

The Turkish malaise: a critical essay. By Cengiz Aktar. London: Transnational Press. 2021. 99pp. £14.50. ISBN 978 1 80135 076 1. Available as e-book.

After 20 straight years of AK Party rule, Turkey's President Erdogan resembles other strongmen and autocrats across the globe. Grounding his regime in disregard for the rule of law and a lack of institutional checks and balances, he has cemented his alignment with a new genre of platforms and sentiments rooted in a nationalist–authoritarian–conservative dogma and morality. The failed coup attempt of 2016 enabled President Erdogan to consolidate political control, and his regime has since amassed unprecedented power. The coup attempt has also led to a sustained, round-the-clock government campaign that is underpinned by a discourse of hatred against a long list of 'enemies' in all spheres of life. Arrests on a massive scale, mock trials and purges of thousands of perceived opponents are commonplace under Erdogan's leadership.

This treatise by the renowned scholar Cengiz Aktar conducts a timely and poignant search for the root causes of this democratic backsliding. A dominant part of Aktar's answer lies in revising how we view the impact of the Ottoman Turkish past on modern politics as well as Turkey's relationship to the West. But the author is fully aware that framing the complex impact of the empire on the present regime raises some difficult questions.

First, where do we seek to locate the impact of the past? Is it in policies and institutional behaviour? Or in the political thought of the era, generational attachments, values, memory, consciousness, orientations of people—intangibles, in short? Second, what about the specificity of each era, the contingencies, crises and global conditions that compel change beyond a historically bound present? How can we deal with the impacts of the past, particularly on a regime that from the outset has been neither coherent nor consistent in terms of discourse and policy?

The author considers these questions as part of the same problematic and offers a clear answer. Aktar seeks the presence of the past in today's changed terrain of culture, judgement and behaviour by revisiting the unprecedented historical traumas of Ottoman Turkish modernization, 'the primary and truly compelling dynamic over the last two centuries' (p. 6). In doing this, Aktar neither glorifies nor demonizes the Ottoman Turkish modernization process. Instead, he explains how the past and present articulate with each other in specific contexts with regard to the current regime and relations between Turkey and the EU.

Aktar's singular achievement in this thoughtful analysis is to establish the present significance of a series of historical traumas. Turkey's (in)famous nation-building in the first quarter of the twentieth century was based in its public philosophy on the ethno-religious cleansing of non-Turks and non-Muslims. The public role of Islam was marginalized and delegitimized, and the non-Muslim bourgeoisie was annihilated. The Armenian bourgeoisie was destroyed in 1915–16, while the Greek community was targeted through killings and population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1922. Aktar points to the violence and hands-on policy of the state elite, obsessed with unity and security, as the circumstances in which the

meta-narrative of the nation was invented. For him, they have a direct bearing on the contemporary Turkish psyche and behaviour.

The Armenian genocide is singled out as the wellspring from which ‘contempt for the rule of law, bias in the judicial system, destruction of the sense of justice’ were injected into the bloodstream of the nation (p. 58). The collective amnesia about the unpunished past crimes is a ‘hidden stigma on the Turkish soul’ (p. 27) and has manifested itself as a ‘weakness on a subconscious level’ of all Turks (p. 47). Aktar’s writing is also a reminder of the popular support and approval both Erdogan and his government’s denial of the Armenian genocide enjoy. It is tragic that Turkey’s left-wing and liberal intellectuals, who are still stuck in the simplistic dichotomy of secular republicanism versus Islamism, are also part of the problem. They give Erdogan a free rein in undermining democratic freedoms and the rule of law.

As a well-known expert on EU–Turkey relations, Aktar calls out the failure of Turkey’s EU accession process as both a cause and an effect of the regime’s slide towards authoritarianism. For him, the integration of Turkey could have been the ‘coronation of a two-century long journey that started in the early 19th century’ (p. 29) and beneficial for both sides. Both Erdogan’s abandonment of integration and the wilful Orientalist disdain for Turkey by ‘Christian Democrats of old Europe’ have contributed to the death of the accession process (p. 30).

Aktar acknowledges that the hold of history on minds and souls supersedes the desire to recover from past blemishes. Nevertheless, a redemptive politics—a politics of interrogating the Ottoman Turkish paradigm that frames contemporary politics—must be a priority. That is, if Turkey decides to do right by democracy.

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Russia and Eurasia

Klimat: Russia in the age of climate change. By Thane Gustafson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2021. 336pp. £31.95. ISBN 978 0 67424 743 7.

When it comes to climate change policy, Russia has been a laggard rather than a leader. This book by Thane Gustafson does not profess that Russia under President Vladimir Putin has changed course. Indeed, Russia remains the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world and formally joined the Paris Agreement on climate change only in 2019. For anyone hoping to glean information about Russia’s role in international climate negotiations or its implementation of and compliance with international climate agreements, *Klimat* is not the book. Rather, one should read *Klimat* if interested in understanding the broader implications of climate change for Russia’s economic and national security policies in the twenty-first century.

Gustafson makes a compelling argument that if Russia continues to rely on fossil fuels domestically as well as for export revenue, the consequences will be devastating for its economy and environment. *Klimat* is ambitious and comprehensive in its scope. Gustafson draws on his deep knowledge of the Russian energy sector, dating back to his earlier writings on the Soviet oil and gas sectors. While Russia