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Review

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Onur Atalay. *Türk'e Tapmak: Seküler Din ve İki Savaş Arası Kemalizm.* İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018. 360 pp. Paper, 44 TL. ISBN: 978-9750524653.

Atalay's *Türk'e Tapmak* (Idolizing the Turk) is a study of the sacralization of politics and an attempt to portray Kemalism as a secular religion. Onur Atalay does so by placing Kemalism within the context of the rising totalitarian movements of interwar Europe—namely Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. References to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a prophet, if not a divine being outright, dot the entirety of the text; so, too, do various quotations from early republican publications and proclamations that refer to religion in one capacity or another. Despite this seemingly limited thematic focus and the title's emphasis on interwar-era Turkey, the book, in fact, deals with pretty much everything else: the first and second chapters, for instance, provide sweeping summaries of how politics were sacralized in Europe, tackling issues such as the rise of the secular, the gradual ascendancy of human rationality, and the ultimate emergence of civil religions—all analyzed within the context of changes such as the Enlightenment and French Revolution. In the rest of the book, “politics-as-religion” turns into a loose thread that connects the two centuries of Ottoman and Turkish intellectual history.

Although this is a monograph published out of a dissertation, one searches in vain for an introductory chapter that could outline the work. As a result, readers do not get much of a chance to learn how the author evaluates the state of research on Kemalism, where he situates his own work, or the types of interventions his book seeks to make in the literature. Only in the first footnote of a two-page-long preface does the author assert that there exists a broader unwillingness in Turkey to do critical research on Kemalism (p. 13). Those who dare to study Kemalism in any critical way, the author warns, could be barred from having access to research funds and scholarships, on top of being cold-shouldered by senior academics. This statement makes one wonder—and eventually double-check—if the book really got published in 2018 instead of a few decades prior. Needless to say, to portray critiques of Kemalism as being “taboo” today is just a straw man argument that not only dismisses the important advances made in the field, but also misrepresents the Turkish context where Kemalism has long turned into a convenient whipping boy used widely by academics and public intellectuals for the past few decades.

The absence of an introduction also means that Atalay does not engage in a serious attempt to define what Kemalism is, explain to what extent it differs from the Unionist political culture, or compare it to latter-day *Atatürkçülük*—aspects that would ultimately require a periodization of Kemalism. To his credit, Atalay acknowledges the existence of different strands of Kemalism (pp. 14, 75–79, 295), but “secular religion” as an analytic framework often serves against

emphasizing differences. As one continues to read the book, it becomes clear that Kemalism is a historical given for the author, a phenomenon that does not require a careful historical contextualization. Chapter 4, which deals with the policies of the Kemalist regime toward religion and secularism, for instance, inexplicably lacks any reference to the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 or the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925. In fact, these crucial episodes are not mentioned at all throughout the entire book. Rather than a simple omission on the part of the author, however, the absence of such a historical discussion is a symptom of a larger de-contextualization: the majority of the text reads like a bundle of quotations organized thematically, a narrative strategy that frustrates a chronological understanding of developments in Kemalist thought and practice.

The organization of chapters also suffers from a similar deficit of process-centered approaches. While the first two chapters deal with the European context, Atalay devotes the third chapter to a discussion of the 1930s and the mutual influences the totalitarian leaders had upon one another. The Ottoman Empire is introduced only in the fourth chapter, already one quarter of the way through the book, and compressed into three pages. The intellectual legacy of the empire is given more prominence in chapters 6 and 7, which tackle the themes of (Western) civilization and science, respectively. While the significance of the Ottoman legacy in the making of Kemalism is not denied, particularly as far as the discussions on materialism, positivism, and secularism are concerned, the heavy emphasis on Europe at the beginning of the book implies where Atalay's sympathies lie in identifying the source of historical change. Even though the third chapter highlights an interactive process of mutual borrowings and influences among the totalitarian regimes during the 1930s—thus in line with the correctives made to the modernization paradigm—Atalay's monography largely keeps the Ottoman Empire itself at bay, treating it as a historical background at best.

Chapters 9 and 10 represent the most interesting part of the book, thanks to their sustained, chronological, and contextualized focus on the construction and dissemination of the cult of leadership around Atatürk. Yet, as a whole, the monograph continues to remain analytically singular, with one quotation after another harnessed to illustrate Kemalism as a secular religion. This empirical abundance certainly indicates the long research hours put into the completion of the monograph, but beyond their illustrative potential, they provide little in the way of analytic, theoretical, or methodological insight. The author instead chooses to italicize all references to religion in his quotations—even figures of speech (!)—and expects his readers to draw their own conclusions. There is no concluding chapter, either, where the author could have addressed some of these analytic gaps by reflecting upon the data he so painstakingly put together.

Had Atalay's book been published fifteen or twenty years earlier, during the heyday of the post-Kemalist critique in Turkey, its intervention would

have perhaps represented a productive step forward. Today, however, the topic feels stale and unappealing, if not analytically outdated. This is all the more so, because the existing literature on Kemalism, which the author readily dismisses at the onset, has long replaced a basic discursive analysis of Kemalism with more interactive frameworks of state-society relations;¹ gone well beyond the usual comparisons with the totalitarian regimes of the interwar period and instead begun to situate it with the developmentalist regimes of the global South,² while underlining Kemalism's transnational implications in the Middle East and the Balkans.³ Such methodological and analytical advances of the recent literature are unfortunately absent in this book.

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Çimen Günay-Erkol. *Broken Masculinities: Solitude, Alienation, and Frustration in Turkish Literature after 1970*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016. 264 pp. Cloth, \$55. ISBN: 978-6155225253.

Every once in a while there emerges a fine example of literary criticism that offers a fresh outlook on familiar works and breaks new ground rather than plowing well-tilled soil. This is exactly what Çimen Günay-Erkol does in *Broken Masculinities* by focusing on the representations of masculinity in the novels written under Turkey's harsh cultural and political climate in the 1970s. She establishes very early in her book that the novels in question, commonly named "March 12 novels" in reference to the military coup that took place in 1971, are critical in understanding "what happened to men in Turkey's 1968 history, and how their masculinities in crisis are reflected in literature" (p. 9). What is remarkable in Günay-Erkol's analysis, which covers a great variety of novels extending from well-known and widely read works such as Erdal Öz's

1. See Gavin D. Brockett, ed., *Towards a Social History of Modern Turkey: Essays in Theory and Practice* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2011); Murat Metinsoy, "Fragile Hegemony, Flexible Authoritarianism, and Governing from Below: Politicians' Reports in Early Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 4 (2011): 699–719; Hale Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923–1945* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

2. Berk Esen, "Nation-Building, Party-Strength, and Regime Consolidation: Kemalism in Comparative Perspective," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 4 (2014): 600–20.

3. Amit Bein, *Kemalist Turkey and the Middle East: International Relations in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Nathalie Clayer, Fabio Giomi, and Emmanuel Szurek, eds., *Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).