . . . the national resistance movement," and blocking his telegrams put him in an inconvenient position as soon as the Kemalists gained power and came to rule the new Turkey (4, 102–4). Consequently, Refik Halid was listed as a "traitor," sell-out or "collaborator with the British occupation forces" by Mustafa Kemal's entourage (4), which occasioned his self-exile to Beirut in 1923. For nearly fifteen years he continued to publish literary work there, "engaging in *muhalefet* from afar . . . by launching a new form of political critique of Mustafa Kemal and his national movement" (92, 126).

Most intriguing in Philliou's exploration in this period is Refik Halid's endeavors to "cast and recast the recent past, and to craft a historical narrative for *muhalefet*, . . . [an] unfinished counternarrative to official history" (12). She does not discuss the 1922 interview of Mustafa Kemal with Ahmed Emin, but instead considers the 1927 speech as the defining moment in the invention of Kemalist official history. *Muhalefet*, she maintains, especially that of Refik Halid, looked to defy and despise "that master narrative with a counterimagination" (13).

Refik Halid did so first by penning in 1923–25 his memoirs of the armistice period, *Minelbab İlelmihrab* (From the Gate to the Pulpit). Though he was in Beirut, he sent his writings to the Istanbul journal *Akşam* (Evening) for publication in installments, which "sparked so much controversy" because of its description of events from the viewpoint of Istanbul, which did not at all glorify the achievements of the Kemalists. The controversy created a clear schism between the Istanbul and Ankara press (142) and inspired in part the Law on the Maintenance of Order, which furnished the ruling Kemalist party with unlimited power (150–51).

According to Philliou, the memoirs constituted a "pre-emptive counternarrative" to Mustafa Kemal's 1927 speech (127, 140). In contrast to the official history, which decoupled Kemalism with the Unionists, Refik Halid saw (rightly so) the Kemalist nationalists as the regrouping of many of the compliant Unionists. The "nationalists" were "Unionists in disguise, with the same agenda, the same illiberal tactics, and the same gang-like mentality" (105, 185), though in the writings of Refik Halid Philliou also finds "amazement and veneration for the miraculous progress that was achieved" by the Kemalist revolution (185).

A second point Philliou makes about the early republican period is that *muhalefet* constructed "a clear binary between the *muhalifs*/liberals and Unionists-as-nationalists" (107). Once the Independence War was over, the nationalist leadership were divided into two factions:

> On one side was the "First," or "Eastern" group (including Mustafa Kemal, İsmet [İnönü], and Kılıç Ali; Eastern referring to the Eastern flank of the resistance movement in Anatolia. On the other was the "Second," or "Western" group, referring to the resistance movement on the Aegean coast and in Western Anatolia. Kazım (Karabekir), Rauf (Orbay), and other were in the "Western" faction—which contained a diversity of views, similar in some ways to the *muhalefet* of the Young Turk movement of the previous era. The Westerners, at least initially, broadly advocated . . . moving toward a liberal democracy. . . . They were worried about process, whereas the Easterners were concerned with outcomes; the rift thus echoed the liberal/Unionist split of the Second Constitutional Era, yet the individuals populating the two factions had recombined. (135)

But with the elimination of the opponents of the Kemalist regime by 1926 and the reorientation of writers like Refik Halid Karay and many others away from the opposition, *muhalefet* "as partisan opposition went underground in the single-party Kemalist Republic" (185). The term *muhalefet* in the sense of pluralist and democratic liberalism was now less a historical factor; instead, it was confined to the realm of imagination. Concomitantly, in the political vocabulary of the day it shrunk to opposition within the Republican People's Party (RPP), and the political parties that sprang from it such as the Free Party (est. 1930) or the Democrat Party (est. 1946).

In point of fact, the term "liberal" was embraced not only by the shunned *muhalefet* in this period. From their early spokesmen such as Ahmet Ağaoğlu to hard-line figures like Recep Peker, the Kemalists tended to associate the

RPP with political liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s, however authoritarian the nature of its governance might have been, or however skeptical it was of unbridled economic liberalism—something that perhaps could have received more attention in Philliou's book. This conceptual muddling over the term "liberal" (in Turkish, *liberal*) in the early republican era resulted from the simultaneous infusion of different brands of European liberal thought into Turkish political culture: the Kemalist, republican, and authoritarian liberalism was wittingly positioned against reactionary conservatism (*irtica*). It drew inspiration from the French Enlightenment thought with all its paradoxes, as was exemplified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's infamous sentence in *Emile*, "I have decided to be what you made me," which endorses reason (against superstition) but not without molding it first into a predefined, imposed social truth—in the case of Kemalism, the alleged truth was the imperative of civilizing and Turkifying the society. It was positioned against reactionary (*irticacı*) movements. The term "liberal reactionary" (a category used in *A Past Against History*) did not exist in their dictionary.

Unlike the *muhalefet*'s more moderate yet still elitist liberalism inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model (as put forth by Mehmed Sabahaddin and his intellectual inspirers), the republican liberalism was inherently suspicious of democratic inclusion, self-destructively nationalist and (violently) averse to ethno-religious diversity. At least at the rhetorical level, the latter defined liberty within the confines of liberating the *Turkish* society from the ills associated with the ancient Ottoman regime such as monarchy, the morally corruptive role played by the religious elites and their self-interested misinterpretations of Islam (and symbolized by the Caliphate and other religious orders), or submission to foreign interventionism/economic-financial domination since the *Tanzimat* era. Counterintuitive as it may sound from an Anglo-American perspective, the nationalist Kemalist mythos constituted the moral foundations of the republican liberalism, which has long idealized "western civilization" (with all its undertones of nineteenth-century European imperialism) and viewed religion with suspicion, and therefore, embedded it in the new regime by way of state control, not by the separation of religion and the state. With the outbreak of World War II and especially during the Cold War, the term *liberalism* was disassociated with Kemalist thought and increasingly gained a pejorative connotation in the political sense in Turkey. In the realm of economy, liberalism had been seen by the hard-line Kemalists such as İsmet (İnönü) as a nonstarter since the late 1920s.

Notwithstanding the absence of these diverse appropriations of liberal thought in her analysis, Philliou's point is well taken about the fact that the size of the political space within which the *muhalefet* could speak and what/whether it could speak speaks volumes about the political nature of the regime in Turkey. She argues that, with the transition to multiparty era and the partial liberalization of the politics of Turkey, "on hiatus since 1927 . . . the Ottoman past of *muhalefet* reappeared . . . in several forms in cultural and political life" in the late 1940s (193). Figures like Refik Halid, Kazım Karabekir, and Rauf Orbay, who were Mustafa Kemal's former opponents, were able to publish their memoirs (they could finally speak), retelling "their own stories [and] contesting official history . . . specifically *Nutuk* [Speech]" in the very peculiar context of post–World War II Turkey, now sandwiched between the two major camps of the Cold War in the global north, and seeking security in the West once again. According to Philliou, figures like Refik Halid were no longer considered as "liberal-reactionaries (supposed defenders of the Caliphate who redeemed themselves by happening to be good writers . . .)" but now as "liberal progressives," as champions of freedom expression "in a new, liberal democratic framework for Turkey" (195).

But this proved to be much less than a full circle. When the Democrat Party (DP) ascended to power in 1950 and particularly after its authoritarian turn in the mid-1950s, Refik Halid remained silent, which, Philliou writes, exposes

> one of the contradictions of *muhalefet* as a trope. In principle, *muhalefet* was about the freedom to oppose power; in reality, it tended to mean opposition to the Unionists, and then to the RPP, which meant an uncritical defense of the DP, even as that party exhibited the same shortcomings as the RPP after a few short years in power. (199)

A Past Against History does not discuss the other principled opposition figures that looked to entertain their freedom to oppose power in the late 1950s and 1960, figures like Ahmed Emin Yalman and Beyhan Cenkci, who were persecuted and imprisoned (even if only for a short while) as the new regime was silencing the opposition.

The lack of engagement in the book with these other liberal or oppositional writers more often than not blurs the operationalization of *muhalefet* as a theme. It becomes less and less clear as to when Philliou uses it as a historical fact, when as an analytical tool, and when, at least in my reading, as a normative category especially after the term underwent a major transformation in the 1950s:

> Invoking *muhalefet*, in the sense of dissent and contestation for its own sake, was becoming a signal for the celebration of liberal values and moderate dissent. And yet *muhalefet*, retaining as it did the connotation

> of *muhalefet* against the RPP and the deep history of *muhalefet* as dissent against the Unionists, became paradoxical when [the] RPP for the first time became the formal opposition party (*muhalefet*). (200–201)

Philliou considers the RPP's first decade in opposition, specifically in the final years of the DP regime when İnönü portrayed the party's situation as the "downtrodden," as "disingenuous to the point of cynical." She makes this point in view of the fact that in 1960 a military coup took place "to reinstate the RPP in power in 1960–1" (201). This, however, reads anachronistically, as the RPP had emerged, at least for a brief period of time prior to the coup, as a champion of liberties.

Notwithstanding this, Philliou does make a very important point: during the latter half of the 1950s, *muhalefet* no longer referred to opposition to the Unionists and the RPP alone, but emerged more as "a space of resistance," as "a concept that forces us to see party, state, government, and the individual personality of Atatürk as disaggregated from each other. And yet it is also a stance that is . . . complicit with the bedrock contradictions of the Turkish Republic" (211).

In my view, this reading is the strongest aspect of Philliou's study of *muhalefet*. It helps us see beyond the fluid quality of the term, for one, how the authoritarian elites could swiftly turn into champions of political and civil liberties when in dire need of them in *muhalefet*, and how, in turn, champions of political and civil liberties that once formed the *muhalefet* could easily become authoritarian rulers, as has been the case with the RPP, DP, and more recently Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (JDP). These fickle nuances, appropriations of *muhalefet,* and diverse schools of liberal thought form, among others, the complex dynamics of domestic politics in Turkey today, more than the dialectical and monolithic lineage of two main political traditions, that is, Unionist/Kemalist and liberal opposition.

In these nuances we find also why, in June 2013, the majority of the Gezi Park protestors in Izmir were chanting militarist slogans and endorsing the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk with the unshaken belief that he symbolized the "civilized" face of Turkey and social freedoms against (uncivilized, religious) oppression. Their understanding of freedom remarkably differed from those of many other Gezi Park protestors, such as the supporters of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (PDP) under Selahattin Demirtaş, which, Philliou argues, represented the new *muhalefet* until its suppression. She singles out the PDP possibly because of the fact that it endorsed a more democratic, more inclusive, pluralist, and social liberal agenda than other political parties back then, even though it is still a matter of debate as to what degree it was itself emancipated from the Kurdish cults of personality. Yet the way she uses the term *muhalefet* in the context of the 2010s is again normative.

In sum, *A Past Against History*'s analysis of the imaginative opposition in literary space through the lens of Refik Halid Karay's writings is exceptionally resourceful. Even though one cannot help wonder if Refik Halid epitomizes the voice of the opposition in the period covered, the book is laden with stunning, sometimes amusing, translations alongside tragic historical moments such as the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Ankara fire of 1916, or the *Tan* incident in 1945. Philliou's sketching of *muhalefet* as the opposition to the CUP and the Kemalist nationalists is well thought out. But most welcome is the conceptualization of the *muhalefet* as a normative category, even though Philliou does not explicitly state (or even mean) it.

An independent and self-critical *muhalefet* in Turkey is indeed much required for tireless and vigorous advocacy of basic rights, liberties, and freedoms that Gezi Park protestors fought for in 2013—however different their perception of freedom might have been. Wishfully speaking, such a *muhalefet* in the normative sense upheld and embraced as a value on its own right can help cohere different understandings of political and cultural freedoms under a constitutional frame. It can serve as a key to break free from the confines of official histories, the cult of Atatürk, and counter-cults and -narratives that have been (and possibly will be) forged around the personas of Erdoğan, Fethullah Gülen, and Abdullah Öcalan, and so on, which have long exhausted the country's resources—be it intellectual, cultural, moral, or economic. In short, *muhalefet* can finally divert the public's energy from un/making nationalist mythos into consolidating still basic liberal democratic values (e.g., rule of law, tolerance, transparency, equality) and economic justice of which Turkey is in dire need today.