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The Racist Critics of Atatürk and Kemalism, from the 1930s to the 1960s

Abstract
This article examines racist attitudes toward Atatürk and Kemalism from the 1930s to the 1960s. Liberal, leftist and conservative-Islamist critics of republican Turkey's founder and his policies have contributed to a widely shared image that, even if Kemalism was not essentially racist, the Kemalist approach to religious and ethnic minorities could hardly be described as egalitarian. Thus one is taken by surprise to uncover a parallel layer of virulent racist criticism, hidden under the deposit of decades of anti-Kemalist discourse. The most important ideologue of racism in Turkey, Nihâl Atsız, and his circle attacked Atatürk's leadership, condemned Turkey's foreign policy, and particularly the appeasement policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and, most importantly, ridiculed Kemalist attempts at building a civic nation model in the early republican era. Turkish racists never considered Atatürk and the Kemalists as fellow nationalists; on the contrary, the research for this article shows that racists questioned their nationalist credentials and accused Kemalists of being cosmopolitans. The acrimonious relationship between the racists and the Kemalist establishment can be taken as an example of how the latter oscillated between a western, democratic orientation and an inward-looking, xenophobic worldview, providing us, therefore, with a more complicated and multi-faceted picture of Kemalism.

Keywords: **A**tatürk, Atsız, Kemalism, racism, Turkish nationalism

By the end of the 1930s, Nihâl Atsız, a young man with a history of problems with the authorities, had already been regarded as Turkey's leading racist ideologue and activist, resolute and outspoken, unlike several others who were more pragmatic than he and toned down their discourse to make it more palatable in faculty clubs or official meetings. In 1941, bookstores in Ankara and İstanbul started to display a new title by him, the now little-known *Dalkavuklar Gecesi* ('The Night of the Sycophants').[1] Since the establishment

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1 Nihâl Atsız, *Dalkavuklar Gecesi* (İstanbul 1941).

of the Turkish Republic in 1923, this satirical novelette was one of the most daring attacks on the former president Kemal Atatürk, prominent Kemalist statesmen and the close circle of academics and intellectuals who took part in the invention of Kemalist history and language theories. Its plot was set in the Hittite capital, Hattušaš, obviously to poke fun at Atatürk's desire to establish a Turkish pedigree for the Hittites, and real-life characters appeared on the scene one after another, with fictitious but instantly recognizable names.[2] Apart from insults hurled at the politicians and the team of academics, Atatürk (the Hittite king) was not spared either and portrayed as a drunkard who surrounded himself with sycophants and blindly believed whatever they told him. Inexplicably, the novelette was distributed freely[3] and even rumoured to have become a bestseller, particularly among the Turkish political elite.[4]

Kemalism, which had been condemned so harshly in the *Dalkavuklar Gecesi*, is the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey. In a nutshell, it can be defined as an eclectic framework of political, economic and social views to aid in the construction of a nation-state on the remains of the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk and the Kemalist ruling elite envisioned and accomplished wholesale transformation of Turkish law, calendar, alphabet, numerals, clock, costume, gender relations and other aspects of daily culture by a carefully orchestrated series of westernizing reforms during the early republican period.[5] With the end of single-party rule and Turkey's transition to multiparty politics after 1945, opponents of the regime, who were shell-shocked by the rapidity and intensity of the reforms of the two previous decades, came out of their closets, expressing their resentment of the Kemalist revolution. This wave of criticism was not a passing phenomenon; it intensified over the years and reached a crescendo after the 1980s, as the founding elite of the early republic were accused of being anti-Islamic, undemocratic and illiberal, sacrificing the post-1908 experience of

2 The philosopher İlânasam (Hasan Âli Yücel), poet İrdas (Sadri Etem), chief sorcerer Ziza (Şevket Aziz Kansu), vice-sorcerer Pilga (Dr Reşit Galip), priest İduskam (Sadri Maksudi Arsal), king's odalisque Yamzu (Afet Uzmay-İnan), counsel Sabba (Cevat Abbas Gürer) are some of the principal characters. Only three characters can be identified by implication: the Hittite king Subbiluliyuma (Kemal Atatürk), army commander Tutaşil (Chief of Staff Fevzi Çakmak), and the seer Şilka (the author Atsız himself).

3 In contrast, H.C. Armstrong's biography of Atatürk, *Grey Wolf*, which was published in Atatürk's lifetime, was immediately banned in Turkey. See Harold C. Armstrong, *Grey Wolf: An Intimate Study of a Dictator* (London 1932); Mustafa Yılmaz, 'Harold C. Armstrong'un 'Grey Wolf: Mustafa Kemal, An Intimate Study of a Dictator' (Bozkurt Mustafa Kemal); Kitabı Üzerine', *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 11 (1995), 721–56.

4 Niyazi Berkes, *Unutulan Yıllar* (İstanbul 1997), 268. The novelette did, however, lead to a furore in the Turkish press and was one of the matters that drove a wedge between Atsız and his rivals within the racist-Turanist circles: see R. Oğuz Türkkan, *Kuyruk Acısı* (İstanbul 1943), 22, 124–31.

5 Although Atatürk himself did not leave behind a fully worked-out ideology, the Republican People's Party and the military governments of 1960–1 and 1980–3 invented what we today call Kemalism or Atatürkism, posthumously; see Metin Heper, 'Transformation of Charisma into a Political Paradigm: Atatürkism in Turkey', *Journal of the American Institute for the Study of Middle Eastern Civilization* 1 (1980–1), 65–82.

democracy in the Ottoman Empire to westernizing zeal and top-down reforms. By now we are all too familiar with the leftist-socialist, conservative-Islamist, and finally the liberal[6] critics. However, it comes as a surprise to discover a forgotten and unanticipated layer of racist criticism under the deposit of decades of anti-Kemalist discourse. Unanticipated, because recent scholarship on topics such as the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism and Turkey's conduct vis-à-vis the Kurds and its non-Muslim citizens has contributed to a widely shared image that, even if Kemalism was not essentially racist, its approach to the question of ethnic and religious minorities was not in harmony with the theoretically egalitarian Turkish constitutions. There is today a growing consensus among scholars that Turkey's treatment of its ethnic and religious minorities was certainly not exemplary, particularly in the early republican period. Thus one does not expect to find out that Kemalist rulers had become targets of vicious criticism from the 1930s to the mid-1960s at the hands of Turkey's racist circle,[7] who found fault with the Kemalist ideals, policies, leaders and especially the Kemalist approach to the question of national identity. While current scholarship condemns Kemalism and the founding elite of the republic for contriving exclusionary stratagems which targeted non-Muslims and assimilationist policies against the Muslim minority groups, it seems that racist critics of Kemalism were blaming early republican rulers for doing exactly the opposite.

As their publications made it all too clear, advocates of racism and territorial expansion in Turkey from the 1930s onward became more and more disappointed with Kemalism, the Kemalist regime and the official nationalism and foreign policy of the Turkish state. Racists' growing disillusionment was actually a testimony to the fact that, in their eyes, the Kemalist strain of Turkish nationalism was too soft, tolerant and all-embracing; the regime was more democratic than necessary, and its foreign policy timid. The crucial question, then, would be to ask when and how exactly the racists departed from the Kemalist discourse. Judging by the scale and severity of the polemics against Kemalism, should we consider this an in-house quarrel or the final break between two incompatible groups of elite? What does this sour relationship between Kemalism and racism tell us about the nature of the

6 The journal *Birikim* (published from 1989 to the present); Kemal Tahir, *Yorgun Savaşçı* (İstanbul 1965); İdris Küçükömer, *Düzenin Yabancılaşması* (İstanbul 1969); Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's journal *Büyük Doğu* (published from 1943 to 1971, with intervals); Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, *Bir Nesli Nasıl Mahvettiler* (Ankara 1950); idem, *Bu Millet Neden Ağlar* (Ankara 1952); Ahmet Kabaklı, *Temellerin Duruşması* (İstanbul 1991); Kadir Mısıroğlu, *Lozan Zafermi [sic] Hezimetmi [sic]* (İstanbul 1965); Mehmet Altan, *Birinci Cumhuriyet Üzerine Notlar* (İstanbul 2001); idem, *İkinci Cumhuriyet'in Yol Hikayesi* (İstanbul 2008); Atilla Yayla, *Kemalizm: Liberal Bir Bakış* (Ankara 2008); Sevan Nişanyan, *Yanlış Cumhuriyet: Atatürk ve Kemalizm Üzerine 51 Soru* (İstanbul 2008).

7 For two important studies on the evolution of European racism, which obviously had a direct impact on Turkish racists, see George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, 2nd edn (Madison, WI 1985); and Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge 1992).

Kemalist interpretation of Turkish national identity? This article examines these issues through a study of racist publications from the 1930s to the 1960s, focusing mainly on the *oeuvre* of Nihâl Atsız and the circle around him.

The nature and the type of Kemalist nationalism during the early republican period (1923–50) continue to perplex scholars. The long-held view in the official, Kemalist historiography of the period was that successive Turkish governments since 1923 have interpreted Turkish identity under the guiding light of constitutional principles which equated 'Turkishness' with being a Turkish citizen.[8] Identifying all Turkish citizens as Turks proper, the three constitutions of the republican era were completely and positively blind to ethnic, religious and linguistic differences between Turkish citizens and dissociated 'Turkishness' from its popular meaning: that is, the name of an ethnic group. Supporters of this view argue that republican statesmen rejected the German model of ethnic nationalism and emulated the French model of civic nationalism[9] by reducing 'Turkishness' to a legal category only.[10] In other words, citizens of Turkey who happened to be of Kurdish, Greek, Armenian, Jewish or Assyrian descent had only to say *oui* to a Renanist *plebiscite*, according to this view, to take advantage of the opportunity of turkification, as far as their citizenship status was concerned, and gaining full equality with ethnic Turks, provided that they remained faithful to their side of the bargain.

Conversely, a number of critical studies which question this and other aspects of the Kemalist historiography started to appear in the 1980s,[11] and this current has gradually become the dominant view since the 1990s, forming a new paradigm in the study of the early republic. Scholars who work within the new paradigm argue that, in practice, the avowedly secular Kemalist ruling elite made religion a major factor for subtle discrimination. Ethnically non-Turkish but Muslim citizens, such as the Albanian, Bosniac and Circassian immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus were dispersed in Anatolia, asked to adopt Turkish names and discouraged from using their

8 Articles 88, 54 and 66 of 1924, 1961 and 1982 Constitutions respectively.

9 As Weberian ideal types, the civic and ethnic models of nationalism are still used in the literature: see Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation-States: The French and German Experience, 1789–1815* (Princeton, NJ 1967); Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA and London 1992), 1–17.

10 Turhan Feyzioğlu, 'Atatürk ve Milliyetçilik', in *Atatürkçü Düşünce* (Ankara 1992), 265–322; Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, 'Atatürk'ün Milliyetçiliği', in *Atatürkçü Düşünce*, op.cit., 323–32; Toktamış Ateş, *Türk Devrim Tarihi* (İstanbul 1984), 278–9; Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, *Atatürk'e Saldırmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği* (Ankara 1996), 57; Enver Ziya Karal, 'The Principles of Kemalism', in Ergun Özbudun (ed.), *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State* (London 1997), 11–35. For a critical view on this approach, see Ayşe Kadıoğlu, 'Denationalization of Citizenship? The Turkish Experience', *Citizenship Studies* 11 (2007), 283–99.

11 Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek-Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması (1923–1931)*, 3rd edn (Ankara 1981); and Baskın Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği: Resmi İdeoloji Dışı Bir İnceleme* (Ankara 1988).

vernacular languages in public. On the other hand, Kurds, who should be included in this category, presented Ankara with a real challenge. Geographically, Kurds were an autochthonous people concentrated in south-east Anatolia and had already achieved some degree of national consciousness in the early twentieth century. Central government's measures to deal with this impediment before the Kemalist nation-building process were, therefore, more assertive. Dialects of Kurdish were banned in public; Kurdish names of localities were turkified; an effort was made to convince the Kurdish elite that they were originally a branch of the Turkish people. When those measures did not work, armed insurgencies in Kurdish areas were suppressed with brutality with occasional resort to forced migrations on a limited scale. Nevertheless, the Kemalists still regarded Kurds and other Muslim minorities as 'potential Turks' and, therefore, adopted policies of assimilation and acculturation to deal with these groups.

In the case of non-Muslim ethnic minorities, such as Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Assyrians, the policy of the Turkish governments in the early republican period is more difficult to fathom. While Turkish Jews received comparably better treatment, Greeks and Armenians were still seen through the lenses of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22), fought against Armenians in the East and the Greeks in the West. Thus, regarded as a security liability, remnants of those ancient communities were expected to prove their loyalty to the Turkish Republic by assimilating completely. Until such assimilation would occur, they were carefully excluded from the civil and military bureaucracy and, as in the case of the notorious wartime Property Tax of 1942, they were taxed differently, with exorbitant rates from 1942 to 1944, despite their equal status as Turkish citizens.

This new paradigm is far from being a monolithic approach, but should rather be taken as a coalition of scholars with various shades of opinion. On the one hand, there are those who still adhere to the basic parameters of the civic nationalism model, but yet have reservations about the official discourse on nationalism, especially regarding its claim of having provided full equality to all Turkish citizens.[12] The majority of the scholars who are working within the new paradigm, however, classify Turkish nationalism as an unambiguous example of the ethnic or the ethno-cultural type.[13] Some of the latter modified

12 Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke 2007).

13 Ahmet Yıldız, *'Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene': Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919–1938)* (İstanbul 2001); Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (London 1997); Füsun Üstel, *'Makbul Vatandaş'* in *Peş¸inde, II. Meş¸rutiyet'ten Bugüne Vatandaş¸lık Eğitimi* (İstanbul 2004); Taha Parla, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları: Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi ve CHP'nin Altı Oku*, vol. 3 (İstanbul 1992); Günay Göksu Özdoğan, *'Turan'dan 'Bozkurt'a: Tek Parti Döneminde Türkçülük (1931–1946)* (İstanbul 2001); Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleş¸tirme Politikaları* (İstanbul 2000); Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleş¸tirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (İstanbul 2000); Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London and New York 2006); Fikret Adanır, 'Kemalist Authoritarianism and

their position by indicating that ethnicity in the Turkish context was not defined as strictly and in an exclusive manner as it has been in other ethnic nationalisms.[14] There are yet others, academics or political activists, for whom the nationalistic activities of the Turkish state in the early republican period amounted to nothing less than racism.[15]

Remarkably, neither of these two paradigms has so far faced up to the challenge to the lines of argument presented by the Atsız circle. The official historiography traditionally shied away from the study of race and ethnicity questions in Turkey in order to not wash dirty linen of the past in public. Academic promoters of the new trend, on the other hand, who are busy demolishing the myths of the Kemalist scholarship, do not seem to be aware of the existence and gravity of the racist opposition to Atatürk, Kemalism and the republic from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. Atsız is mentioned in the standard works on Turkish nationalism in the early republican era only with respect to his resistance to the Turkish History Thesis in 1932; he completely disappears from the literature after that brief reference, while other racist figures do not feature at all.[16] Taking into consideration his continued presence on the scene after that date and the rolling impact of racist publications, a revision of the accepted wisdom in both paradigms is in order.

Hüseyin Nihâl [Atsız][17] was born into a military family in İstanbul in 1905, and died a dispirited man in his native town

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Fascist Trends in Turkey during the Inter-War Period', in Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (Boulder, CO 2001), 313–61; Umut Özkırımlı, *Milliyetçilik ve Türkiye-AB İlişkileri* (İstanbul 2008).

14 Nizam Önen, *İki Turan: Macaristan ve Türkiye'de Turancılık* (İstanbul 2005), 254; Howard Eissenstat, 'Metaphors of Race and Discourse of Nation: Racial Theory and State Nationalism in the First Decades of the Turkish Republic', in Paul Spickard (ed.), *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World* (New York 2005), 239–56.

15 İsmail Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi ve Kürt Sorunu* (Ankara 1977); Nazan Maksudyan, *Türklüğü Ölçmek: Bilimkurgusal Antropoloji ve Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Irkçı Çehresi, 1925–1939* (İstanbul 2005); idem, 'The *Turkish Review of Anthropology* and the Racist Face of Turkish Nationalism', *Cultural Dynamics* 17 (2005), 291–322. Murat Ergin, on the other hand, has recently provided a thoughtful approach to the issue of racism in Turkey, shifting the focus of discussions from laws and state policies to discourse analysis: see his 'Is the Turk a White Man? Towards a Theoretical Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness', *Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (2008), 827–50.

16 For the only exception, see Özdoğan, *'Turan'dan 'Bozkurt'a*, op.cit., 183–4.

17 Hüseyin Nihâl adopted the surname 'Atsız' following the Surname Law of 1934, which required all Turkish citizens to adopt surnames. Atsız was originally the name of an eleventh-century military commander, who conquered Syria for the Seljukids. Etymologically, 'Atsız' means someone who does not have a name, and legend has it that Hüseyin Nihâl picked this surname in protest at the top-down character of the Surname Law: see Jacob M. Landau, 'Ultra-Nationalist Literature in the Turkish Republic: A Note on the Novels of Hüseyin Nihâl Atsız', *Middle Eastern*

in 1975.[18] An early turning point in his life was his admission to the Military Medical Academy in 1922, where he soon made a name for himself as a dyed-in-the-wool racist.[19] Atsız caused trouble at school because of his ideological commitment as well as his self-confidence and forwardness; a disciplinary note in his school register described him as 'rebellious, irreconcilable, defiant and disrespectful', all being character traits unbecoming an army cadet.[20] He was to be expelled from school in 1925, when he refused to salute a higher-ranking officer because the man happened to be of Arab origin.[21] Dismissal from the military academy had a devastating impact on Atsız, but he continued to feel, live and act like an active officer on duty to the end of his life. After a brief interval, he enrolled at the İstanbul *Darülfünûn* – the only Turkish university at the time – to study Turcology under Fuad Köprülü, a world-renowned expert in the field. Köprülü later recruited him for his team of teaching and research assistants, recognizing the brilliance of Atsız as a young man. Former friends and acquaintances from the early 1930s, too, remembered him as a promising

Studies 39 (2003), 205. Atsız remained a life-long opponent of western-style surnames and encouraged his followers to affix patronyms before their first names.

18 There are several biographies of Atsız in Turkish, but most are repetitive hagiographies written by admirers; see Sakin Öner, *Nihâl Atsız* (İstanbul 1977); Akkan Suver, *Nihal Atsız* (İstanbul 1978); Osman F. Sertkaya, *Nihâl Atsız* (Ankara 1987); Altan Deliorman, *Tanıdığım Atsız*, 2nd edn (İstanbul 2000); Hayati Tek, *Nihal Atsız* (Ankara 2002); Cihan Özdemir, *Atsız Bey: Hüseyin Nihal Atsız'ın Hayatı, Fikirleri ve Romanları Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (İstanbul 2007); Hakkı Öznur, *Ülkücü Hareket*, vol. 6, *Portreler* (Ankara n.d.), 3–99. For an evaluation of his role in Turkish nationalist thought, see Güven Bakırezen, 'Nihal Atsız', in Tanıl Bora (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce*, vol. 4, *Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul 2002), 352–7; Umut Uzer, 'Racism in Turkey: The Case of Huseyin Nihal Atsiz [*sic*]', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22 (2002), 119–29; Refet Körüklü and Cengiz Yavan (eds), *Türkçülerin Kaleminden Atsız* (İstanbul 2000); several papers in *Atsız Armağanı* (İstanbul, 1976); Murat Altun, 'Extracting Nation out from History: The Racism of Nihal Atsız', *Journal of Historical Studies-Boğaziçi University* 3 (2005), 33–44; Jacob M. Landau, 'Atsız and Türkeş', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 36 (2002), 132–7; Cenk Saraçoğlu, 'Nihal Atsız's World-View and Its Influences on the Shared Symbols, Rituals, Myths and Practices of the Ülkücü Movement', Turkology Update Leiden Project Working Papers Archive, accessed in March 2009, <www.let.leidenuniv.nl/tcimo/tulp/Research/cs.pdf>; Ahmet Kabaklı, *Türk Edebiyatı III* (İstanbul 2002), 708–21; Ömer Faruk Akün, 'Atsız, Hüseyin Nihal', *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 87–91; Yılmaz Öztuna, 'Nihâl Atsız', in *Türk Tarihinden Portreler* (İstanbul 1999), 319–29; Mahmut Goloğlu, *Millî Şef Dönemi (1939–1945)* (Ankara 1974), 245–55; Günay Göksu Özdoğan, '1930 ve 40'ların Türkçü Akımı', *Toplumsal Tarih*, 29 (May 1996), 19–24; Güven Bakırezer, 'Nihal Atsız'ın Düşüncesi', *Toplumsal Tarih*, 29 (May 1996), 25-36; idem, 'Nihal Atsız', in Tanıl Bora (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasal Düşünce*, vol. 4, *Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul 2002), 352–7; Fatih Yaşlı, 'Nihal Atsız ve Anti-Komünizm: "Kinimiz Dinimizdir"', *Bilim ve Gelecek 55* (2008), 58–62; Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, NJ 1959), 262–70.

19 Yağmur Atsız, *Ömrümün İlk 65 Yılı* (İstanbul 2005), 19–23.

20 Entry on 'Atsız' in Sadeddin Nüzhet Ergun, *Türk Şairleri*, vol. 2, (İstanbul n.d.), 562–3; for another contemporary account, see entry on 'Nihal' in İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, vol. 3, 3rd edn (İstanbul 1988), 1235–7.

21 Atsız, 'Ahlakî Adalet: 1500 Harbiyelinin Macerası', *Ötüken*, No. 23 (22 November 1965), 1.

intellectual, who had well-established contacts with the cream of the republican intelligentsia.[22]

The fact that Atsız was an outspoken Turkish racist in his twenties does not seem to have jeopardized his career. Atsız's employment record and his wide network of high-placed friends and acquaintances prove that, while some might have disliked his racist worldview, he was nevertheless tolerated in a society where racism was fairly new and did not yet carry the stigma that it would after the second world war. How did he, and a few others like him, become racists? It is difficult to respond to this question in a conclusive manner, because Atsız did not leave behind a testimony describing what he read in his youth or who influenced him most among his teachers or friends. We might have a clue, however, in his son Yağmur Atsız's memoirs, where the latter claims that his father's conversion to racism took place between 1918 and 1922 in response to Greek and Armenian attitudes toward the Ottoman Turks.[23] This argument is consistent with numerous other testimonies from a host of political activists, bureaucrats, officers or members of the intelligentsia from the last generation of the Ottoman Empire, who, in their own account, became nationalists under the impact of the rapid dissolution of the empire from 1908 to 1918. Many who belonged to this generation, including Atsız, believed that the Turkish-speaking Ottoman Muslims could maintain their existence as a sovereign nation only if they internalized and implemented the principle of the survival of the fittest in a Darwinian struggle between human races.[24] Social Darwinism had great appeal for these young men – and very few women – and provided a simple explanation for the Ottoman decline, as well as a recipe for salvation. In addition, they were influenced by the Prussian Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz's *Das Volk in Waffen*, which recommended a nation-at-arms as the ideal model of society and drew attention to the pioneering role of military officers in its construction.[25] Von der Goltz's book was translated into Turkish in 1884, a year after the publication of the German edition, and was made recommended reading for all Ottoman army cadets.[26] Therefore, although we are unable to trace his racism back to European roots exactly, Atsız's unabashed militarism and glorification of war can be attributed to the environment of imperial collapse in which he grew up.

Ostensibly on the brink of a successful academic career, everything went downhill for Atsız from that point on. He had already raised eyebrows in

22 Pertev Naili Boratav's reminiscences are in Mete Çetik (ed.), *Üniversitede Cadı Kazanı: 1948 DTCF Tasfiyesi ve Pertev Naili Boratav'ın Müdafaası* (İstanbul 1998), 51–3, 192–6; and Berkes, *Unutulan Yıllar*, op. cit., 59, 68, 110, 172–4, 274.

23 Yağmur Atsız, *Ömrümün İlk 65 Yılı*, 19–23.

24 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York 2001), 289–90; Mustafa Aksakal, 'Not "by those old books of international law, but only by war": Ottoman Intellectuals on the Eve of the Great War', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 15 (2004), 507–44.

25 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, op.cit., 294.

26 Ibid.

the Ministry of Education by publishing *Atsız* in 1931, a journal which ignored government policy regarding Turkic peoples in the Soviet Union. In 1932, he stepped forward as a vocal opponent of the official History Thesis and, this time, truly annoyed his superiors.[27] Atsız was forced to resign from his university assistantship as a result and exchange his academic career for teaching positions at provincial high schools, first in Malatya and then in Edirne. Instead of taking heed of the sudden reversal of his fortunes, Atsız was further emboldened to challenge the official version of Turkish history in a new, influential journal, *Orhun*. This time, his stubbornness cost him his job, as he was summoned back from Edirne without a new appointment.[28] Although he would be returned to office nine months later in 1934, Atsız was to remain under oppressive surveillance for the rest of his life.

Hopeful that Atatürk's death in 1938 would usher in a new atmosphere of freedom of expression, especially in the field of Turkish history, Atsız picked up from where he left off and published a pamphlet in 1940 which contained his radically new interpretation and periodization of Turkish history.[29] To his chagrin, the pamphlet was instantly banned by the government.[30] The following year, 1941, witnessed the release of Atsız's infamous novelette, *Dalkavuklar Gecesi* ('The Night of the Sycophants'), as well. From 1941 to 1944, Atsız moved from the margins of Turkish intellectual life to the centre of Turkish politics and emerged as the *enfant terrible* of the racist-Turanists,[31] who applied pressure on the government and President İsmet İnönü in support of an alliance with the nazis. The ultimate aim of such an alliance, according to the naïve expectations of the Turkish Turanists, was to liberate the Turkic-speaking peoples under the Soviets and unite them all under a Turanian empire.[32] There is no doubt that the Turanist movement in Turkey was financed to a certain extent by the nazis, who sent some 5 million gold Reichsmark to the German embassy in Ankara to be distributed among their Turkish 'friends'.[33] Whether Atsız was one of those 'friends' and a recipient of nazi money is, however, unknown and extremely unlikely. Racist-Turanist views appeared in a torrent of new journals, which proliferated from 1941

27 Hasan Özdemir and Hadi Şenol (eds), *DTCF'de Türkolojinin Öyküsü* (Ankara 2006), 81; and Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 13: Çanakkale'ye Yürüyüş, Türkçülüğe Karşı Haçlı Seferi*, 2nd edn (İstanbul 1997), 71–3.

28 The Ministry's opinion on Atsız's conduct is explained in detail in Hasan-Âli Yücel, *Dâvam* (Ankara 1947), 13–14.

29 Atsız, *900üncü Yıldönümü*, 2nd edn (İstanbul 1955).

30 Önen, *İki Turan*, op. cit., 274–5.

31 Pan-Turanism or pan-Turanianism was a Turco-Hungarian political movement for uniting all Turanian peoples under the banner of a Turanian empire; the movement was guided in both countries by anti-Russian, and later anti-Soviet, elites; see [Denison Ross], *A Manual on the Turanians and Pan-Turanianism* (London n.d.); Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington, IN 1995), 80–1; Tarık Demirkan, *Macar Turancıları* (İstanbul 2000).

32 The best monograph on the racist-Turanists and their activities during the second world war is Özdoğan's *'Turan'dan 'Bozkurt'a*, op.cit.

33 Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli Şef Dönemi (1938–1945)*, vol. 1 (İstanbul 2003), 673.

to 1944, or as pamphlets and books from like-minded publishing houses.[34] Always audacious, Atsız even took the liberty of addressing private and open letters to Prime Ministers Refik Saydam and Şükrü Saracoğlu and to President İnönü, in which he suggested substantial modifications to the Turkish political system or new courses of action in foreign policy.[35]

The Turanist assault on the government and fierce polemics against Hasan Âli Yücel, the Minister of Education, in particular, intensified in early 1944. When an Ankara court was hearing a libel case against Atsız on 3 May 1944,[36] a core group of racist-Turanists and thousands of sympathizers organized a mass rally in his support and even briefly occupied the courthouse, chanting anti-government slogans.[37] By this time, the racist-Turanist movement could no longer be considered a marginal group. A public demonstration of this size in wartime Ankara was an extraordinary event, and this convinced the government to take the impact of racist propaganda on public order more seriously. Furthermore, developments in domestic politics coincided with calculations about the post-second world war settlement. By early 1944, it was clear to all observers that the defeat of the nazis was only a matter of time and, once that had come to pass, the non-aligned Turkey was going to be alone to face Stalin.[38] Under the weight of those circumstances, the Turkish government was trying desperately to appease the Soviets and to avoid being swallowed up behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, the round-up of the racist-Turanists in late May 1944 signalled the end of Turkish neutrality in the war and was also meant to be a gesture toward Turkey's irritable

34 Detailed information on those publications can be found in Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, op. cit., 111–47.

35 The private letters are reported in Yücel, *Dâvam*, op. cit., 15–16. Atsız's open letters to Prime Minister Saracoğlu appeared in Nos 15 (1 March 1944) and 16 (1 April 1944) of the journal *Orhun*.

36 The libel case was brought to the court by the left-leaning novelist Sabahattin Âli. Atsız and Âli had become good friends in the late 1920s, when both were living in the same dormitory. Their friendship ended following Âli's tilt toward socialism, and the two eventually became bitter enemies when Âli depicted his former friend as a deceitful character in his novel *İçimizdeki Şeytan* (İstanbul 1940). Atsız replied with a pamphlet, *İçimizdeki Şeytanlar* (İstanbul 1940) and, in his second open letter to Prime Minister Saracoğlu, Atsız labelled Âli a Soviet spy and called for his immediate arrest, prompting Âli to go to court with the libel case. For Âli's version of events, see Sabahattin Âli, *Mahkemelerde: Belgeler*, prepared by Nüket Esen and Nezihe Seyhan (İstanbul 2004), 74–80.

37 '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 25 (23 March 1951), 13–15; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 26 (30 March 1951), 11–12; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 28 (13 April 1951), 13–15; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 30 (27 April 1951), 13–14; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 31 (4 May 1951), 13–15; Mustafa Müftüoğlu, *Milli Şef Döneminde Çankaya'da Kâbus (1944 Turancılık Davası)* (İstanbul 2005), 51–65; Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli Şef Dönemi (1938–1945)*, vol. 2 (İstanbul 2003), 220–1; Necmettin Sefercioğlu, *3 Mayıs 1944 ve Türkçülük Dâvâs*ı (Ankara 2009).

38 Selim Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An Active Neutrality* (Cambridge 1988); Günay Göksu Özdoğan, 'II. Dünya Savaşı Yıllarındaki Türk-Alman İlişkilerinde İç ve Dış Politika Aracı Olarak Pan-Türkizm', in Faruk Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi* (İstanbul 1994), 357–72.

northern neighbour. Following President İnönü's denunciation of the movement in the strongest terms on 19 May 1944 in a radio-broadcast public speech,[39] 47 prominent racist-Turanists and sympathizers were taken into custody, including Nihâl Atsız and his brother Nejdet Sançar.[40] The so-called 'Racism–Turanism Trials' continued for almost three years, if we take into account the retrial process at the Military Court of Appeals. Although all the accused were eventually acquitted, the Racism-Turanism Trials had an enduring impact on public opinion and the Turkish intelligentsia. The year 1944 marked the end of Kemalist fraternizing with radical forms of Turkish nationalism; from this year on, all forms of nationalism other than the Kemalist version lost their privileged association with the Turkish state and moved to the ranks of the opposition. In this sense, 1944 should be considered a turning point in the history of Turkish nationalism.

When finally released from prison, Atsız found himself ostracized. His public image was badly bruised, and police surveillance over his activities was also tightened. Atsız's teaching career was cut short to prevent him from inculcating his racist beliefs in students, and only in late 1949 was he re-appointed to an isolating position at the Süleymaniye Library of Manuscripts. Apart from a brief interval, he would work there until his retirement in 1969.[41] Yet pressures from above could not restrain his penchant for political activity and pursuit of a loyal following. Another feeling that did not die out in him was his aversion to Kemalism and Atatürk's heritage in Turkey. The now battle-hardened Atsız made the most of the relaxation of censorship after the 1950 elections and initiated several projects. The one which was to have the greatest impact in terms of agitating conservative youth in the Turkish periphery and, hence, beefing up the number of Atsız's addicts happened to be a new journal, *Orkun*, which was published from 1950 to 1952 under his spiritual guidance. *Orkun* instantly turned into a forum for expressing extremely critical views on Atatürk, İsmet İnönü, politicians and public figures affiliated with the RPP, and about Kemalism in general. Even though he had to put on the brakes after the DP government passed a law in 1951 making it a punishable offence to insult Atatürk,[42] Atsız did not renounce his views to the end of his life.[43] Because of his courage to be one of the very few vocal adversaries of Kemalism in Turkey and his unflinching support for the, now, unfashionable racist ideology, Atsız slowly came to be known as a pathologically honest and upright man, who was not afraid to speak his mind against all odds. It was his charismatic character

39 The text of İnönü's speech is reproduced in Maarif Vekaleti, *Irkçılık-Turancılık* (Ankara 1944), 3–9.

40 Özdoğan, *'Turan'dan 'Bozkurt'a*, op. cit., 108–15; Önen, *İki Turan*, op. cit., 321–3.

41 Sertkaya, *Nihâl Atsız*, op. cit., 9–10; Özdemir, *Atsız Bey*, op. cit., 33–4, 435–7; Deliorman, *Tamdığım Atsız*, op. cit., 56–9.

42 Law No. 5816 Concerning Crimes against Atatürk came into effect on 31 July 1951.

43 In a letter he wrote to Tahsin Banguoğlu in the 1970s, he was still making fun of the Kemalist language thesis and expressed his disappointment that Tamerlane did not erase the city of Ankara from the face of the earth: see Mehmet (Baboğlu) Uzun, 'Hüseyin Nihal Atsız'dan Tahsin Banguoğlu'na', *Müteferrika* 15 (1999), 133–8.

and personal integrity that made him a role model for the new generation of conservative, right-wing youth, who were gradually replacing the former generation of racist-Turanists and bringing with them a totally new agenda for the nationalist movement in opposition.

Statements by renowned political leaders and ideologues of Turkish nationalism attest to Atsız's influence on them. In a posthumous *Festschrift* in his honour, Osman F. Sertkaya introduced Atsız as 'without doubt, the greatest figure in the [*history*] of Turkish nationalism since Ziya Gökalp'.[44] Beşir Ayvazoğlu argued that the common denominator for all stripes of the Turkish Right from the 1950s to the 1980s was the distaste for Kemalism and the Republican People's Party, and Atsız's *oeuvre* factored in this as a must-read for all those who shared that worldview.[45] Another prominent nationalist author, Nevzat Kösoğlu, described in his memoirs how he proudly displayed Atsız's books in his jacket pocket during his undergraduate years, so that other nationalists could spot and approach him.[46]

The closest aides to Atsız since the 1940s were his brother Nejdet Sançar, Sançar's wife Reşide, and the publisher of his journals, İsmet Tümtürk. While this early generation of racist-Turanists challenged Kemalism in principle, they were in many respects excellent products of the Kemalist Revolution. All descended from urban, military or civilian bureaucratic families and enrolled in the best educational institutions available in Turkey at the time.[47] These young men and women were exposed to western education and lifestyle in their family environment. Religion, for them, was mainly a private affair and, even in private, it did not fulfil an important function; they lived in westernized households with relatively equal roles for both genders; the symbolic reforms of the early republic such as the hat law, the changes of costume, alphabet, numerals or calendar did not bother them.

In the aftermath of the second world war, racism was doubly discredited both in the West, where nazis and their allies were defeated decisively, and in Turkey, as a result of the public condemnation of racist-Turanists and all forms of radical nationalism by the government. Therefore, Atsız and his circle were no longer able to appeal to the sensibilities of the westernized urban elite in Turkey, who associated Atsız with Hitler and his views with the catastrophe which nearly enveloped Turks, as well. Nevertheless, opportunely for Atsız, the dearth of recruits from Turkey's future top elite was offset by a new source of converts. The new crop of nationalists, who joined the Atsız circle, shared certain sociological and generational characteristics. Nearly all were young professionals or bureaucrats, who were born and raised in provincial towns or villages, and most graduated from provincial high schools before they

44 Erol Güngör et al., *Atsız Armağanı* (İstanbul 1976), xviii.

45 Beşir Ayvazoğlu, 'Türkiye'de Sağcı Olmak', *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No. 16 (1991), 36–7.

46 Osman Çakır, *Hatıralar, Yahut Bir Vatan Kurtarma Hikayesi: Nevzat Kösoğlu ile Söyleşiler* (İstanbul 2008), 38, 45–6, 66, 68, 85.

47 Nejdet and Reşide Sançar graduated from the Teachers' Seminary in İstanbul and taught at various high schools throughout Turkey. İsmet Tümtürk, on the other hand, was the son of the poet Cenab Şehabettin, had a law degree and was fluent in English and French.

arrived in İstanbul or Ankara for higher education. Hailing from the Anatolian periphery, untouched by the Kemalist revolution, these young men[48] had a very conservative outlook. All were devout Muslims and subscribed to a strict ethical code, based on maintaining a traditional household and a patriarchal approach to gender relations. For these new immigrants, the urban centres of İstanbul and Ankara symbolized decadence of the national spirit and they usually identified Kemalism as its root cause. Although Atsız lived in a totally different world compared with his new recruits, he nevertheless created a centre of attention for radical conservative youth as one of the very few openly anti-Kemalist figures in Turkey. The new members of the Atsız circle included Zeki Sofuoğlu (1920–), İsmail Hakkı Yılanlıoğlu (1918–92), Hikmet Tanyu (1918–92), Selahattin Ertürk [Hocaoğlu] (1923–88) and dozens of other, less significant sympathizers who made pilgrimages to the Atsız home in İstanbul or contributed articles and jingoistic poems to his journals. The cultural gap which separated the early generation of racist-Turanists from those who joined the movement after the 1944 trials could, however, be easily overlooked, as both generations within the Atsız circle had an interest in uniting against the common adversary.[49]

The racist critique of Kemalism and of the Republican People's Party (RPP) was multifaceted and incredibly bold for its time.[50] The audacity of the critics, with Atsız charging at the forefront, is illustrated by how those polemics plainly took the form of personalized attacks on Kemal Atatürk, even if we do not take into consideration heaps of scorn poured on İsmet İnönü and other Kemalist celebrities. Despite posthumous attempts by Atsız's biographers at effacing the memory of those attacks on Turkey's founding father, Atatürk was certainly a primary target for racist criticism at least until the mid-1960s.

48 Apart from Reşide Sançar and Adile Ayda, racist-Turanism remained a male-dominated movement.

49 This cultural gap between the two groups was going to grow into a full-blown dispute in the 1960s, when Atsız attempted to steer the radical nationalist movement into a secular path and dissociate it from the mainstream right-wing in Turkey. Yet the conservative generation had become so much more predominant numerically that his attempt dealt a mortal blow to his prestige and marginalized Atsız in the nationalist circles. See Deliorman, *Tanıdığım Atsız*, op. cit., 230–60; Öznur, *Ülkücü Hareket*, op.cit., 21–31; Beşir Ayvazoğlu, 'Tanrıdağ'dan Hira Dağı'na Uzun İnce Yollar', in Tanıl Bora (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce*, vol. 4, *Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul 2002), 541–78. For Atsız's views on religion, see Ferit Salim Şanlı, 'Türkçülük Akımında Din Olgusu Üzerine Aykırı Bir Yaklaşım: Hüseyin Nihal Atsız ve Fikirleri', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Ankara, 2010.

50 Bekir Berk, 'Kemalist! Haddini Bil ve Ağzını Topla', *Altın Işık*, No. 1 (15 Ocak 1947), 9; Atsız, 'Millî Mukaddesat Düşmanları', *Altın Işık*, No. 2 (15 February 1947), 12–14; Atsız, 'Hasan Âli Hesap Vermelidir', *Altın Işık*, No.4 (25 April 1947), 3–5; Kemaloğlu, 'Milliyetçiliğin Soysuzlaştırılması', *Altın Işık*, No. 4 (25 April 1947), 6–8; Koloğlu İhsan, 'Partiler ve Millet', *Altın Işık*, No.4 (25 April 1947), 11; Atsız, 'Kültür Davasının Başı', *Altın Işık*, No. 7 (25 August 1947), 3; Atsız, '3 Mayıs 1944', *Kür Şad*, No. 2 (3 May 1947), 3; 'Türkçülük Dâvâsı', *Kür Şad*, No.2 (May 1947), 4–7; 'Türk Milletine Açık Mektup', *Kür Şad*, No. 3 (10 June 1947), 4; Hikmet Tanyu, *Türkçülük Davası ve Türkiye'de İşkenceler* (Kayseri 1950); Çiftçioğlu Nejdet Sançar, *Türklük Sevgisi* (İstanbul 1952); Hocaoğlu S. Ertürk, *Türkçülük Nedir?* (İstanbul 1955); Ârif Çivicioğlu, *Türkçülük ve Gerçek Demokrasi* (İstanbul n.d.).

To begin with, Atatürk was blamed for poor morals. Atsız's description of Atatürk was the story of a brilliant military officer turned a scheming politician and, eventually, a drunkard. Atsız held Atatürk responsible for losing political wisdom step by step after he took to binge drinking, and also for promoting incompetent sycophants of 'mixed blood' to important policy-making positions.[51] While Atatürk's own ethnic make-up was never questioned in print, we can safely assume that he was suspect in the eyes of the racists because of his family roots in Ottoman Salonica, a town which had always been associated with the Sabbatean minority.[52] In order to scold Atatürk for his sexual licentiousness, on the other hand, an unsigned comment in the journal *Orkun* accused him of initiating a romantic relationship with his adopted daughter, Afet [Uzmay] İnan, while the novelette *Dalkavuklar Gecesi* had already condemned the two as lovers.[53] Without a doubt, rumours of the same kind were very popular and circulated widely among anti-Kemalist conservatives and Islamists in those years; yet what set Atsız apart from the rest was, firstly, his courage to be the first to put them in writing at a time when he could be severely punished for this, and secondly, his persistence in publishing anti-Atatürk polemics even if those comments jeopardized the unity of the racist movement. While there was little to be gained from criticizing Atatürk's person, such defamation provoked protests from many racists, who were still passionate about the newly deceased president and regarded him as a Turkish national hero. The leader of a rival racist circle, Reha Oğuz Türkkan, for example, published a notice in a mass-circulation newspaper declaring that his group had nothing to do with the notorious *Dalkavuklar Gecesi*.[54]

Racist-Turanists did not acknowledge the role played by Atatürk in the establishment of modern Turkey, claiming often that he could not yet be elevated to the pantheon of distinguished Turkish leaders in history.[55] On numerous

51 Atsız, *Dalkavuklar Gecesi*, op. cit., 31–8, 45–56; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 20 (16 February 1951), 8–12.

52 Sabbateans are the followers of Shabtai Tsvi, a seventeenth-century messianic rabbi and a convert to Islam. The tiny Sabbatean community severed its ties with Rabbinic Judaism, but, on the other hand, Sabbateans segregated themselves meticulously from their Muslim co-religionists as well. When the community was forced to move to Turkey during the Greco-Turkish population exchange, they were met with great suspicion and occasional hostility. See Marc Baer, 'Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and the Dönme in Ottoman Salonica and Turkish Istanbul', *Journal of World History* 18 (2007), 141–70; Jacob M. Landau, 'The Dönmes: Crypto-Jews under Turkish Rule', *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19 (2007), 109–18.

53 Atsız, *Dalkavuklar Gecesi*, op. cit., 22–5, 31–8; 'Bilene Aşkolsun', *Orkun*, No. 16 (19 January 1951), 9. Atsız was not the only one to articulate that rumour. Vamık Volkan, too, mentions it in his *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography* (Chicago 1986), 261.

54 Türkkan, *Kuyruk Acısı*, op. cit., 128–31. On the other hand, the editors of *Orkun* felt compelled to respond to many such complaints as well; see 'Ülküdaşlarla Başbaşa', *Orkun*, No. 10 (8 December 1950), 16; İsmet Tümtürk, 'Niçin Hâlâ Hücum Ediyorsunuz Diyenlere', *Orkun*, No. 16 (19 January 1951), 3.

55 Hacıömeroğlu, 'Türkçülük Karşısında Atatürkçülük Bir Dâva Mıdır?', *Orkun*, No. 22 (2 March 1951), 3–4.

occasions, for instance, Atsız asked his students at high schools to write essays on the question of the greatest Turkish leaders and, after grading the papers, he would announce his top three as Mete, Kür Şad and either one of Alparslan and Fatih. When he was asked why he cut Atatürk from the list, Atsız responded that:

> Atatürk was undoubtedly a good soldier. He was successful at the Battle of Gallipoli and was the commendable leader of the War of Independence. He was the pioneer of a new phase in Turkish history. But, when we take into consideration the entirety of Turkish history, these accomplishments [*are*] not enough to join the three great personalities. Moreover, history has not yet illuminated everything. The events of the current century [*are*] too fresh and emotions still alive. It should not be expected to be able to judge this period even-handedly. After the passage of time, maybe a full century, could it be possible to arrive at an unbiased opinion.[56]

Likewise, racist journals associated with the Atsız circle occasionally sent opinion surveys to subscribers and published their responses; one standard question invited the respondents to name their favourite leader from Turkish history, with the proviso that those who had passed away in the past 50 years could not be taken into consideration.[57] Since Atatürk died in 1938, this stipulation disqualified him effectively from being included in the inventory of candidates, on purpose, in all likelihood.

Furthermore, racist-Turanists also saw eye to eye with the Islamist conservatives, who had a tendency to doubt and usually belittle Atatürk's leadership in the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22). According to the official historiography on the beginning of the War of Independence, Atatürk started the nationalist struggle in Anatolia not with the help of, but despite Mehmed VI, the last Ottoman sultan, who had become a lackey of the invading Entente powers. Both the conservative Islamists and racist-Turanists, however, believed and tried to prove that, when Atatürk moved from İstanbul to Anatolia in May 1919 with the aim of initiating a liberation struggle, he was acting on the orders of Mehmed VI, who, they claimed, provided him with a generous subvention in gold to kindle the fire of struggle.[58] The natural outcome of this argument was to regard the later stage of the struggle between the nationalist government in Ankara and the sultan's government in İstanbul as an act of *lèse majesté*. In the same vein, the racist-Turanists criticized Atatürk for arrogating all the credit of the success of the War of Independence to himself at the expense of other

56 The story is recounted by one of his students: see Deliorman, *Tanıdığım Atsız*, 23–5. Mete (Mo-tun in contemporary Chinese sources) was the legendary leader of the Hun Empire in the second century BCE and is credited with founding the first Turkish standing army. Kür Şad is a half-mythical figure, a Kök Türk prince of the seventh century CE in captivity in the Chinese capital, who is said to have led a palace coup to free his people and died figthing Chinese troops. Alparslan was the founder of the Seljukid Empire in the eleventh century CE and Fatih (Mehmed II) is known for his conquest of Constantinople.

57 One example can be found in 'Anketimiz', *Milli Yol*, No. 2 (2 February 1962), 15.

58 Yücel Hacaloğlu (ed.), *Atsız'ın Mektupları* (İstanbul 2001), 88–9.

pashas, who, so the racists said, contributed to victory just as much as Atatürk did.[59]

The Atsız circle attacked forcefully the cult of Atatürk in Turkey. They questioned the rationale of erecting statues of Atatürk on every public square,[60] for example, while İsmet Tümtürk advised the government to halt the construction of Atatürk's mausoleum and to return the earmarked allowance to the budget instead of complaining about recurring deficits.[61] In the sixth issue of the journal *Orkun*, published on 10 November 1950, on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the death of Atatürk, the main article on the front page was deliberately titled 'When Will the Shroud of Lies Veiling This Century Be Torn Away?'.[62] In response to complaints from readers about the inappropriateness of that article, the editors of *Orkun* responded in a following issue with an anonymous editorial:

> We do not find it appropriate to idolise anyone . . . . With respect to Atatürk, so far, those who admire (or claim to admire) him have praised him excessively, and those who do not like him (or disapprove of some of his actions) have preferred to keep silent out of fear that they may cause trouble . . . . This silence is also significantly due to the custom of not to speak ill of a man after his death. Among us, nationalists, there are those who like Mustafa Kemal, and those who do not. Both groups, we believe, are worthy of respect (as long as they are sincere). The appropriate course of action for Turkism [*euphemism for racist-Turanists*] on this issue is to prevent the likelihood of friction among Turkists.[63]

Only a few weeks later, it was Atsız's turn to lead the charge against Atatürk and Kemalism:

> If the kemalists [*sic*] are not fond of racism, racists are not fond of kemalism [*sic*] either.. . . If we need to compare racism with kemalism [*sic*], we can say thus: racism depends on the historical truth that those who are not [*racially*] Turkish had always betrayed us, while kemalism [*sic*] depends on the deceitful propaganda of the past thirty years. They should not forget it for a moment that *the false god* that they rely on is falling apart and being replaced by truth and merit.[64]

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59 Bekir Sıddık Özyıldırım, 'Son Yüzyılın Tahrif Edilmiş Olan Tarihi Düzeltilmelidir', *Orkun*, No. 14 (5 January 1951), 13; 'Emekli General Ali İhsan Sâbis'le Bir Görüşme', *Orkun*, No. 35 (1 June 1951), 6–7.

60 'Anıtlar', *Orkun*, No. 10 (8 December 1950), 9.

61 İsmet Tümtürk, 'Millî Şuur Işığında Mülteciler Meselesi', *Orkun*, No. 1 (6 October 1950), 13.

62 M. Zeki Sofuoğlu, 'Son Yüzyılı Örten Yalan Perdesi Ne Zaman Yırtılacak?', *Orkun*, No. 6 (10 November 1950), 3–4.

63 'Ülküdaşlarla Başbaşa', *Orkun*, No. 9 (1 December 1950), 16.

64 Atsız, 'Millî Birlik', *Orkun*, No. 21 (23 February 1951), 3–4. Italics are mine, but writing 'Kemalism' with the lower case is an Atsız speciality. Also see the editorial note following Hocaoğlu S. Ertürk, 'Türkçülük ve Kemalizm', *Orkun*, No. 39 (29 June 1951), 3–5; Hocaoğlu S. Ertürk, 'Irkçı-Turancı Atatürk', *Orkun*, No. 41 (13 July 1951), 3–5; İsmet Tümtürk, 'Atatürk Meselesi', *Orkun*, No. 24 (16 March 1951), 3–4; 'Büyük Adam', *Orkun*, No. 35 (1 June 1951), 9; '1944–1945'ten Hâtıralar', *Orkun*, No. 44 (3 August 1951), 9; Atsız, 'Büyük Adam', *Özleyiş*, No. 6 (March 1947), 4–5.

The allusion to Atatürk as a false god whose downfall was near showed clearly that little had changed since the 1944 Trials, when Atsız was asked by the court to state his views on Atatürk and replied that he held 'Chief Commander Mustafa Kemal' in high esteem but did not like 'President Atatürk' at all.[65]

Atsız and his followers celebrated the May 1950 general election as a turning point in modern Turkish history, one that transformed Turkey truly into a republic. The 27-year-long rule of the RPP represented an 'illegitimate and tyrannical dictatorship' in their eyes,[66] which finally came to an end with the first free and fair election in republican history.[67] When Nejdet Sançar referred to the RPP as 'a great enemy of Turkism', 'a joint-stock company based on [*material*] interest, rather than a political party', having 'an ominous mentality knocked down by the will of the nation', those words were not empty rhetoric.[68] On the one hand, the animosity of the Atsız circle towards the founder-president of Turkey was not motivated by individual or racial reasons only, but rather could be understood within the framework of opposition to wide-scale changes in Turkey, which Atatürk came to symbolize personally. On the other hand, it would be wrong to classify the dispute between the racists and their Kemalist opponents as a factional fissure separating an otherwise like-minded elite group into two.[69] On the contrary, the rivalry among them stemmed from real disagreements on fundamental issues such as regime type, foreign policy, and construction of national identity and historical memory.

First of all, the Atsız circle objected to the ways republicanism was practised in Turkey, both before and after 1950. Ironically, the single-party regime from 1923 to 1945 was more preferable for them from a purely instrumentalist point

65 '1944–1945'ten Hâtıralar', *Orkun*, No. 44 (3 August 1951), 9.

66 Atsız, 'Kurucular Meclisi', *Orkun*, No. 9 (1 December 1950), 3–4.

67 Bernard Lewis, 'Recent Developments in Turkey', *International Affairs* 27 (1951), 320–31. Atsız noted that Turkish parliaments before 1950 could not be considered democratic institutions, since their members were actually appointed, according to him, after unfair elections. As a personal example, he recounts how he and some 200 classmates voted for the Free Party in the 1930 local election and how those votes disappeared in the ballot box: see *3 Mayıs Türkçüler Günü Antolojisi* (Ankara 1967), 41–2. Incidentally, we learn from this recollection that Atsız had already been disillusioned with the RPP as early as 1930 and voted for its short-lived rival in the elections.

68 Nejdet Sançar, 'Türkçülük Düşmanları', *Orkun*, No. 1 (6 October 1950), 4–5. Atsız was much harsher and did not mince his words when expressing his hatred for the RPP; see Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 10: Çanakkale'ye Yürüyüş, Türkçülüğe Karşı Haçlı Seferi* (İstanbul 1997), 70–308.

69 After the mid-1960s, the attitude of the racist-Turanists toward Atatürk and Kemalism was still aloof, but outright hostility had disappeared. This was reflected in articles published in Atsız's journal *Ötüken*; for example, see Nejdet Sançar, 'Komünist Düşmanı Atatürk, Atatürk Düşmanı Komünist ve Belgeler', *Ötüken*, No. 20 (16 August 1965), 1–2; Mustafa Kayabek, 'Atatürk ve Türk Milliyetçiliği', *Ötüken*, No. 23 (22 November 1965), 4–5; Atsız, 'Biz Ne İstediğimizi Biliyoruz', *Ötüken*, No. 26 (15 February 1966), 1–3; Atsız, 'Millî Bayram', *Ötüken*, No. 29 (28 May 1966), 2; M. Zeki Sofuoğlu, 'Tekrar Canlanmak', *Ötüken*, No. 35 (November 1966), 2; Nejdet Sançar, 'Atatürkçülük Perdesi Arkasında Türklük Düşmanlığı', *Ötüken*, No.48 (December 1967), 4; Nejdet Sançar, 'Atatürkçülük Meselesi I', *Ötüken*, No. 62 (February 1969), 5–6; Atsız, '16 Devlet Masalı ve Uydurma Bayraklar', *Ötüken*, No. 65 (May 1969), 3–5.

of view, since it tallied well with their authoritarian tendencies. The main problem with the single party rule, according to the racist-Turanists, was that it had not been controlled by the right kind of rulers: that is to say, by themselves. In their opinion, multiparty politics after 1945 and the fall of the RPP from government in 1950 brought another set of problems to the surface. The post-1950 political climate was poisoned by petty arguments between politicians, they argued, who were motivated less by common good than by their individual or party interests. In addition, the new political culture was too lax for the racists. As opposed to the military-style discipline the racists maintained in their personal lives, self-discipline and respect for moral and national values were collapsing, they believed, when faced with certain flaws in the new regime in Turkey, such as libertarianism, cosmopolitanism, decadence and greed. However, these other debilities of the republican multiparty system paled in importance when compared to its greatest 'sin': namely the notion of equality for everyone regardless of language, religion, gender, and especially colour and ethnicity. The racists' deep-seated belief in the inequality of nations as well as human beings and the fact that republicanism made it legally impossible to prevent the 'racially impure' from gaining influential positions in government were the leading factors that distanced them from a republican regime.[70]

Atsız, as the spokesperson for his circle, preferred an aristocratic-praetorian type of government to the republic. In a letter he sent to Prime Minister Refik Saydam, before the 1944 Trials, he recommended amendments to the Turkish constitution which, if implemented, would have effectively transformed Turkey into a typical fascist dictatorship of the interwar period.[71] Atsız's plan for administrative and political reform underlined the role of the president as the linchpin of the system and absolute leader of the nation. He suggested that presidents be nominated by a triumvirate composed of the prime minister, the chief of general staff and the chairman of the parliament, and if possible from among those three. The appointment of the president should be for a life term and necessary measures had to be taken to eliminate his – a woman president was quite unthinkable from Atsız's standpoint – dependency on the parliament. Atsız thought that the party system and the parliament constituted liabilities only; his solution to this problem was to abolish the RPP altogether and to reduce the number of seats in the parliament. In other words, Atsız dreamt of an all-powerful president who could deal with domestic and foreign issues through a loyal cabinet, connect with the masses directly and represent their will personally, without an intermediary representative-legislative institution. This regime bore a striking resemblance to the nazi rule in Germany, with the

70 Atsız's critique of republicanism can be found in his autobiographical novel *Bütün Eserleri 11: Ruh Adam* (İstanbul 1997), 37-38 and 70-71. Also see, Uzer, 'Racism in Turkey', op.cit., 125-128.
71 Yücel, *Dâvam*, op. cit., 15–16. A copy of the letter and other incriminating documents were presented to the court by the Ministry of Interior. For a similar letter sent to President İnönü, see Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 13: Makaleler II*, 2nd edn (İstanbul 1997), 249.

exception that Atsız did not even consent to a party apparatus standing between the leader and the nation in the Turkish case.[72]

The most important qualification to be sought in Turkey's future leaders, and anyone occupying a position of significance, for that matter, ought to be purity of race and blood. A typical racist accusation against the Kemalists was that the majority of their top leadership did not belong to the Turkish race.[73] If non-Turkish races could be barred from administrative positions, Turks of pure race, who had so far been cheated out of office, might then bring forth a natural aristocracy based on merit and character. Atsız believed that those who would truly excel and distinguish themselves in service to the nation were most likely to appear from among the ranks of the officer corps. Atsız's lifelong devotion to his former career led him to presume that the top echelons of power in the new system had to be and was going to be dominated by men of military background.[74] That is why, for example, he proposed to make the chief of general staff an equal of the chairman of the parliament in the Turkish protocol.[75]

The second major source of conflict between the racists and the Kemalists stemmed from diverging and incompatible orientations in foreign policy. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the first world war, Turkish nationalist forces fought an independence war against the Entente Powers, as a result of which the Republic of Turkey was recognized at Lausanne in 1923 as an independent sovereign state. In many ways, the Treaty of Lausanne, the last treaty to be signed between the victors of the war and a defeated nation, inaugurated a totally new era in Turkish history. The Kemalist leadership and the Kemalist historians later on worked hard to give an optimistic view of the treaty, describing it as the miraculous conclusion of a war between colonising imperialists and Turks, who are jealous of their sovereign rights. Therefore, the Lausanne Treaty has traditionally been depicted in the official historiography in larger than life terms, as a fresh and honourable beginning for a newborn nation.[76] Racists, on the other hand, disagreed with this interpretation profoundly. From their point of view, Lausanne could be considered a success only in comparison with the Treaty of Sèvres,[77] but on the whole racists found

72 Yücel, *Dâvam*, op. cit., 15.

73 Ibid., 17; '1944–1945 Irkçılık-Turancılık Davası', *Orkun*, No. 20 (16 February 1951), 8–12; Çivicioğlu, "Atatürkçü'leri Tanıyalım: Ahmet Emin Yalman', *Orkun*, No. 30 (27 April 1951), 5–7. It should be born in mind that rival racist circles applied different criteria for determining one's Turkishness. While Atsız could be said to be relatively more lenient (!), accepting the Nuremberg Laws as the basis of racial purity, Reha Oğuz Türkkan demanded to see a family tree for nine generations.

74 Atsız's novel, *Ruh Adam*, is full of scenes describing the merits of a military aristocracy. Also see Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 13: Makaleler II*, op. cit., 199–200.

75 Yücel, *Dâvam*, op. cit., 15.

76 Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Yeni Türkiye Devletinin Haricî Siyaseti* (İstanbul 1935), 138–9; Aptülahat Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi* (İstanbul 1966), 1–2.

77 The Peace Treaty of Sèvres was signed between the Entente powers and the Ottoman Empire on 10 August 1920 and partitioned Ottoman territories among the victors of the war; as a result of

nothing in it to be proud of.[78] With the shrunken territory of the republic, Lausanne only reminded them of the lost glory of the Ottoman Empire, whose borders extended from the Adriatic Sea to the Indian Ocean as late as 1900. The new Turkey, which they found themselves in, occupied only the Turkish homeland in Anatolia and barely maintained a foothold in Europe in eastern Thrace.

Faced with the 'stark' reality, racists rejected the notion that the state of the Turks could for ever live within the borders drawn at Lausanne in a form that is reduced to a shadow of its former self and cut off from its hinterland in the Balkans and the Middle East and, most importantly, from Turks abroad in Inner Eurasia. To put it differently, Atsız and his circle did not accept the settlement of the question of Turkey's borders at Lausanne as final; for them, the Kemalist republic could only represent an interim period and was bound to transform into an incomparably larger and stronger state. They saw this happening when a racist government would come to power, regroup national forces and strike at the right moment to re-conquer the outlying Turkish *terra irredenta*. This is why Atsız opposed the Kemalist foreign policy principle of recognizing and even defending the settlement after the first world war, demonstrated in particular by Atatürk's famous dictum 'Peace at home, peace in the world'.[79] While Atatürk endeavoured to restore stability in Turkey's borders by initiating regional defence pacts with the Balkan and Middle Eastern countries[80] and signing a friendship agreement with the Soviets, Atsız challenged the rationale behind those diplomatic moves and, in a will he prepared in 1942, named nearly all nations in the world as enemies of the Turks, putting his followers on alert against them.[81] The racist perspective on foreign policy thus was essentially irredentist; Atsız persisted in believing in the idea of a Turkish *Lebensraum* and advised future racists to secure it by war if necessary. The foreign policy issue on which these two perspectives collided head-on was the future of bilateral relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union.

Turkish governments in the early republic attached great value to maintaining cordial relations with their northern neighbour. The Bolsheviks had supported Turkish nationalist struggle against the Entente from 1920 to 1923 and

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the Turkish War of Independence, it was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923; see Osman Olcay, *Sèvres Andlaşması'na Doğru* (Ankara 1980); Paul Christian Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919–1920* (Columbus, OH 1974).

78 Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 10: Çanakkale'ye Yürüyüş, Türkçülüğe Karşı Haçlı Seferi*, op. cit., 41–2; Namık Zafer Alpsü, 'Türk Tarihinde Ağustos'un Manâsı', *Orkun*, No. 51 (21 September 1951), 10.

79 Bakırezer, 'Nihal Atsız', op. cit., 354; Berna Türkdoğan (ed.), *Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası – Makaleler* (Ankara 2000), 18, 22, 29–61; Mehmet Gönlübol and Cem Sar, '1918–1938 Yılları Arasında Türk Dış Politikası', in *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası*, vol. 1 (Ankara 1989), 59–60.

80 Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri*, op. cit., 78–82, 138–57.

81 Quoted in Bozkurt Güvenç, *Türk Kimliği* (Ankara 1994), 363.

recognized the Ankara government diplomatically when it was still treated by the international community as an assemblage of outlaws; Stalin also agreed to sign a treaty of friendship and neutrality with his Turkish counterparts in 1925, which remained in force until 1945.[82] The logic of this bilateral relationship rested partly on the premise that, while the Soviets would refrain from exporting the Bolshevik Revolution to Turkey, the Turkish regime was going to renounce the Turanist version of Turkish nationalism and restrain all expressions of solidarity with Turkic peoples languishing under Stalinist rule. A stream of complaints flowing from the Soviet embassy, for instance, was one of the reasons why the Turkish government clamped down on the semi-official *Türk Ocakları* (the Turkish Hearths) in 1931,[83] and foreign policy concerns were mentioned when permission for Atsız's journal *Orkun* was revoked in 1934.[84]

The rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow during the interwar period did not go down well with the racist-Turanists and gave them the impression that vital Turkish interests were being compromised by Turkey's – according to them – cowardly and treacherous appeasement policy. Atsız and his followers' hatred for the Soviet Union derived from two principles. On the one hand, they were truly repulsed by socialism as a school of thought. Anti-communism had already started to appear in the 1930s as the dominant theme in Turkish nationalist propaganda[85] and caused the final break between Atsız and his former friends and acquaintances like Sabahattin Âli, Pertev Naili Boratav and Nazım Hikmet Ran. Moreover, the racist-Turanists tended to see ideologies through the lenses of nationalism, and thus regarded socialism a patently Russian ideology above everything else. From the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, the Ottoman Turks and Tsarist Russia were interlocked in a nearly perpetual state of war, in which the Ottomans lost vast territories and eventually came to regard Russia as the eternal enemy. Analysing international politics with that historical impulse, the racist-Turanists believed that the 250-year-long hostility between the two states had reached a new stage, and while the Russians were now fighting in the name of socialism, from the racist perspective world revolution was but another means of advancing Russian national interests under a humanitarian disguise.[86]

On the other hand, the racist hostility toward the Soviet Union was certainly not grounded in ideology alone. As much as they abhorred socialism as a school of thought and as an instrument of Russian expansionism, the real

82 Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası* (İstanbul 2003), 315–16.

83 Füsun Üstel, *İmparatorluktan Ulus-Devlete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları (1912–1931)* (İstanbul 1997), 360–1.

84 Önen, *İki Turan*, op. cit., 262–3; Süleyman Tüzün, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'de Dış Türkler Tartışmaları (1939–1945)* (Isparta 2005), 35–54.

85 Yüksel Taşkın, 'Anti-Komünizm ve Türk Milliyetçiliği: Endişe ve Pragmatizm', in Bora (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce*, vol. 4, op. cit., 618–34.

86 Yaşlı, 'Nihal Atsız ve Anti-Komünizm', op. cit., 61.

source of enmity could be found in the Soviet dominion over multitudes of Turkic peoples who lived subject to the whims of party bosses in Moscow and various socialist 'experts'. Plans for social engineering in the Soviet Union aimed at promoting ethnic particularism among the Turkic peoples and upgrading each community to the level of a recognized nationality in order to separate them thereby from each other for ever by means of symbolic and visual barriers.[87] The Soviet policy of divide-and-rule was plainly at odds with the pan-Turanist ideology and confirmed racist-Turanists' worst fears regarding eventual assimilation of the eastern branch of the Turkic world, if Soviet rule over them would not come to an end before long. The ultimate goal of pan-Turanism was to unite all Turkic peoples under the political umbrella of a Turanian Empire, taking advantage of perceived racial ties, linguistic affinity and geographical contiguity.[88] The Soviet Union stood in the way as a colossal impediment before the realization of this political fantasy. As a matter of fact, the racist-Turanists were not oblivious of the dictates of *Realpolitik*; they did not champion a belligerent policy vis-à-vis the Soviets after 1945, since that course of action was doomed to failure under Cold War circumstances. Yet Atsız preferred to call an enemy an enemy in his characteristic style and could not forgive the Kemalist RPP governments for their repeated entreaties for friendship between Turkey and the Soviet Union. He received full support on this issue from his followers, who appeared even more jingoistic than he was, at times.[89]

In addition to profound disagreements on regime type and foreign policy, the racist-Turanists and the Kemalists were at loggerheads over the nature of Turkish national identity as well. To put it simply, these two branches of Turkish nationalism did not respond in the same way to the question 'Who is a Turk?' The novelty of the Kemalist approach was to disentangle Turkish national identity from any association with Islam and to build it on exclusively secular foundations.[90] It would not be an exaggeration to claim that Kemalism aimed to supplant Islam with language, history and memory as secular sources of identity and pride, and as new ingredients in the construction of

87 Yuri Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review* 53 (1994), 414–52; S. Wurm, *Turkic Peoples of the USSR: Their Historical Background, Their Languages and the Development of Soviet Linguistic Policy* (London 1954); Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917–1953* (Berlin and New York 1998).

88 Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, op. cit., Chapters 3 and 4; Historical Section of the Foreign Office, *The Rise of the Turks: The Pan-Turanian Movement* (London 1919); Gotthard Jäschke, 'Der Turanismus der Jungtürken: zur osmanische Aussenpolitik im Weltkriege', *Die Welt des Islams* 23 (1941), 1–53; idem, 'Der Turanismus und die kemalistische Türkei', in R. Hartmann and H. Schell (eds), *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Leipzig 1944), 468–83.

89 Önen, *İki Turan*, op. cit., 266; İsmet Tümtürk, 'Millî Şuur Işığında Mülteciler Meselesi', *Orkun*, No. 1 (6 October 1950), 10–13; Nejdet Sançar, 'Dış Türkler', *Orkun*, No. 3 (20 October 1950), 4–5.

90 Gökhan Çetinsaya, 'Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" in Modern Turkish Political Thought', *The Muslim World* 89 (1999), 350–76.

Turkishness.[91] Arguably, the most important step in that direction was taken in the early 1930s with the establishment of the Turkish History and Language Institutes, which were charged with the task of conceiving a nationalist model for the study of Turkish history and language and removing the unwanted Islamic, Arabo-Persian layers of sediment hiding the supposedly virgin Turkish core from view. Under the guardianship of Atatürk, who entrusted daily politics to the İsmet Paşa governments from 1930 to 1937 and devoted much of his time to the study of identity questions, the institutes invented the Turkish History and Language Theses – with capital letters – as official, state-sponsored paradigms for the study of Turkish history and language. Both theories were pseudo-scientific and rested on a chain of assumptions that did not square with linguistic or archaeological evidence. In a nutshell, Atatürk's team of amateur historians and linguists maintained that the ancestors of the modern Turkish nation established a brilliant Neolithic civilization in Inner Eurasia, which eventually died out because of long-lasting climatic changes and a severe drought that afflicted the region on a permanent basis.[92] The Turkish inhabitants, so the story goes, were forced to emigrate in all directions, transmitting their superior culture to the Americas, India, China, the Near East and, of course, Europe. Therefore not only did all those centres of ancient civilization flourish after they were inoculated by the Turkish pioneers, but one could also discern in their languages – with the 'right' methodology – a stratum of Turkish language material, contributing the most indispensable cultural concepts. Sponsored by Atatürk and the institutes, the twin theories were put on show at international conferences in İstanbul in 1932, 1934 and 1936.[93]

91 Ibid., 362.

92 More information on the history and language theses can be found in: Etienne Copeaux, *Espaces et temps de la nation turque: analyse d'une historiographie nationaliste, 1931–1993* (Paris 1997); Büşra Ersanlı-Behar, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de Resmi Tarih Tezinin Oluşumu (1929–1938)* (İstanbul 1992); Jens Peter Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache: Sprachwissenschaftliche Theorien in der Zeit des erwachenden türkischen Nationalismus* (Wiesbaden 2000); Karl Steuerwald, *Untersuchungen zur türkischen Sprache der Gegenwart*, vol. 1, *Die türkische Sprachpolitik seit 1928* (Berlin-Schöneberg 1963); Agâh Sırrı Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri*, 3rd edn (Ankara 1972); Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford and New York 1999); İlker Aytürk, 'Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (2004), 1–25. The majority of the tiny community of Turkish historians and linguists at the time chose to remain silent, including Atsız's academic patron Fuad Köprülü. Zeki Velidi Togan, however, bluntly disputed the timing of the so-called drought, ruining thereby the carefully crafted chronology of events. Togan, as a result, was publicly humiliated and compelled to resign from his chair at the Darülfünûn. For the dispute at the First Turkish History Conference and attacks on Togan, see *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar, Müzakere Zabıtları* (İstanbul 1932), 167–93, 369–400. Other academic opponents, who kept a low profile, included Avram Galante, Hüseyin Kazım Kadri and Ragıp Hulusi Özdem.

93 Atatürk was particularly interested in maverick European scholars, supportive of Turkish theories and who might buttress those with their insider knowledge of Western scholarly standards. For a general overview, see Murat Ergin, 'Cultural Encounters in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Western Émigré Scholars in Turkey', *History of the Human Sciences* 22 (2009), 105–30; for case studies on particular scholars, see Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache?*, op. cit.,

Essentially, the Kemalist theories on history and language were meant to achieve four goals. First, they provided the westernizing, Kemalist elite with an opportunity to wrap the Turkish modernization project in a shroud of much-needed authenticity. If the theories had indeed 'proved' racial identicalness of the Turks and the Europeans, or 'verified' that ancient Turks were the ancestors of modern European nations, this would have pulled the rug from under the feet of Turkish conservatives, who argued that Kemalist modernization was nothing more than mimicking the West. In this way, the Turks could have returned to Europe, not to ape, as conservative critics of the regime claimed, but as the penitent prodigal son who returned back to claim his rightful heritage.[94] Second, the theories also answered back to Greeks and Armenians who submitted territorial claims to much of Anatolia at Sèvres on the basis of autochthonous habitation before the Turks arrived in the eleventh century. The Turkish riposte followed in the theories and took the form of moving the Turks' date of arrival several thousand years earlier by asserting that the Hittites and the Sumerians were two branches of Turkish immigration out of Asia and thus those 'Turkish tribes' settled Anatolia before others.[95] Third, the theories were important components of the nation-building programme in Turkey, which aimed at constructing a secular culture that Turkish youth could be proud of. In this sense, they could be regarded as early and idiosyncratic varieties of the post-Orientalist critique, taking the nineteenth-century European humanities and social sciences to task for not giving Turks proper credit for their role in history. Fourth, they were also instrumental in being a tool of assimilation and acculturation of non-Turkish, and especially Muslim, ethnic groups in Turkey. Thanks to the Turkish Historical Thesis, nearly all such groups could be identified as 'potential Turks', or Turks who needed to be reminded of their ancestry.

In contrast, Atsız and the racists held the official theories on Turkish history and language in great contempt. These are their well-known grounds for opposition to Kemalists and for the most part inaccurately believed to be their only ones.[96] Speaking in the name of his circle, Atsız ridiculed the Turkish History

48–52, 94–161; Ayşe Tetik, 'Der sowjetische Linguist N. Ja. Marr und die türkische Sonnensprachtheorie', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 20 (2002), 231–67; Hamid Bozarslan, 'Jean Deny et la troisième congrès de la langue turque (İstanbul 1936)', *Turcica* 39 (2007), 201–52; İlker Aytürk, 'H.F. Kvergić and the Sun-Language Theory', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 159 (2009), 23–44; Jens Peter Laut, 'Noch einmal zu Dr. Kvergić', *Turkic Languages* 6 (2002), 120–33.

94 Aytürk, 'Turkish Linguists against the West', op. cit., 19.

95 Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir, 'Archaeology as a Source of National Pride in the Early Years of the Turkish Republic', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 31 (2006), 381–93; Olivier Mariaud and Kenan Eren, 'L'archéologie de l'Ionie archaïque dans l'historiographie turque: le mythe de l'Âge d'Or et l'idéologie du territorialisme', *European Review of History* 13 (2006), 569–87. For the precursors of this argument, see Turkish Grand National Assembly, *Pontus Meselesi* (Ankara 1338 [1922]), Introduction; Yusuf Ziya [Özer], *Yunandan Evvelki Türk Medeniyeti* (İstanbul 1927), Introduction.

96 Güven Bakırezer, 'Nihal Atsız', op. cit., 353–5; Özdoğan, *"Turan"dan "Bozkurt"a*, op. cit., 189–90; Önen, *İki Turan*, op. cit., 254–6.

and Language Theses without mincing words.[97] From his perspective, the Kemalist attempts at glorifying the Turkish past were at once unnecessary, shameful and potentially destructive. They were unnecessary because the glory of the Turkish past was an established fact in the eyes of the racists; it did not have need of bogus acclaim.[98] According to Atsız, the desperate endeavours to prove Turkish contribution to European and world civilization exposed the subconscious inferiority complex of the Kemalist elite,[99] rooted in their ignorance of Turkish history. Moreover, those theories were shameful because fabricating pseudo-science invited mockery, compromised the standing of the Turks as a modern nation before international public opinion and ruined the prestige of the Turkish state in the eyes of foreign academics.[100] Owing to his solid background in history and Turcology, Atsız could tell the vulnerability of the Turkish fantasies and how their flimsy evidence would become defenceless when put to the test by Western scholars according to rigorous standards of methodology.

Above all, however, Atsız and fellow racists believed that the Kemalist history and language theories signalled a dangerous trend in the early republican period, namely an inclination towards expanding the borders of Turkishness in order to assimilate minority groups in Turkey and to welcome them as born-again Turks eventually.[101] Atsız and his circle were right in detecting such a tendency, because as Howard Eissenstat maintained, while we associate '... race discourse with the policies of segregation in America or Nazi Germany... [the Kemalist] discourse was fundamentally designed to act as an inclusionary (if aggressively assimilationist) rather than exclusionary discourse.'[102] Like a true racist, on the other hand, Atsız attacked the policy of assimilation. His policy recommendation was either to get rid of the minority groups in Turkey,[103] or to treat them as perpetual outsiders.[104] Anything short of these measures would be tantamount to official approval for Turks to mix up with non-Turks, Atsız contended. This is also why he waged war against Kemalist theories on history and language. Whereas history textbooks in

97 Uzun, 'Hüseyin Nihal Atsız'dan Tahsin Banguoğlu'na', op. cit., 133; 'Eden Bulur', *Orkun*, No. 27 (6 April 1951), 9; 'Güneş-Dil Teorisini Yad!', *Orkun*, No. 37 (15 June 1951), 8; Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 13: Makaleler II*, op. cit., 151.

98 Atsız, 'Türkler Hangi Irktandır?', in Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 14: Makaleler III*, op. cit., 147–50; Atsız, *Türk Tarihi Üzerinde Toplamalar* (İstanbul 1935), Introduction; Atsız, 'Türk Tarihine Bakışımız Nasıl Olmalıdır?', *Çınaraltı*, No. 1 (9 August 1941), 6–8.

99 Atsız, 'Türkçü Kimdir', *Orkun*, No. 3 (20 October 1950), 3.

100 Atsız, 'Türk Tarihine Bakışımız Nasıl Olmalıdır?', op. cit., 6–8.

101 Ibid., 6.

102 Eissenstat, 'Metaphors of Race and Discourse of Nation', op. cit., 239.

103 In the 1930s, Atsız published a treatise in which he openly advocated exterminating the Roma, and possibly the Jews, living in Turkey; see Atsız, *Bütün Eserleri 10: Çanakkale'ye Yürüyüş*, 2nd edn (İstanbul 1997), 20.

104 In 1973, the 67-year-old Atsız was imprisoned for provocative publications against Kurds and Arabs; see Atsız, 'Konuşmalar', *Ötüken*, No. 40 (April 1967), 2–10; idem, 'Kızıl Kürtlerin Yaygarası', *Ötüken*, No. 42 (June 1967), 2–4; idem, 'Bağımsız Kürt Devleti Propagandası', *Ötüken*, No. 45 (September 1967), 3–5.

Turkish schools turkified many ancient peoples such as the Sumerians, Hittites, Etruscans, the Maya and the Inca, taking their cue from the official viewpoint, the racists slammed the idea as a perfidious act of diluting the Turkish identity as well as proclaiming the Turkish race impure. 'What kind of a relationship', Atsız asked, 'could unsightly Hittites, with their stunted bodies, short necks, lush, curly hair and beards, have with us?' and continued, 'if everybody is [proven] Turkish, then the feeling of nationality wanes because "Turkishness" can no longer be a privilege.'[105]

The racist critique of Kemalism reveals the contradictions inherent in the Kemalist-nationalist discourse. The Kemalist founders of the republic were torn between two equally powerful commitments. Their admiration for the French Revolution and their love of freedom and hatred for tyranny, all of which they imbibed secretly in their youth at the repressive Hamidian schools, seared on their consciousness a predilection for emulating the French example and founding the new Turkey as a parliamentary democracy with a civic understanding of national identity. On the other hand, several factors overlapped to neutralize the ideological undercurrent of liberalism and democratisation. Firstly, the horrors of the first world war discredited the self-proclaimed intellectual and moral supremacy of the West over the rest of the world and its claim to be a light unto the nations.[106] Secondly, alternative, non-democratic and illiberal paths to modernity epitomized by the Soviet, German, Italian and Japanese examples, rose to prominence at about the same time and did not fail to impress the Turkish leaders.[107] Finally, memories of inter-communal strife between Turks, Greeks and Armenians in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and during the Turkish War of Independence were still too fresh and bred suspicion against all remaining minority groups in Turkey. The result of those conflicting desires and influences was a much more complex process of nation-building in early republican Turkey, one that is not fully accounted for in the two existing paradigms in the field. The acrimonious relationship between the racists and the Kemalist establishment can be taken as an example of how the latter oscillated between a western, democratic orientation and an inward-looking, xenophobic worldview.

The evidence at hand proves beyond doubt that this conflict cannot be reduced to a disagreement on the question of national identity only and our attention is drawn to other factors immediately. Those included hard feelings toward Atatürk, İsmet İnönü and other early Kemalist leaders at a very personal

105 Atsız, 'Türk Tarihine Bakışımız Nasıl Olmalıdır?', op. cit., 6.

106 Michael Adas, 'Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology', *Journal of World History* 15 (2004), 31–64; Aksakal, 'Not "by those old books of international law, but only by war"', op. cit., 507–44.

107 Falih Rıfkı [Atay], who imparted semi-official views from his column in the dailies *Hakimiyeti Milliye* and *Ulus*, visited fascist Italy and Stalin's Russia to learn from their experimentation with modernization. His published travelogues were discussed in the Turkish press and at Atatürk's table, which he frequented often; see, *Yeni Rusya* (Ankara 1931); idem, *Faşist Roma, Kemalist Tiran ve Kaybolmuş Makidonya* (İstanbul n.d.); idem, *Moskova Roma* ([İstanbul] 1932).

level; the racists' loathing for democratic procedures available in Turkey at the time and hence their desire for regime change; and a serious clash over Turkey's foreign policy orientation and its role in international society. Although the major bone of contention between them was certainly the one regarding the question 'Who is a Turk?', there is no denying the fact that the racists were at odds with Kemalism and the Kemalist establishment in a myriad of ways.

That said, the disagreement on the Turkish national identity deserves special attention because of its implications for the contemporary debate that has engulfed the study of Turkish nationalism. It would be far too simplistic to argue that, since racists opposed Kemalism, Kemalists could not have been racist. We could easily discern a number of racist statements by prominent Kemalist statesmen of the early republican era and, likewise, there is no doubt that some of the leading Kemalist cabinet ministers, politicians and intellectuals were mesmerized by the swift recovery of the devastated German lands and by the ease with which the nazis transgressed the boundaries imposed on Germany at Versailles. However, while the allure of the German example had, indeed, captivated some in Ankara, the true Turkish racists of this period were obviously not satisfied with the results. The harsh tone of the racist polemics and the scale of government measures to suppress the racist movement demonstrate that the difference of opinion was not trivial. For that reason, academic assessments of the Kemalist leadership in the early republican period – particularly the assimilationist and discriminatory policies vis-à-vis minority groups – must take into account the racist critics of Kemalism and why racists became opponents of the regime in the first place. It would be wide of the mark to consider this a disagreement over the degree of racism between two essentially racist elite groups. Atsız and his colleagues never regarded Kemalists as fellow racists; on the contrary, as the research for this article shows, they constantly questioned the nationalist credentials of the Kemalist elite, accusing them of cosmopolitanism. From the racist perspective, Kemalism was an ill-conceived project of modernization, a hopeless path from the beginning which only led the Turks to ruin and irreversible degeneration. What emerges therefore is an infinitely more complicated and multifaceted picture of Kemalism and Kemalist policies compared with what we are offered by the current paradigms.

On the other hand, the impact of the racist movement on Kemalists and the Kemalist ideology has been profound and, one has to say, ironically positive on the whole. Historical evidence illustrates many cases of discrimination against non-Muslim minorities in the early Kemalist republic and pressure on Muslim minorities to assimilate. Arbitrary use of racial jargon was quite common in this period and one could easily come across references to 'qualities inherent in blood' or 'the nobility of race', including those by Kemal Atatürk, in political speeches and textbooks. All this was going to change dramatically during and in the aftermath of the 1944 Racism-Turanism Trials. The relationship between the Kemalist establishment and Atsız was already tense in the 1930s as a result of explicit and systematic racism in Atsız's works as opposed to incoherent, vague and occasional use of racist terminology in the Kemalist discourse.

The upsurge of racist-Turanism after 1940 and its unexpected popularity among university students, however, made a clash between the racists and the Kemalists inevitable. In this respect, the Trials of 1944 should be considered a watershed. The racist challenge to the Kemalist definition of Turkishness had an enormous impact, in the sense that it paved the way for a soul-searching process among the Kemalists. Towards the end of the war, the Kemalist rulers of the early republic were anticipating imminent changes in the international system and could realize that racism was not going to be in the spirit of the times in the new world order. Clearly, even the sporadic and unmethodical employment of racist terms and discourses was now considered an unnecessary burden in the new environment. The Trials of 1944 convinced the regime to draw a boundary between racism and Kemalist nationalism and to condemn Turkish racists publicly. While policies of discrimination (in the case of non-Muslims) continued, the Kemalist discourse was combed very carefully to purge pre-war remnants of racist jargon. After 1944, the Kemalist nationalists dropped all references to anything that slightly resembled racism or ethnic nationalism, and re-defined the Kemalist approach to the identity question as an impeccably civic one.

Finally, the research for this article also brings to light the deliberate and skilful erosion of the memory of the rift between Atsız and Kemalism from public and nationalist consciousness by the nationalist intelligentsia after the 1970s. None of Atsız's many biographers, all of whom are actually his admirers, dwell on his hostility toward Atatürk and Kemalism. They neither raise the issue of spiteful articles in *Orkun* and a host of other racist publications nor mention the true meaning of the *Dalkavuklar Gecesi*. This is obviously not accidental. The roots of this exercise in selective memory should be sought in the post-1970s attempts on the part of the nationalist intelligentsia and politicians to move from the fringes of the political spectrum to the centre and to make peace with the Kemalist state elite. As part of that manoeuvre, Atsız's polemics, which were truly embarrassing under the new circumstances and jeopardized the new career of nationalism in Turkey, were swept under the carpet and censored carefully. The expertise of Atsız's nationalist censors was such that the contemporary generation of Turkish nationalists, who admire Atatürk and Atsız simultaneously as great heroes, are absolutely unacquainted with facts which are buried in out-of-print pamphlets and old journal volumes.

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