

ON THE 'UNDEAD' FATHER OF TURKEY:
THE IMPOSSIBLE MOURNING OF YOUNG ATATÜRKISTS

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Thesis Abstract

Hilal Kaplan Ögüt, “On the ‘Undead’ Father of Turkey: The Impossible Mourning of Young Atatürkists”

This study aims to analyze the discursive and non-discursive practices which are centered around Atatürk as a signifier. Based on the narrative analysis of the interviews conducted during fieldwork, it intends to address the workings of such a signifier, as these bear a direct relationship to the political through personal and social practices of mourning. In that sense, the thesis aims to problematize the “impossible mourning” of young Atatürkists with regard to the issues of governmentality and sovereignty. For that purpose, it discusses the implications of the concept of impossible mourning in its relation with the state of exception and structural nostalgia. It investigates how Atatürk as a central category in the constitution of the political continues its hegemony over the political by operating as an empty signifier free from a stable content. In that sense, the thesis claims that Atatürk is posed as the opportunity of reaching a perfect and harmonious society and therefore being situated as the *objet petit a* of the political in Turkey.

Following this line of thought, it argues that the way young Atatürkists fulfill the empty character of Atatürk as a signifier varies according to their subjectivization processes which lead to many different narrativizations of Atatürk. It also claims that committing to Atatürk in a mournful manner leads to understanding the current political situation as a deviation since Atatürk’s rule is understood as a Golden Age. Through the definition of “portrait effect”, it discusses the implications of Atatürk’s image in the subjectivization processes of young Atatürkists and its relation to the duty of keeping his memory ‘alive’.

Tez Özeti

Hilâl Kaplan Ögüt, “Türkiye’nin ‘Ölmeyen’ Babası Üzerine: Atatürkçü Gençliğin İmkansız Yası”

Bu çalışma, bir gösteren olarak Atatürk etrafında merkezileşmiş söylemsel ve söylemsel olmayan pratikleri çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Saha araştırması sırasında yapılan mülakatların anlatı analizine dayanan çalışma, kişisel ve toplumsal yas tutma pratikleri üzerinden siyasal olanla direkt bir ilişkisi olan böylesi bir gösterenin işleyişini ele almaktadır. Bu anlamda, tezin amacı yönetimsellik ve egemenlik meseleleri bağlamında genç Atatürkçülerin “imkansız yası”nı problematize etmektir. Tezde imkansız yas kavramının istisna hali ve yapısal nostalji ile ilişkisi üzerinden içerdiği anlamlar tartışılmaktadır. Tez, siyasal kuruluşunda merkezi bir kategori olan Atatürk’ün siyasal üzerindeki hegemonisini sabit bir içerikten yoksun boş gösteren gibi işleyerek nasıl kurduğunu araştırmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Atatürk’ün mükemmel ve uyum içindeki bir topluma ulaşmak için bir fırsat olarak sunulduğu ve böylece Türkiye’de siyasalın objet petit a’sı olarak konumlandırıldığı iddia edilmektedir.

Bu düşünce hattını takip ederek, genç Atatürkçülerin bir gösteren olarak Atatürk’teki boşluğu doldurma yollarının pek çok farklı Atatürk anlatısına yol açan kendi özneleşme süreçleri ile bağını tartışmaktadır. “Portre etkisi” tanımı üzerinden, Atatürk imgesinin Atatürkçü gençlerin özneleşme süreçleri üzerindeki etkisi ve bunun Atatürk’ün hatırasını ‘canlı’ tutma görevi ile alakası tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca Atatürk’e yaslı bir usul ile bağlanmanın, Atatürk’ün başta olduğu zamanlar bir Altın Çağ olarak algılandığı için, mevcut siyasal durumu bir sapma olarak anlamaya yol açtığını iddia etmektedir.

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dedicated to the loving memory of
Uğur Kaymaz, Hrant Dink and Medine Bircan
for whom I will always mourn...

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PREFACE

When I first decided to study Atatürkist young people, my family and friends became very concerned. They were worried that I might face several unpleasant incidents or even harassment. Although I was very excited rather than anxious about my topic of study in the beginning, these reactions put me in an uneasy state. Finally, the day of meeting my first informant has come. I was nervous because my informant had not seen 'me'- meaning my headscarf- yet, since we communicated only by telephone or e-mail. How would he react? Maybe he would turn his back and leave as soon as he saw me. Maybe he would choose a more polite method and make up an excuse to leave. Or maybe I was nervous over nothing, we would sit down and have a good chat. I called him when I reached our meeting point. Then, I heard a cell phone ringing. I turned my head towards the voice and saw him. Our eyes met and in those eyes, I was able to read a moment of shock. That momentary expression faded as soon as I started to walk up to him with a smiling face. Then he started to smile at me too and reached out his hand in order to shake mine. I immediately shook his hand. I should not show any trace of hesitation in shaking his hand because for Atatürkists, this was some sort of test in order to see how 'modern, progressive and open-minded' I was as a headscarved woman. For that moment, I felt the need to pass that test. We went to a place I had arranged before and started to talk around a beautiful breakfast table. The interview which was planned to take two hours lasted for almost four hours. In the end, I asked him if he had anything to add. He said out of context: "Atatürkist reforms are for the people, no matter what they are, they do not have to be applied one-on-one. For instance, wearing a headscarf in the university may be allowed as long as education is equally available to all of us".

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Turkey's history is a unique and complex story of colonization in which both the colonizer and the colonized are indigenous. Colonialism can roughly be defined as the domination of an external power that conducts political, social and economic regulations over a society. As is known, Turkey has come into existence by fighting external powers rather than being exposed to one's dominance. However, when the history of the Turkish Republic is carefully examined, one can easily see an understating of power that is in parallel with the logic of colonialism since colonialist reasoning considers the society it rules as the object of its intentions and desires and therefore considers every sort of intervention legitimate. In this sense, Atatürkism is the current version of this colonialist reasoning with its specific mechanisms, practices and institutions.

This study arose from several 'first encounters' between the alleged 'colonizers' and 'colonized' by displacing/disrupting the stable familiarity of such positions. I refer to myself as 'colonized' since I belong to an assumed social group that needs to be 'enlightened' and shaped in accordance with Atatürkist values/desires because, as a headscarved woman, I do not quite fit in the norms of the desired Atatürkist subject. In fact, the headscarved woman is regarded as the opposite of the ideal Atatürkist woman who is supposed to adapt herself to Western values without denying traditional values. However, a headscarved, educated, middle-class woman dislocates the assumed Republican woman subjectivity and therefore gets to be interpreted as a direct opposition to Atatürkist values. Both as an

anthropologist and as someone implied in the story, I make my self visible by acknowledging this throughout this research.

This research is about a neologism which is also a name very much worn: ‘Atatürk’.¹ It is mainly about an ongoing discursive dispute regarding the clear and stable definition of Atatürk. So, the discursive and non-discursive practices centered around this name as a signifier will be dealt with starting from the historical roots of this dispute to contemporary political order in Turkey. It is specifically about young people who identify themselves with this name as “Atatürkists” and the way in which they become and act, construct and practice as actors of this dispute. My research showed me that “mourning” as a personal and social phenomenon appears to be a keyword since this name signifies not only a dead leader but also many other things. So, it is also an attempt to understand workings of such a signifier, as these bear a direct relationship to the political through personal and social practices of mourning. The impetus behind my preoccupation with this subject is the fact that the political in Turkey is generated and re-generated around the founding father of Turkey, Atatürk. What triggered this study is Agamben’s discussion of the unresolved semantic evolution of the word *iustitium* - the technical designation for the state of exception - to acquire the meaning of “the public mourning for the death of the sovereign”. Turkey’s ‘rich’ history of coups staged “in the name of Atatürk” is itself an indicator of the link between the state of exception and public mourning for the death of the sovereign. More saliently, I am studying the particularities of this modality of power in the context of mourning after Atatürk and the effects of this mourning on the

¹ In this study, I mostly refer to Atatürk as a name that signifies not only a dead leader but also the totality of what is constructed under/inscribed in this name after his death considering that Atatürkism inevitably revolves around this name. As I will try to show, there is something more in ‘Atatürk’ than Atatürk’s himself. In this sense, this thesis does not problematize the personage of Atatürk.

subjectivization processes of “Atatürkist youth” who are given a crucial role ideologically, as in any authoritarian rule.

Although sovereignty is often conceptualized in relation to certain theories of the law and the state, there are some newly emerging fields of study that conceptualize it as constitutive of subjectivity in different contexts. In this sense, abstract sovereignty has returned as a main problem in anthropology.² This reinvention attempts to explore not only *de facto* sovereignty concerning the ability to kill, punish, and discipline but also the processes of sovereignty that influence the processes of subjectivization.³ However, the historical conditions of emergence of discourses and practices of state sovereignty is still a debatable topic to be problematized because the question of the historicity of state sovereignty is significant for acknowledging the shifting discursive practices and the different social relations that create the historical conditions of emergence of such discourses.

Throughout my research, I tried to investigate how and through which means these young people bind themselves to Atatürk, how it is given meaning and how these meanings operate within the everyday lives of these young people.

During my interviews I realized that each of my informants had a different version of Atatürk in their minds. Although there are certain common points of intersection such as meeting the official discourse in school or growing up in a house with Atatürk’s pictures, the process through which they claim an Atatürkist identity differ from each other radically to the point that they are different from each other personally. In time, I noticed that ‘who Atatürk was’ is always already a question

² Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35, Sovereignty Revisited, (2006): p. 296.

³ For a successful example see Yael Navaro Yashin, “Confinement and The Imagination: Sovereignty and Subjectivity in a Quasi-State”, in *Sovereign Bodies: citizens, migrants, and states in the postcolonial world*, ed. Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 103-119.

about who my informant is. That is to say, there is a mutually interactive relationship between the characteristics they attribute to Atatürk from what they heard or read. In this sense, the way they imagine Atatürk is very much parallel with how they define themselves. Therefore, answering the question “who Atatürk was” was also to answer the question “who I am” for my informants. Both of these answers which are not immune from the existing relationships of power relate the past with the present. In this way, the past is shaped and understood through the present.

However, when I first started to study Atatürkism, I used to think of it as an ideology that creates ‘truth effects’ through a certain discourse which produces certain subject-positions. As is known, discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a particular topic in an acceptable and intelligible way at a particular historical moment. It provides not only certain rules and practices to talk, write or conduct oneself but also restricts and limits other ways of talking, writing or conducting oneself in relation to the topic. During my research, I came to realize that although Atatürkism is a product of the official discourse, the discursive practices of my informants, in some cases, vary significantly from each other, such as the choice of words or historical examples, depending on various factors. The diversity of the meanings they attribute to Atatürk is so striking that the various discourses concerning the ‘whatness’ of Atatürk came to be the main issue in my study.

Actually, that is in line with the construction of the political in Turkey which is also mired by the endless debates in which all sides try to align themselves with Atatürk whose ‘final’ meaning always escapes us. Then I realized that there is a special character to Atatürkism which cannot be restricted to one single discourse.

There are several discourses with its peculiar truth effects and subject-positions which define themselves under Atatürkism. In this sense, Atatürkism does not

provide one discourse that restricts and limits certain ways of talking, writing or conducting oneself in relation to itself. Thus, Atatürkism can also not be defined as a discourse that prescribes what is 'sayable' or 'thinkable'. Rather, it comprises several discourses that produce various forms and practices of knowledge, objects and subjects which differ radically from each other with no necessary continuity between them. By this, I do not refer to discourses of Atatürkism produced in different times but exactly the discourses of Atatürkism produced at this particular historical moment. In this sense, I do not think that it is proper to define Atatürkism as an ideology but as a field of sovereignty in which meaning/final decision is deferred and deferred endlessly. This is an indicator of the fact that Atatürk as a signifier provides a legitimate discourse from which 'the sovereign fiat' could be pronounced.

Anthropological effort is mainly understood as giving voice to those who have been silenced by political or economic oppression. Yet, in this study, my informants are chosen from a group of people whose voice is quite intelligible and even dominant to an extent in Turkey. My main attempt, in this thesis, is to understand young people's perception of Atatürk and the various ways in which they claim an Atatürkist identity which is the normative form of republican subjectivity offered by the official discourse. In this context, there is a statist character in Atatürkism which constructs itself through dictating an excluding norm on how to be an ideal Turkish citizen. In short, this thesis is not about a marginalized group but on the contrary it is about a social identity that marginalizes others on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. My interest in Atatürkism emerged in my undergraduate years when I have faced practices of discrimination for the first time in my life because of the headscarf ban in universities. It was not only painful but also quite interesting to see the transformation of your friends into people who do not want to be in the same class

with you because of a state-decreed ban. Having received such a strong reaction from people you consider as friends made me think about the underlying reasons since they are not “essentially” bad people. This led me to become more interested in the construction of Atatürkist identity which is the common reference of my friends’ desire to shut me out.

During fieldwork, I was ‘shut out’, too. I was unable to conduct participant observation because I was unable to enter the universities in which the student clubs held their meetings. In addition to this ‘compulsory’ exclusion, two different but connected student clubs in different universities declined to see me. I was told that this is a group decision they made and that I could observe them during their meeting and ask my questions to all of them at the same time. Unfortunately, that was impossible considering the fact that the headscarf ban was strictly applied in those universities. I insisted on finding out why I was rejected, they insisted on stating that it is a group decision which they can do nothing about. Although it is not said openly, I felt that I was not trusted since I was an ‘outsider’ who might have vicious aims. This decision did not upset me because I expected such reactions but it showed me the deep effects of the power operations regarding our everyday life in which we may even become unable to communicate because of them.

Besides this accustomed yet insipid incident, I was able to conduct in depth interviews with 13 university students who were members of the Atatürkist Thought Clubs in their universities. We usually met in the top floor of a breakfast house in Taksim which is regarded as the center of Istanbul’s cosmopolitanism, in a sense, ‘no man’s land’ for both of us. Once, I went to the building of the Youth Unity of Turkey (Türkiye Gençlik Birliği) which was also in Taksim. I conducted two of my

interviews there. During my visit, I was welcomed warmly for someone seemingly from a group of people they defined as ‘counter-revolutionist’ in their discourses. Throughout the interviews, what I wanted to hear was how my informants relate themselves to Atatürk in general and to tell me its story. I carried out my fieldwork in Istanbul between April and August in 2008. The problem of phrasing my questions was a hard one since Atatürkism is a highly charged issue within the contemporary context of Turkey, and especially, if the questions are being asked by someone who most probably does not define herself as Atatürkist. That is why I tried to ask as short questions as possible, using very few words. For instance, if I wanted to find out what they thought of Atatürk’s name being used to legitimize coups, I asked them to interpret the history of Turkey because I did not want to use the word “coup” since most Atatürkists regard some coups as a revolution such as the 1960 coup. In general, my interview design was shaped during the actual process of interviewing, in relation to my informants’ making sense of me and themselves.

For generations, traditional anthropologists pretended as if “the anthropologist” does not exist in the relationship between the self (anthropologist) and the other (informant or the field in general). This way, the anthropologist does not have to examine the basis of the questions asked, the kinds of data collected and finally the content of the theories employed to make sense of and then to present the data.⁴ This study is ‘by its nature’ an empirical study because the people I interviewed are very much factual. Yet, it is not an empiricist one because anthropological understanding is always bound to be partial and hermeneutic.

I do not position myself as an invisible omniscient third-person narrator. I could not have done so even if I wanted to since I ‘belong’ to a social category that is very

⁴ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.23.

much disagreeable and even unpleasant: “headscarved women”. That is why I introduced myself to my informants starting with my education to my personal life. Although I did not make any political claims or points during the interviews, I chose to tell them my story so that they would know I am a person not a representative of a fictional social category.

During the interviews, they sometimes attributed their assumptions to me while making a point. They mostly positioned themselves thinking that I disagreed but sometimes they also assumed that we were ‘on the same page’. At moments like these, I kept as silent as possible because what an informant chooses to omit saying is as important as the things she chooses to say. In addition, I was also re-shaped and re-defined as a researcher, as a naïve counter-revolutionist who needs to be enlightened, as a friend who wants to listen, as an ally who thinks pretty much the same, etc. In a few interviews, I was considered as representing one of those definitions but in most of them, I was transitively defined as one or the other during one interview. Of course, none of my informants openly declared that they considered me such and such but it was implied between the lines. For instance, sentences starting as “you know” convey a more friendly and close connection, while sentences starting with “you must have realised” imply a more patronizing and otherizing tone. In the end, this study is done by a researcher who is inevitably located as the researcher of a story of otherization/exclusion in which she is otherized/excluded. In this sense, my informants and I applied mutual strategies to make sense of each other and ourselves within the situation of interviewing and being interviewed. In the end, I tried to make our experience of the anthropological interview as dialogic as possible since an anthropological effort is not about finding

out distanced accounts of objective truths that regard the stable, unified object of analysis.⁵

The first chapter of this thesis will introduce the concept of “impossible mourning” as a sociological tool to argue the underlying reasons why Atatürk as a signifier, the product of a particular and historically specific imaginary about power, continues to sustain its hegemony by contextualizing it in Turkey’s painful history of democratization with regard to the state of exceptions by underlying the roles given to young people at different times. As one of the underlying reasons, it will also look at the practices of governmentality that are based on “familial citizenship” starting with Atatürk as the ancestor/father of Turks. It investigates Atatürk as a central category in the constitution of the political by operating as an empty signifier free from a stable content and then questions its claim to include all differences which leads to a totalitarian danger. Lastly, it argues how Atatürk is posed as the opportunity of reaching a perfect and harmonious society and therefore being situated as the *objet petit a* of the political in Turkey.

The second chapter focuses on the relationship between the Turkish youth and Atatürk from a historical perspective. Then, it gives the historical context in which the interviews were conducted by situating them within the atmosphere produced by the Republican rallies. It investigates the process of identification that is highly charged with emotions such as love, fear and mourning which operate as an individualizing form of power. It also analyzes the different ways my informants relate to Atatürk with regard to sublimation or rationalization of it in various ways in relation to “ideological disidentification”. In addition, I tried to show how the

⁵ Renata Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 39.

process of identification is connected to impossible mourning in the sense that my informants render themselves responsible for making present Atatürk's absence. Finally, third chapter deals with the construction of national memory which is a form of mythologization in which Atatürk's time is presented as a Golden Age while Atatürk is presented as the spiritual and progenitor father of Turks to whom not only the best and right qualities are attributed. It is argued that there is a structural nostalgia with regard to the mythologization of Atatürk in Turkey because by remembering his death and this loss, the hope (fantasy) of returning or at least reviving the perfection of those times is not only kept 'alive' but is also presented as the ultimate truth, since, this way, mourning after Atatürk and yearning for him becomes the only legitimate political discourse. Lastly, it discusses the ways through which mourning after Atatürk is realized such as the ritualized social practices which mobilize domains of material objects and visual images, especially his photographs with reference to "the portrait effect".

CHAPTER 2

IMPOSSIBLE MOURNING AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

“the history of melancholia includes all of us.”

Charles Bukowski

In his famous book, “On Democracy”, Claude Lefort states that the basic feature of the democratic order is that the place of Power is an empty place.⁶ Yet, in Turkey, a supposedly democratic country, the place of Power is occupied by ‘the name of the father’: Atatürk. In this sense, Turkey shares a common characteristic with totalitarian regimes in which the political⁷ is usually centered around the figure of a national father. The theme of national fatherhood exists in many nation-states. Yet, what I mean with national fatherhood is a leader figure to whom all the best and right qualities are attributed in the sense that all the meanings and characteristics of the nation and the state converge in his existence. So what I mean with national fatherhood is different than the way, for instance, Americans understand from George Washington. The theme of national fatherhood that I want to refer to, is similar to what Slavoj Žižek means when he states that in the post-revolutionary “totalitarian” order, the sublime political body re-emerged in the shape of Leader and/or Party.⁸ In this sense, what I mean with national fatherhood is parallel with the meanings attributed to Hitler as the *Führer* or Mussolini as the *Duce*. But surely, despite the similar qualities, Mustafa Kemal as *Atatürk* is the product of a particular

⁶ Claude Lefort, “The Image of The Body and Totalitarianism”, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. John B. Thompson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 293.

⁷ I use ‘the political’ not as an adjective because I consider it not as an attribute of something else that is dependent on other things to be defined but as a substantive that defines the process of socialization in a holistic manner in the sense that all social phenomena have political meaning.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Lenin’s Two Bodies”, *For They Know Not What They Do*, (London: Verso, 2002), p. 256.

and historically specific imaginary about power which changes in a dynamic manner along with time.

The most obvious distinguishing feature is that Atatürk continues to ‘live’ as a signifier while the others are remembered as a disgrace to humanity. Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, the authors of “Immortal Atatürk”, state that Atatürk is omnipresent:

His picture continues to be venerated alongside the national flag and is displayed beside it on days of national celebration and remembrance. He is omnipresent. He is on postage stamps and money, both bills and coin. Statues of Atatürk are everywhere, and his words are chiseled on the stone facades of buildings. His photograph is found in government offices and in the corner grocery store. His name has been bestowed on boulevards, parks, stadiums, concert halls, schools, bridges and forests. When the Turks seized the northern sector of Cyprus in 1974, busts of Atatürk were brought ashore with the troops and erected in every liberated Turkish village. Mental and physical representations of Atatürk have fused with and are symbolic of the Turkish spirit, and thus he has indeed become immortal... The title Ebedi Şef, “Eternal Leader”, was reserved for Atatürk, who, in that role, became a brooding presence watching over and guarding his nation.⁹

In addition to these, terms like “Atatürkist nationalism” or “Atatürk’s Principles and Revolutions” take place in the constitution. There is also an item concerning the crimes committed against Atatürk in the Turkish Criminal Law that stipulates to sentence from 1 to 3 years in prison those who insult the “spiritual memory” (*manevi hatırası*) or “spiritual personage” (*manevi şahsiyeti*) of Atatürk. It is also illegal not to have a picture of Atatürk present in a business place. Also, an official ceremony including the state high officials’ visit to Atatürk’s tomb is obligatory whenever a foreign leader/representative comes to Turkey and also when there is a national celebration day or on the national mourning day, November 10th. In the constitution, there are 15 references to Atatürk or “Atatürk’s Principles and Revolutions.” As it is clearly seen through the examples, the figure of the national father crystallized in the

⁹ Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, “Transformation into Immortal Atatürk”, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 345-6

signifier of Atatürk presents a site around which the political is oriented in Turkey.¹⁰

So, inevitably this is an attempt to study and examine the production and re-generation of the political in Turkey.

Atatürkist Youth Resurrecting Atatürk's Soul: "We're on Your Path"

As a young researcher who is a member of the 'apolitical'¹¹ generation of 1980's, I decided to start my investigation by learning more about the historical discourses that were centered around Atatürk as a signifier. I specifically searched for the 'use' of Atatürk, roughly speaking, 'what Atatürk does' with regard to the discursive practices in the times of 'exceptional states'. With this in mind, I researched several newspapers and magazines such as *Hürriyet*, *Tan*, *Milliyet*, etc. that appeared one month before and one month after the related coup. In addition, I investigated several articles and texts of speeches regarding the historical context of the coup. The common point in these different historical contexts was the legitimization of coups by referring to Atatürk's name both calling the army to intervene before the coup and also justifying the deeds of the military after the coup. The press usually urged the army, as the representative of this name, to take action in the name of the Turkish people. This obviously contradictory demand basically implies that 'the people' want what Atatürk would have wanted and that the army as the ultimate position of authority to have access to the wishes of the people, is obliged to do what is needed. This perspective derives from a discursive strategy that attempts to conceal the 'true nature' of sovereignty which certainly does not belong to the people but to those who

¹⁰ Nazlı Ökten, "Ölümsüz Bir Ölüm, Sonsuz Bir Yas: Türkiye'de 10 Kasım", in *Hatırladıklarıyla ve Unuttuklarıyla Türkiye'nin Toplumsal Hafızası*, (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2001), p. 326.

¹¹ The generation of young people who were born after 1980 is considered to be apolitical with regard to highly politicized youth movements before the coup.

have the power “to decide on the exception” as the ultimate representatives of Atatürk as a signifier.

The first coup in Turkey was staged on May 27, 1960. The discursive practices particular to this coup are quite different from the others and, are especially significant for this study on Atatürkist youth considering the huge role played led by young people marching in the streets of big cities calling for the army to intervene in the political sphere. These political riots by young people who call the army to intervene were mostly praised in the media which refer to them as “The Youth of Atatürk”. This categorization is appropriate considering the fact that the most commonly used slogan according to the archive shots was “My Father, We are on Your Path”.¹² In the protests, huge posters of Atatürk were carried by young people who were usually university students. Atatürk, mostly dressed in military uniform, seems thoughtful (the famous shot in Kocatepe) or discontented in these posters. Interestingly, posters which depict Atatürk in civil clothing took the place of “Atatürk, the soldier” after the coup. Especially the rally of young people from Istanbul University on April 28 and the rally “555 K” which means that it took place in Kızılay (Ankara) on May 5, 1960 can be seen as the cornerstones of the Turkish history of coups. In line with the official discourse, the young people were defined as “the guardians of the regime” and that they claimed Atatürk’s legacy by protecting it from the wrong deeds of the government which had drifted from Atatürk’s path. “Atatürk’s address to Turkish Youth” was one of the most referred texts which was said to be read by male students in several universities every day.¹³ This is the main text that constitutes the bond between Atatürk and the Turkish youth. The other important text was “The Bursa Speech of Atatürk” in which Atatürk called the

¹² “Atam, İzindeyiz”.

¹³ Hürriyet, June 9, 1960.

Turkish Youth to take action and even apply to violent methods whenever they sensed a threat to the regime. It was claimed that Atatürk, when informed about a counter-reformist act in Bursa, immediately went there by train to oversee the response of the authorities there. The sources say that the speech was delivered during dinner that day in Bursa on February 5, 1933. However, it is interesting that this speech which calls young people to declare ‘their own state of exception’, to break the law and even kill people in case of a threat to the regime was not known until a few years before the coup of 1960. In this sense, the authenticity of this speech is disputed by some sources which state that the Republican People’s Party (CHP) came up with this text in order to mobilise the youth more fiercely.¹⁴ Both of these texts along with the official discourse’s definition of, the Turkish youth, seemed to have made the protests of young people who called the army to intervene not only legitimate but also admirable.

What is more, the fantasy the resurrection of Atatürk as the savior of the country has been extensively used in political discourse. In a public speech that referred to the coup, it was stated that “Atatürk’s soul has roared again within the borders of the nation”¹⁵ by referring to the coup. In the newspapers, Atatürk was often stated as the “the leader at front”.¹⁶ The reason for this fantasy of resurrection of Atatürk to be used so widely points to the idea that any decision attributed to Atatürk is always right and best. This idea is the basic proof of the existence of a field of sovereignty¹⁷ emerging from this name which became the ultimate justification of every coup

¹⁴ Mahmut Goloğlu, “Bursa Nutku”, *Atatürk İlkeleri ve Bursa Nutku*, (Ankara: Goloğlu Press, 1972), p. 42.

¹⁵ “Atatürk’ün ruhu Misak-ı Milli sınırlarında yeniden kükremiştir”. Nusret Kurozman, *Çeşitli Veçheleriyle Atatürk*, (İstanbul: Robert Kolej Yayınları, 1964), p. 184.

¹⁶ İlhan Engin: “Yes, my dear Atatürk... It was as if the ground cracked open and you joined us. It was you leading your people in their march... You were leading your army on the day of March 27.” In *Hürriyet*, June 9, 1960.

¹⁷ By ‘field of sovereignty’, I refer not only to the ‘big’ political decisions made, especially the decision on exceptions such as the coups but also to Atatürkists’ variable choice of discursive practices in order to become “the real Atatürkist”.

staged by the army which is considered to claim the people's right to protect Atatürk's legacy.

Moreover, the fantasy of resurrection of Atatürk creates the illusion of 'a perfect/complete society' as if there is a possibility of reconciliation between some mythical origin and a future utopian ideal. This certainly has to do with the issue of mourning after Atatürk and I intend to discuss this process further later because I think that it involves important highlights in order to understand the modality of power specific to Turkey which has a peculiar state-revering culture. To understand the consequences of this fantasy better, the conditions that made occupation of the center of the political by Atatürk possible, should be investigated.

On May 19, 1960, just a week before the coup, an event that led to a series of other events ending with a coup took place in Anıtkabir. According to the newspaper¹⁸, a young woman, Remziye Baturbaygil, screamed out loud when she was in front of Atatürk's mausoleum: "My Father... My Father! Were we to come in front of you like this? We are so ashamed of ourselves"¹⁹ and then fainted. This scene filled with emotions was pointed out as the cause of huge events that took place in Ankara that day. May 19, 1960 became the day when youth riots escalated. This historical incident joined the two strands of Atatürkism, 'mourning after Atatürk' and 'the youth of Atatürk' in his burial place on the day of his officially declared birthday which is celebrated as a national festival called "The Youth and Sports Festival". This event is significant in the sense that it shows the highly emotional character of bonding with Atatürk to whom one is mournfully committed. As I will explain in the second chapter, love and mourning are the two basic emotions in this relationship which mutually sustain each other: The more you love, the more you mourn. In

¹⁸ Hürriyet, May 20, 1960.

¹⁹ "Atam... Atam! Senin karşına böyle mi gelecektik? Senden utanıyoruz".

addition, it points to the role of young people in ‘reviving Atatürk’s soul’ as the social group called to identify themselves with Atatürk:

Atatürk entrusted the safety of Turkey’s future to her youth, but in effect it has been the military, linking themselves directly with Atatürk and his tradition, who have taken control of the state affairs whenever it appeared that the revolution he wrought was in danger, for example, in 1960, 1971, and most recently in 1980, with the expressed intention of setting the nation back on the road indicated for it by Atatürk. Just what the road is requires some examination.²⁰

Resurrection of ‘Atatürk as Fantasy of State’ through Coups: Youth Gone Astray

The young people who were encouraged to participate in politics until the coup of 1960 were forcefully discouraged by the coup of 1971 for having gone ‘off the road’. With the influence of the 1968 movement, young people who had the opportunity to engage in politics both financially and mentally were attracted by socialism. They not only organized rallies but even kidnapped and killed in some extreme situations. Deniz Gezmiş, one of the most beloved icons of nowadays, was hanged along with two of his revolutionist friends after the army made another coup in 1971. The theme of the army’s taking power in the place of Atatürk was current again. The text of the memorandum by the army was like this:

Parliament and government have led the society to anarchy, brother-fight, social and economical discomfort with their consistent attitudes, views and activities, have lost the hope of the common sense to reach the civilisation level that Atatürk has showed us as an aim, and the future of the Turkish State has been put in a great danger.²¹

This theme was not only shared by the army officials but also by mass media. For instance, a caricature published in one of the mainstream newspapers of 1970s

²⁰ Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, “Transformation into Immortal Atatürk”, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 351-2.

²¹ Parlamento ve hükümet, süregelen tutum, görüş ve icraatıyla yurdumuzu anarşi, kardeş kavgası, sosyal ve ekonomik huzursuzluklar içine sokmuş, Atatürk'ün bize hedef verdiği çağdaş uygarlık seviyesine ulaşmak ümidini kamuoyunda yitirmiş ve anayasasının öngördüğü reformları tahakkuk ettirememiş olup, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin geleceği ağır bir tehlike içine düşürülmüştür.

illustrated Atatürk coming out of his picture on the wall and kicking Demirel –the prime minister of the time- away from his desk.

The memorandum of March 12, 1971 was only the harbinger of a coup that would have even worse consequences. Until the 1980 coup, there were quite fierce antagonisms resulting in armed conflicts between young people from right-wing and left-wing political groups. It later became apparent that the ‘deep state’ contributed to the escalation of such events. In addition, counter-insurgency²² intervened directly by oppressing unarmed young people who protest or march in line with their opinions. The protests on May 1, 1977 which led to the murder of 36 people, the massacres of Maraş and Çorum were examples of the most memorably horrible events of those days. Naming these events as maternal quarrels or “anarchy”, the army took over the rule of the country again. Yet, it is known that terms like anarchy or chaos are mostly used in order to legitimize the declaration of the state of exception:

The state of exception is not decided by a situation of conflict or chaos, although this is often its discourse of legitimation; rather it is decided to affirm a juridical order in which lawfulness, right, is suspended in the name of law.²³

Anarchy was considered to be a result of the shraying of young people from the path of Atatürk. That is why the coup of 1980 strongly emphasized the role of Atatürk in educating the young people who may go ‘off the road’ if not directed into Atatürkist path. For instance, General Kenan Evren stated in the declaration speech of the coup:

The precautions that will prevail the Atatürk Nationality to the even to remotest places of the nation in educational system. The precautions that will prevent our children to grow up with the foreigner ideologies instead of the rules of Atatürk and avoid them to be anarchists consequently. Therefore, our teachers whom we mention with respect each of them, will not be allowed to be members of the associations with “Der” and “Bir” and get seperated. The aim of students from every level to be consolidated with the rules and nationality of Atatürk and gain the knowledge and talent devoted to production.²⁴

²² It is the name of the illegal armed forces which are organized against the leftist organizations in NATO countries.

²³ Begoña Aretxaga, “Maddening States,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2003): p. 405.

Atatürk as a state fantasy was widely used in legitimizing the 1980 coup. For instance, the first thing that the generals did after they declared the state of exception was to visit the tomb of Atatürk, Anıtkabir and pay their respect:

After observing a reverential moment of silence, General Evren wrote in a special visitors' book what was, in effect, a letter to Atatürk, as though he were still alive. It began, "Greta Leader Atatürk," and explained that the Turkish army, as guardians of his ideals, had had to halt those who were pushing Turkey toward "darkness and helplessness." The letter ended, "We remember you once again with gratitude and a sense of obligation, and bow before you in respect." The highest authority in the nation acknowledged that Atatürk still lived. Such is, in truth, the legacy of immortality.²⁵

After the military officials allowed 'free' elections to take place, Turgut Özal came to power in 1983. With him, Turkey entered a new area which was later called as Özalizm, an equivalent of Thatcherism in Turkey. Turgut Özal came to power by appealing both the secular bourgeoisie and the religious Muslim business people who constitute the newly emerging upper middle class. He embraced secularism and Muslim values together. He set Turkey's road to liberal and capitalist politics by applying privatization policies, practicing free market rules and encouraging free entrepreneurship. With this trend, multinational companies and foreign goods surrounded the country massively. Various brands from every sort of product which were almost impossible to find before Özalizm became easily available. Turkey's economy rapidly grew which created a process that was later named as "the boom time". This swift change in economic relations brought about its own culture industry which escalated especially with the privatization of televisions in the 1990s.

However, the 1980s and 1990s were also the years in which there was a changing

²⁴ Eğitim ve öğretimde Atatürk Milliyetçiliğini yeniden yurdun en ücra köşelerine kadar yaygınlaştıracak tedbirler en kısa zamanda alınacaktır. Yarının teminatı olan evlatlarımızın Atatürk ilkeleri yerine yabancı ideolojilerle yetişerek sonunda birer anarşist olmasını önleyecek tedbirler alınacaktır. Bu maksatla hepimizin tek tek saygıyla andığımız öğretmenlerimizin Der'li, Bir'li derneklere üye olarak bölünmelerine müsaade edilmeyecektir. Her düzeyde öğrencinin amacı Atatürk ilkeleri ve milliyetçiliği ile pekişmiş ve üretime yönelik bilgi ve becerisini kazanmak olacaktır.

²⁵ Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, "Transformation into Immortal Atatürk", *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 354.

discourse or technique of state power with an ‘autonomous’ rise of ‘civil society’. Extensive effort was spent on the part of the bureaucracy to mobilize self-generating or spontaneous groups and organizations within society in order to reproduce and enhance state power. This is a historically specific and contingent synthesis of Foucault’s repressive and productive hypothesis, developed within the Turkish context.²⁶

Familial Citizenship and Atatürk as the Father/Ancessor of Turks

Everyday life is the terrain where the social and the political are not articulated or sutured to each other but make each other extant in a synchronic fashion. They mutually constitute each other through a never-ending process of change within discourse which means that it is produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices. That is also to say that it emerges within the play of specific modalities of power that bring about a discursive practice that has encompassing effects on every-day life. In the case of “Atatürk”, we are dealing with a theme of national fatherhood that surrounds every realm of life from ‘high politics’ to the minutiae of the quotidian. That is why it is crucial to examine the power operations and sovereignty processes by which leaders and their associated state bureaucracies use rhetorics of fatherhood and family to implement their rule. The process of nation-state building requires constituting the identity of the nation through discourses that are in line with the desired kind of polity of the state.²⁷ The description of the proper citizen’s identity is a significant part of these discourses. In

²⁶ Yael Navaro-Yashin, “Does Civil Society Exist?”, *Faces of The State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 132.

²⁷ I think that the concept of the state as a political entity should not be dismissed on the grounds that it is a fantasy or fetish that we revive by charging it with meaning or value because whether it is a fantasy or fetish, it does “exist” as a non-discursive formation.

this sense, the form of subjectivity of the proper citizen, as the subject of certain power operations and sovereignty processes, is constituted through these discourses. A consensus on how to define the proper citizen and his/her relation to the state and nation was absent during the establishment of the republic but in the following years a new and single form of definition that binds the citizen to the state through the nation is settled. A perfect example of this can be found in Orhan Arsal's "Definition of the State" which is part of a conference book published by the Republican People's Party Publications in 1938:

A Turkish child who is tutored by Turkish genuine, and materialize the Turkish genuine is the leader of the nation now. We have not got parties, party means fraction. Obtaining the totality of the authorization called state, or exploiting the authority of state against the other parties will not be our action. This institution called "Republican's People Party" can be also called as "Republican People's Embodiment", is just a sum of the citizens who are elected as guides by the people to design their own future themselves. Certainly, guides also have a guide, he is Atatürk, and that is composed of the actualisation of the thesis of state, that is made by people and directed to the leader of the state, from below to up, and nation anti-thesis to accrue as the Turkish synthesis. Thus, according to ideology of Turkish reform, it is possible to define state as below: "State is the nation that has gathered around its ancestor".²⁸

This paragraph contains a small summary of all the terms around which the political is defined in the early republic.²⁹ First of all, Turkishness is presented as the convergence point of the nation and the state. The Nation and the state are unified in this synthesis which is called "Turk". Atatürk, as "the greatest of Turks", is the ultimate embodiment of this perfect synthesis, in a sense, he is the peak of

²⁸ Türk dehasının içinden yetiştirdiği, Türk dehasını cisimleştiren bir Türk çocuğu bugün milletin başındadır. Bizde fırka yoktur, fırka ayrılık, parti parça ifade eder. Devlet denen salâhiyetler (yetkiler) bütününe veya bu vasıta ile ele geçirmek ve devlet iktidarını diğer gruplar aleyhinde istismar etmek bahis mevzuu değildir. Bugün kendisine "Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi" yerine pek güzel "Cumhuriyet Halk Taazzuvu" denebilecek olan teşekkül, milletin kendi mukadderatını bizzat idare edebilmek için kendine rehber seçtiği yurtaşlarının toplantısından ibarettir, ve elbette ki rehberlerin de bir rehberi vardır ve o da en büyük Türk, Atatürk'tür, ve bu aşağıdan yukarıya doğru, milletten devlete reisine müteveccih taazzuv teselsülü devlet teziyle millet antitezinin Türklük sentezi halinde tahakkukundan ibarettir. O halde Türk inkılabı ideolojisine göre devleti şu kısa cümle ile tarif mümkündür: "Devlet, Atası etrafında toplanan millettir".

²⁹ I agree with Şerif Mardin that there is not one Kemalism but generations of Kemalism which differs from each other. In this chapter, I will only deal with the first generation's understanding of Kemalism between 1930-1938. For an elaborative analysis see Şerif Mardin, "Genel Hatlarıyla Modernleşme", Modernleşme, İslam Dünyası ve Türkiye, (İstanbul: İSAV Press, 2000), pp. 21-31.

Turkishness. There is no place for disputes or disagreements since there is a supposed relationship of correspondence between the nation and the state. The only party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), is the embodiment (*taazzuv*) of the people. Therefore, there is no need for a multi-party system since CHP 'is' the people. The basic underlying assumption regarding the state's relation with the nation is summed in the last sentence. The people that compose the "nation" are presented in the metaphor as a flock that gathers around their shepherd "Atatürk". This metaphor discloses the social imaginary of THE Republican elites that consider the people no more different or able than a flock of sheep and Atatürk as the ultimate guide who leads, shapes, rules them. So, according to the republican ideology, it can be said that a monolithic form of citizenship which is based on being Turk who obeys without objection is desired. İlkey Sunar summarizes the assumptions of the Republican elites:

There could no longer be any contradiction between society and political authority because the nation was a self-governing body. The Party was no more than a representative institution expressive of the solidary "national will". There were no conflicting interests in society because the Turkish people were an integrated whole.³⁰

At this point, it is important to consider the historical context from which this social imaginary emerged. After the devastating effects of World War I, the defeated states which developed into totalitarian nation-states combined with a racist outlook were ruling in Europe with their harsh criticism against liberalism. There were several common points among these states such as a centrally-directed economy, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly and most importantly an official ideology which was represented by a single mass-party typically led by one man.³¹

³⁰ İlkey Sunar, *State and Society in The Politics of Turkey's Development*, 1974, p. 64.

³¹ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, "The General Characteristics of Totalitarian Dictatorship", *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 9.

All these characteristics were present in Turkey with some particular differences in the discourses that were employed. However, the formative process of Turkish fascism is subtly but essentially different from Italian Fascism and German Nazism, which had mass parties and are generally called "fascism from below". Turkish fascism is instead typified as "fascism from above". The single party regime centered around Atatürk and its power group constituted rigid power structures and the charismatic governing apparatus based on Atatürk's image.

Every order of explicit social normativity has to rely on a complex network of informal rules which tell us how to relate to the explicit rules.³² In parallel with this, the bonding between the state and its citizens in Turkey also requires a social normativity that operates on both an implicit and an explicit level. The imagined relationship between the citizen and the state comprises of a discursive practice that deals with the construction of this relationship not only on paper but also in everyday life. In this way, the subjects of the nation understand and accept the discrepancy in the the official constitution of political power and how it is exercised due to the functioning of sovereignty process and power operations in an implicit fashion which creates the inconsistencies that are legitimized at this implicit level. In this context, the form of the polity to which the Turkish citizen was expected to belong has to be questioned. When we look at the process of constituting new subjects as a necessity of nation-state building process during the transition from Ottoman Empire, we see that the paradigm of sovereignty particular to the Turkish nation-state building process did not change much.

With the establishment of the Turkish Republic which denotes a transition from monarchy, the need to create a different form of belonging to the sovereign emerged

³² Slavoj Žižek, "Ideological Fantasy", *Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 32.

since there was no Sultan. Actually, in the last decades, the Ottoman Empire started to take the form of a guardian state.³³ But, with the Republic, a new form of belonging³⁴ which relied heavily on the selective re-interpretation of traditional cultural codes was put into use. As Yael Navaro-Yashin stated “with the foundation of an independent republic to replace Ottoman sovereignty, there was an effort to define what was culturally native to the new polity, “Turkey”³⁵

In “Cultural Intimacy”, Michael Herzfeld states that local familism stands in the way of the modernist-evolutionist project of fixing the final authority at the level of the state.³⁶ In this sense, “state-familism” emerged from the need to legitimize the extension of power relations which diffuse and govern every aspect of life by translating traditional family codes into modern nation state apparatus. In this sense, it can be said that a very likely method of state familism, to support the peculiar connection between the people and the state, was adopted in the process of Turkish modernization. The name of Atatürk as a signifier stands at the center of this state familism as “the name of the father” to whom all members of the family/nation should be responsible and obedient. In this context, the relation of the national subject with the Turkish nation-state was formed in a familial way. In other words, the bond between citizens and between the state and citizens is a bond of family rather than a bond of citizenship. The nation-state has been imagined as a family in tandem with the imagination of the Turkish society consisting of nuclear families. In order to see the codes of this social imaginary, let’s look at how Ali Fuat Başgil, a

³³ Şerif Mardin, “Bürokratin Batılılaşması Olarak Modernleşme”, *Yeni Osmanlı Düşüncesinin Doğuşu*, (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 1996), p. 47.

³⁴ By “form of belonging”, I mean any particular social code that sustains a sense of attachment rather than a rupture.

³⁵ Yael Navaro-Yashin, “Does Civil Society Exist?”, *Faces of The State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 11.

³⁶ Michael Herzfeld, “New Reflections on the Geopolitics of Cultural Intimacy”, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 62.

front theorician of republican ideology, describes the relations between the state and its citizens:

We consider state as a non personal and objective order and institution of the society of people, statism as social and economical politics dedicated to develop and improve this order and institution eternally. We take the state to the political and social order staff of the nation family. When the state becomes the composer and protector of the nation family's order and institution, not a contradiction but a mutual and reciprocal relationship and solidarity of duty and activity prevails. Therefore, there will be no necessity for the individual to see a shelter in against this order and institution of the nation family that is called state. On the contrary, the individual finds peace and prosperity inside this order and institution. Thus, as we can see, nation is nothing but a beautiful and eternal family... Publician state, is the state warding his nation as a good and honorable father.³⁷

According to this obviously totalitarian view, the state spontaneously emerges from the nation, but at the same time, the state is also the founder and the protector of the nation. This is basically a discursive attempt to conceal the power relations between the state and the nation as if the state does not have a total control over the individuals of the nation. It is a perfect example of Mussolini's famous saying with regard to the state: "Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state".³⁸

The pair of nation-and-state is supposed to converge on the same process of mutual identification that makes each other extant in a holistic form. The state identifies with the nation so that the nation identifies with the state.³⁹ Defining the state and the

³⁷ Biz Devleti millet cemiyetinin, millet ailesinin gayri şahsi ve objektif bir nizamı ve teşkilatı alıyor; ve devletçiliği de bu nizam ve teşkilatı namütenahi terakki ve inkişaf ettirmeye matuf sosyal ve ekonomik bir siyaset telakki ediyoruz. Biz devleti millet ailesinin siyasi ve sosyal nizamı kadrosuna alıyoruz. Devlet millet ailesinin nizam ve teşkilatının kurucusu ve koruyucusu olunca, Devlet müsavi (eşit, denk) millet şeklini alınca, ferd ile millet, ferd ile Devlet arasında tezat değil, hayat ve refah için müşterek ve müteakabil bir vazile ve faaliyet münasebeti ve tesanüdü hüküm sürer. Millet ailesinin Devlet dediğimiz bu nizam ve teşkilatı karşısında artık ferd için sığınacak bir kale aramaya hacet kalmaz. Bilakis ferd huzurunu, refah hatta saadetini bu nizam ve teşkilat içinde bulur. Filhakika, dikkat edersek, millet güzel ve ebedi aileden başka bir şey değildir... Halkçı devlet, halk üzerinde iyi ve namuslu bir aile babası vesayeti icra eden devlettir. (Ali Fuat Başgil, "Klasik ferdi hak ve hürriyetler nazariyesi ve muasır devletçilik sistemi", His speech in *Ankara Halkevi*, 1937),

³⁸ The Doctrine of Fascism.

<http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>

³⁹ There is a very well-known phrase that corresponds to this identification process: "the indivisible unity of the state with the nation" (*devletin milletiyle bölünmez bütünlüğü*)

nation in such an intertwined fashion, which is peculiar to totalitarianism, is justified through the metaphor of the family. In the second quote, the sovereignty of state power is defined as “a good and honourable father of the family” which is a manifestation of the effort to explain the ‘modern’ state that deviates from the ‘traditional’ rule with social codes that are traditional.⁴⁰

Moreover, the subjectivity of the ideal Turkish citizen, as any subjectivity, necessitates a form of morality that determines how to think and act. The forms of intimacy peculiar to the nuclear family are employed in order to construct the morality of the proper national subjects while binding them to the state and the nation. In this way, the idea of being a part of the nation, knowing one’s place in this familial hierarchy and the relation between the nation and the state are inscribed in the national subject that is the proper Turkish citizen. As Nükhet Sirman stated: “the most important personal virtue in this system is for someone to know their place, to be able to accurately gauge who to respect and be subordinate to and who to dominate”.⁴¹

So, what we call as familial citizenship provides a discursive formation that calls the citizens to belong and obey in the sense that the family as a metaphor serves as the means to naturalize, legitimize and internalize the power relations between the state and the citizen not only at the level of the polity but also at the level of subjectivity constitutive of the national subject’s identity. Nükhet Sirman rightly notes that nationalism becomes more than a political ideology, but a discursive practice that constitutes institutions, subjectivity and every-day life.⁴² In this sense, the Turkish

⁴⁰ I used quotation marks while using the classic dichotomy of ‘modern vs traditional’ because I do not use these terms as objectively defined criteria. I agree with Sirman in considering them as “basic ingredients of the social imaginary in Turkey”.

⁴¹ Nükhet Sirman, “The making of familial citizenship”, in *Citizenship in A Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences*, eds. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 155.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 154.

nation has been imagined as a nuclear family through which the ideal citizen was trying to be formalized, disciplined and produced. Familial identities are used to make sense of public identities. As Sirman stated, the law that regulates conduct between persons in the public sphere is the morality of kinship.⁴³ Research has also shown that even relations between strangers are experienced through converting them into fictive kinship by using kinship terms (Duben 1982; Erder 1999) For instance, in Turkey, it is not strange to address a woman on the street as “aunt” or a man as “uncle. In this sense, kinship provides the point on which society and polity converge which makes the domination of state even more powerful since it has introduced every-day conduct into politics by combining them in a familial fashion. In short, familial citizenship provided the means to establish the sovereignty of not only the republican elites but also the proper citizens inhabiting this form of belonging that sustains their place in this field of sovereignty through the symbolic power that emanates from this particular construction of citizenship. This way, the only form of legitimate cultural citizenship is determined according to the place one acquires in this big happy family metaphor that is the Turkish Nation. The desired collective subjectivity of the state discourse is maintained through infantilizing the citizens and sets an asymmetrical relationship not only between the state and citizens but also among citizens themselves from the very beginning in accordance with their place in this big family. The national identity of the ideal Turkish citizens necessitates certain forms of subjectivities which are constituted through discursive practices concerning both the ideological state apparatus and everyday life. This new understanding of citizenship brought along a certain hierarchic structure among individuals which are concealed or naturalized by making use of official and

⁴³ Ibid, p. 160.

traditional discourses. As in most national discourses, the family is used in a metaphoric way to implement and consolidate the polity.⁴⁴

The most objectionable outcome of familial citizenship as a discursive practice is that it rendered one form of subjectivity hegemonic over other possible ones in order to consolidate the sovereignty of one subjectivity by excluding other possible ones in an invisible fashion. Because familial citizenship equalized citizenship with abstract notions that connote a steady obedience to norms of the state, many of the rights associated with citizenship cannot be enjoyed by the majority of the population which is a discrepancy that is easily justified and ignored because of the aforementioned discursive practices that provide one part of the population with a field of sovereignty over other citizens who do not fit in the desired citizen profile. Since the code of morality still depends on people to know their place in society, the citizens that do not fit are considered as people who should be taught about their place.⁴⁵ In this sense, it was not a coincidence that the first headscarved parliament member was thrown out by prime minister's words: "Somebody, tell this woman her place".

Hegemony and Atatürkist Strategy: Towards a Radical Totalitarian Danger

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe discusses that with the decline of positivism, society came to be realized in a de-centered fashion that acknowledges the contingent and multi-faceted character of the social rather than a monolithic fashion that imagines the social as a consistent unity.⁴⁶ They argued that

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Telling someone to know their place (Haddini bildirmek)

⁴⁶ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Preface to the Second Edition", *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, (London: Verso Press, 2001), p. 14.

society is the place of various antagonisms instead of a spotless harmony. Their claim was that it was no longer possible to problematize society as a ‘complete’ entity which is crystallized in the motto “society does not exist”.

Slavoj Žižek claims that the political is primarily about securing a lived sense of unity or community between subjects.⁴⁷ That is why power is claimed by promising to complete what is lacking in society, although it is an impossibility since society is ‘incomplete’.⁴⁸ Following this line of thought, it can be said that the engagement between the social and the political stems from an aporia in which the conditions of possibility of the political is also its conditions of impossibility.

Although it is impossible to conceptualize society as an essentialist/adequate “totality”, society is imagined as a unified entity by an underlying logic that is able to include ‘all’ differences. In this sense, it becomes the central category in the constitution of the political, that is Atatürkism.

The impossibility of fixing the unity of a social formation in any conceptually graspable object leads to the centrality of ‘naming’ in constituting that unity, while the need for a social cement to assemble the heterogeneous elements once their logic of articulation no longer gives this affect its centrality in social explanation. Freud had already clearly understood it: the social bond is a libidinal one.⁴⁹

In this quotation, Laclau describes the essentially significant character of populism as a “political operation par excellence” which brings together different ideological positions or political demands, and stresses their equivalence. As mentioned above, “naming” is the precondition of such a political operation. There is an authoritarian side intrinsic to “naming” since it attributes a certain meaning to a ‘thing’. In this sense, it is closely linked to power relations which are eloquently explored especially in the linguistic literature dedicated to the concept of performativity.

⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 75.

⁴⁸ The pretence of the common identity of state and society is prevalent in totalitarian ideologies.

⁴⁹ Ernesto Laclau, “Preface”, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso Press, 2007), p. 10.

The heterogeneous demands that constitute any given populist movement are unified and stabilized by the emergence of an "empty signifier," 'a name' that loses its own specificity as it stands in for other specific demands to which it is seen as equivalent. Following this line of thought, Atatürkism presents a similar logic of equivalence and antagonism according to which a part (Atatürk) comes to stand in for the whole ("the people", Turkey). It operates as an attempt to reduce all differences to a partiality within the imagined communitarian whole. In this context, Atatürk/ism is usually defined as 'the cement' that brings together the Turkish nation; an understanding that is crystallized in the slogan: "Let's unite under Atatürk". Moreover, in parallel with populist leaders, Atatürk is also considered as the symbol of state sovereignty. That is why his image is very much associated with the Turkish flag.

However, different than populist movements, it cannot be claimed that the occupation of the center of the political by the name 'Atatürk' is based on consent. There are several laws binding every citizen to be in line with what is called "the Atatürkist system of thought" and/or penalizes any open criticism to "Atatürk's spiritual personage" which is very much open to the prosecutor's interpretations.⁵⁰ Also, there is a system of heavy indoctrination that occurs in institutions ranging from education to the mass media. So, it can be said that the basis of any populist identity which is voluntary support/consent is missing when it comes to Atatürkism since there are strict discursive and non-discursive strategies that render acting otherwise illegitimate and even illegal. As Laclau has also stated in "Populist Reason", Atatürkism "was a radical, ruptural discourse but it was never populist".⁵¹ It

⁵⁰ Recently, an incident, that reveals the fear constituted around the symbol of Atatürk in an ironic, yet perfect way, took place. A cow named Gülsüm, pushed the monument of Atatürk in a schoolyard from its plinth during her search for green grass. The bust, which was made of plaster, broke. The authorities immediately launched an investigation and questioned people, while the panicked owner sold the animal well under price to another farmer in a neighbouring village. The bust has since been replaced by a metal one, news reports said.

⁵¹ Ernesto Laclau, "Preface", *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso Press, 2007), p. 276.

was an authoritative attempt to create a homogeneous society which is unified around the omnipresent and omnipotent national father (Delaney, 1995) and is also rid of ethnic and religious differences along with class conflicts crystallized in the well-known motto that describes the ideal nation: “a classless, non-privileged, merged mass”.⁵²

‘Atatürk’ as The Sovereign Exception

Since it is not a populist movement, how did Atatürkism sustain its long hegemony over the political in Turkey? In order to grasp the discursive hegemony of Atatürk on the political, I think it is essential to investigate the meaning of the state of exception and its relation with the law. In common language, the state of exception refers to the exceptional events or conditions that fall outside the scope of the law.⁵³ This statement defines the state of exception as if it is an objective, necessary condition that requires the enactment of emergency powers justified in the name of an emergency. But, it is a common view upon which Schmitt, Benjamin and Agamben agreed that the state of exception is a general condition of state theory and practice.⁵⁴ The state of exception, because the conditions which brings about the exception cannot be defined in law conclusively, leaves the question regarding the subject of sovereignty open. There is nothing objective about deciding on the state of exception. The decision is made by the sovereign power(s) arbitrarily. That is why Schmitt’s definition “the sovereign is the one who decides on the exception” is generally accepted. The decision on the state of exception is literally “a decision”

⁵² “Sınıfsız, imtiyazsız, kaynaşmış bir kitle”.

⁵³ http://www.sauer-thompson.com/archives/philosophy/2006/05/state_of_except.html

⁵⁴ I guess this is why Benjamin has offered to be in search of a real state of exception to improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.

because it is not an ordinary situation immanent to law, it cannot be bound by a legal norm, and, precisely because of this, independent from any norm, the sovereign owns the right to decide on the exception. The sovereign is inside the law by establishing it, and, outside the law, by suspending it.

One of the main claims of this study is that ‘Atatürk’ is the name of the sovereign exception in Turkey because it is located in a zone of indistinction where the inside and outside of the law are dispersed into each other in order to animate the “juridically empty” space of the state of exception, insofar as it makes the constitution of the normal sphere possible.⁵⁵ ‘Atatürk’ opens up a juridically empty field of sovereignty because *it* is considered as the singular in which all the right and best qualities are preserved and therefore which occupies the place of Power. Yet, there are many forms of Atatürkism which show that Atatürk does not refer to a singularity since it is unrepresentable as such. Because of this unrepresentable character, every coup d’etat legitimized itself by ‘Atatürk’ which took on several meanings that differ and defer what is considered to be its ultimate meaning. The army officials defended themselves as being mere mediators of Atatürk’s spirit. ‘Atatürk’ was used in a highly leftist discourse in the 1960 coup whereas it represented a much more right-wing representation in 1971 memorandum and a much more nationalist meaning in the 1980 coup.

In this sense, Atatürkism can be called a process of sovereignty which situates ‘Atatürk’ in a zone of indistinction where it is impossible to situate *it* in a certain position. This ambiguity is precisely what bestows it the undecidable position of the sovereign exception because the more undecidable it is, the greater the illusion that it can ‘include’ all differences. As Lacan stated: “every real signifier is, as such, a

⁵⁵ Carl Schmitt, “Democracy and Parliamentarism”, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago: Chicago University Pres, 2005), p. 23.

signifier that signifies nothing. The more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is.⁵⁶

In this sense, the sovereign exception is the figure in which singularity is represented as such, which is to say, insofar as it is unrepresentable.⁵⁷ However, the claim that ‘Atatürk’ is the name of the sovereign exception does not mean that a dead person still continues to effect the realm of politics, but, rather what is inscribed in ‘Atatürk’ enables to construct a field of sovereignty according to which the political decision is made. After all, the sovereign decision does not have to express the will of a hierarchially superior subject to all others, but rather, it represents the inscription within the body of the nomos of the exteriority that animates it and gives it meaning.⁵⁸

In *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben states that a satisfactory explanation has not yet been found for the peculiar semantic evolution that led the term *iustitium* –the technical designation for the state of exception- to acquire the meaning of public mourning for the death of the sovereign.⁵⁹ In his search for the appropriate explanation of this transformation, Agamben points to the fact that the funeral of the sovereign is dramatized as a state of exception where all civil affairs stopped and normal political life suspended, the proclamation of the *iustitium* tended to transform the death of a man into a national catastrophe, a drama in which each person was involved, willingly or not. Agamben advances an explanation of the transformation of *iustitium*, which is declared to cope with the *tumultus* state, in which, anomie

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, “The Psychoses, 1955-1956”, *The Seminar: Book III*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 185.

⁵⁷ Giorgio Agamben, “The Logic of Sovereignty”, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Giorgio Agamben, “Public, Mourning, Anomie”, *State of Exception*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 70.

(rebellion, uprising, riots...) rules, into a term simply referring to the mourning of the sovereign's death:

The correspondance between anomie and mourning becomes comprehensible only in the light of the correspondance between the death of the sovereign and the state of exception. The original nexus between *tumultus* and *iustitium* is still present, but the tumult now coincides with the death of the sovereign, while the suspension of the law is integrated into the funeral ceremony. It is as if the sovereign, who had absorbed into his “august” person all exceptional powers and who had, so to speak, become a living *iustitium*, showed his intimate anomic character at the moment of his death and saw tumult and anomie set free outside of him in the city. Like Benjamin has intuited long before “the state of exception has become the rule”. State of exception and anomie were incorporated directly into the person of the sovereign, who begins to free himself from all subordination to the law and asserts himself as unbound by the laws.⁶⁰

I think the relationship of correspondence between the state of exception and public mourning after the sovereign’s death provides the necessary background to analyze the discursive strategies underlying the sovereignty processes in Turkey with regard to Atatürk. In effect, the fact that mourning after Atatürk is a never ending process provides a very profitable ‘discursive capital’ for those who want to justify the declaration of *iustitium* (the state of exception) by positing Turkey in a never ending *tumultus*. By *tumultus*, I refer to “the caesure by means of which, from the point of view of public law, exceptional measures may be taken” (Nissen 1887, 76). The understanding that presents the period of 15 years under Atatürk’s rule as a Golden Age when there is an unbreakable harmony in society and the view which considers the period after his death as a time that can never be “as good” makes it quite easy to claim that there is a *tumultus*.

Impossible Mourning and Atatürk as the *objet petit a* of The Political

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 68.

In “Deconstruction, Pragmatism and Hegemony”, Ernesto Laclau suggests that “the character of hegemonic logics is deconstructive” because “no instituting act is fully achievable” and that “the constitutive incompleteness of the social is crucial to understand the working of hegemonic logics.”⁶¹. By deconstructive, he refers to the endless ‘play of differences’ constituted by the empty signifier of which ‘final’ meaning is continuously ‘differed and deferred’. That is why the empty signifier is also called as ‘the constitutive lack of the political’ which widens the field of structural undecidability. In this context, Atatürk as the empty signifier around which the field of sovereignty is constituted becomes the ultimate undecidable of which ‘final’ or ‘real’ meaning will never be decided. As is seen, the attempt ‘to fulfill Atatürk’ is common for all decisions regarding the field of sovereignty. This is an attempt bound to fail but also this failure is the strength of the field of sovereignty which would dissolve if Atatürk as an empty signifier was to be fulfilled because the fulfillment of Atatürk as a signifier would have to restrict it to the representatives of this act of fulfillment. For instance, if a common public view emerges that, the CHP is the only Atatürkist party, then the all-inclusive character attributed to this signifier fails and breaks it down to just one of the discourses negotiating for power.

So, hegemonic logics refers to the construction of the political around an empty signifier of whose ultimate meaning is continuously differed and deferred in a never-ending play of differences which, opens a field of sovereignty. That is to say that there is something constitutively lacking in every individual, therefore also in society and this ‘lack’ is exactly what makes the emergence of the political possible by bringing about certain undecidables that have to be decided through the political. Ernesto Laclau points out that “the logic of the *objet petit a* and the hegemonic logics are not just similar: they are identical”. In this context, the empty signifier is in the

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 48.

same aporic⁶² topology with the Lacanian *objet petit a* which can be defined as the unattainable/unfathomable object of [desire](#), but as Slavoj Žižek puts it, the *raison d'être* of *objet petit a* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire.⁶³ In this context, 'Atatürk' as *objet petit a* creates a hole in the core of the political in Turkey as the name of the impossible desire: "the perfect/complete society represented in his personage". It provides the ground of the field of sovereignty of which it is also the absolute sovereign by exempting itself to be stabilized.

Moreover, Yannis Stavrakakis states that "the empty signifier can only function as an *objet petit a*"⁶⁴ in the case of which the object coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost. The obfuscation between "what is lost" and "what is actually lacking from the very beginning" leads to 'impossible mourning' which refers to melancholia in Lacanian terminology. Jacques Derrida defines impossible mourning as follows:

You will also understand, the law of mourning that it would have to fail in order to succeed... And while it's always promised, it will never be reassured(...) We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning, where the possible remains impossible. Where *success fails*.⁶⁵

Similarly, Slavoj Žižek states that the ultimate mistake that the melancholic makes is confusing the lack with loss, and, in this sense, "the object is a positivisation of a lack since the object does not exist in itself".⁶⁶ He continues:

The paradox, of course, is that the deceitful translation of lack into loss enables us to assert our possession of the object; what we never possessed can also never be lost,

⁶² Aporic notions are those of which condition of possibility is also their condition of impossibility.

⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, "The Seven Veils of Fantasy", *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London: Verso Press, 1997), p. 39.

⁶⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis, 'Encircling The Political: towards a Lacanian political theory', in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations: Society, politics, ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2003), p. 284.

⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Memoirs for Paul de Mann", *The Work of Mourning*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 262.

⁶⁶ Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and The Act", *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): p. 651.

so the melancholic, in his unconditional fixation on the lost object, in a way possesses it in its very loss.⁶⁷

Following this line of thought, it can be said that Atatürk as a name does not represent ‘a thing’ that was lost but a thing that is lacking from the very beginning. It is the positivization of the lack at the heart of the political: the fantasy of pure harmony and a fully united community without any conflicts. This is why the fantasy of Atatürk’s resurrection is produced after the declaration of the states of exception which produce and keep the illusion of completeness alive as if there is a possibility of reconciliation between some mythical origin and a future utopian ideal.

It has been argued that our linguistically constructed reality (an ethnic or nationalist ideology for example) depends on the incorporation of all ‘individual symbols, verbal and non-verbal, in a mythic structure’ (Armstrong 1982:6). It is necessary then to move from the consideration of the symbolic structure of political reality to its fantasmatic support. This movement is inscribed in the structure of the empty signifier itself insofar as the empty signifier is emptied of particular contents; the illusion is that it can become completely empty so that it can contain everything; within a certain transferential illusion; it is supposed that anything can be inscribed into it.⁶⁸

Lacan argues the apparently illusional position that the *objet petit a* is by definition an object that has come into being in being lost.⁶⁹ *Objet petit a* serves as this constitutive lack which can neither be included nor excluded. It can not be included by gaining a stable and consistent meaning but it also cannot be excluded since it is the constitutive lack of the political. In this sense, *objet petit a* cannot be located precisely. It is in a zone of indistinction between the Real and the Symbolic. *Objet petit a*, by opening the primordial hole in the Symbolic, opens up the play of differences. It is the lost signified which is:

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 660.

⁶⁸ Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Encircling The Political: towards a Lacanian political theory’, in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations: Society, politics, ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2003), p. 284.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Yannis Stavrakakis, “The Lacanian Object”, *Lacan and the Political*, (London: Routledge Press, 1999), p. 53.

(...) never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences.⁷⁰

Following this line of thought, it is clear that Atatürkism does not have any referential unity because it is ascribed to a political logic whose effects cut across many phenomena. It can briefly be defined as a perfect example of “hegemonic logics” whose sole aim is ‘to keep Atatürk alive’. That is to say, its main purpose is to keep the source of power stemming from “the name” unquestionable and therefore render it the unique center of the political. In this way, the fantasy of conceiving the society as unified by an endogenous underlying logic –that is Atatürkism- is sustained. In this way, all particularities are diminished radically so that any analytical distinction between different political statements/positions are almost unsustainable. The political value or meaning of a given statement or demand is not given in advance, but only by the hegemonic structure within it is articulated. This ‘all-inclusive’ character of Atatürkism is exactly what turns it into a “totalitarian danger” because, in this way, Atatürkism becomes the single legitimate sphere that enroaches all discourses as the inalienable font of political authority by making it impossible and/or at least illegal to challenge ‘the name’ and everything that is related to it.

This totalitarian danger exists in the populist mode of unification which is based on the name Atatürk as an empty signifier. It is totalitarian because it contains common traits of totalitarian regimes such as infallibility of the leader, his being beyond good and evil, the role of the leader as indisputable broker among factions, the perception of challenges to the leader as treason, the suppression of dissent in the name of the

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Differance”, *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982), p. 8.

unity of the ‘people’, and so on. The narrative and psychological force that Atatürkism brings to bear on political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the ‘Atatürk’ as a discursive strategy. In proposing this, I do not wish to imply that there is a single explanation sending one back immediately to a single origin. I acknowledge the different discourses of Atatürkism with their specific histories and particular meanings within different political languages. I am simply attempting to show the complex discursive strategies that function by referring to Atatürk as an empty signifier that is supposed to represent 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subjects of a range of arbitrary political decisions. Unfortunately, the examples marked with these totalitarian traits that lead to highly discriminative consequences are still very common in Turkey.

As the central yet ‘empty’ apparatus of symbolic power, Atatürk produces a continual slippage of categories such as religion, Westernization, nationalism in the act of deciding on the exception. Atatürk sets this play of differences in motion in such a way that one state of exception (the coup of 1980) may lead to Islamic notions being brought to the state apparatus in the name of Atatürk while another (the coup of 1997) excludes and restricts Islamic notions from the state apparatus again in the name of Atatürk. What is displayed in this displacement of terms is “the presence of Atatürk’s absence” as the measure that sustains the making of arbitrary decisions in relation to the existing relations of power.

Modern form of power finds its strength in calling the subjects into submission not by using force but by producing reality and rituals of truth. In the next chapter, I will try to show how impossible mourning operates as a medium of producing reality and rituals of truth. I will try to show that this is basically a process of identification in

which young people aim to render themselves as “the presence of Atatürk’s absence”. In addition, I will also attempt to analyze the various forms of subjectivities that emerge as a result of the different ways Atatürkist young people identify with Atatürk.

CHAPTER 3

IMPOSSIBLE MOURNING AND SYMBOLIC IDENTIFICATION THROUGH EMOTIONS

Atatürkism contains many common features with the other fascist regimes ruling at that particular time in history such as Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan. The practices of the state regarding the youth also include many parallels. The youth was designated as a category who should be educated in such a way as to assure the

survival of a ‘continuing revolution’. Physical excellence was considered to be as important as the intellectual ‘enlightenment’ of young people. Similar to many fascist regimes, sports, in Turkey, were effectively used as a ritualistic means for the spiritual mobilization of the youth. To this end, institutions similar to those in fascist regimes were established. The Directorship of Physical Education and Scouting was established in 1933 for the purpose of educating the young generations of the revolution.

As in Italy and Germany of the 1930s, in Turkey’s first decade of nationalist formation, the scout movements were instituted to promote a feeling of national unity for boys and girls under the state.⁷¹

In 1969, the directorship turned into The Ministry of Youth and Sports which was scaled down in status to the General Directory of Youth and Sports in 1989.

Regardless of the names of these institutions and their effectivity, the youth has always become a matter of great importance for the regime. That is why young people are often called as “the guardians of the regime”.

As Atatürk did not have a known date of birth, he has declared May 19th as his birthday. On May 19th of 1919, he arrived in Samsun in order to participate in the organization of a national war against the occupying forces. Needless to say, this date also marks the beginning of official history writing as narrated in his Speech.⁷² After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, this date was celebrated as a national festival which was first called, “Gymnastics Festival” in 1928. In these events, girls and boys would perform several sport activities in order to show their physical excellence which is a ritualistic means of spiritual mobilization of the youth in most fascist regimes. In May 1936, these festivals acquired the name “Festival of Youth

⁷¹ Yael Navaro-Yashin, “Does Civil Society Exist?”, *Faces of The State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 123.

⁷² Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*, (İstanbul: Assos Press, 2006).

and Sports”. In 1980, after the military coup of 1980, this festival’s name was changed into “Commemorating Atatürk Youth and Sports Festival”. In this way, after May 19, 1960, the youth, once again, became the intersection point where commitment to the nation and remembering Atatürk were fused in celebrations. The week of May 19 is celebrated as “the week of commemorating Atatürk” and students are obliged to write essays or poems regarding Atatürk and his relation with the Turkish youth. They are also obliged to participate in stadium celebrations where they parade in a militarist fashion and perform gymnastic movements. In this way, school gymnastics became synonymous with military training.

In these rituals, young people are to identify with the leader and the nation which is represented by the leader by demonstrating their own bodies. They were thus turned into vanguards who are ready and willing both physically and mentally in order to sustain the continuity of the regime. In this way, the nation would be embodied literally in the youth. The political anatomy of the body would show itself through an apparently politico-theological ritual. In short, sports and physical education play quite an influential role by including young people in the process of consolidation of Atatürkism.

Furthermore, the official discourse and the educational system work to make sure that this symbolic identification occurs throughout all levels. Even the constitution which is still effective since the 1980 coup, in line with many sayings of Atatürk, repeatedly calls on the Turkish youth to identify with him in order to protect and continue his revolutions. Item 58, entitled the “Protection of the Youth”, states:

The State shall take measures to ensure the training and development of youth into whose keeping our State, independence, and our Republic are entrusted, in the light of contemporary science, in line with the principles and reforms of Atatürk, and in

opposition to ideas aiming at the destruction of the indivisible integrity of the State with its territory and nation.⁷³

This item resembles the “National Youth Law” put forward by Hitler which states that young people must be raised in an “atmosphere of discipline and service to the nation”.⁷⁴ Texts such as “Addressing the Youth” (Gençliğe Hitabe) and, the Bursa Speech (Bursa Nutku), rituals such as May 19 stadium celebrations or visiting Anıtkabir, various images such as portraits in houses, on the street, on clothes and accessories, etc., slogans such as “My Father, we are on your path” or “We are all Atatürk” are elements of the power symbolism that not only render Atatürk an ever-present figure of the Turkish public sphere, but also contribute to the subjective formation of an Atatürkist youth.

After this brief background relating Atatürk to the Turkish Youth, I should also mention that the interviews for this study were carried out at an exceptional time. It is important to note the historical context in order to understand the ‘zeitgeist’ of the days while conducting these interviews. When AKP, a conservative-democrat party (in their own terms) with former Islamist roots, came to power after the general elections of 2002, people with Atatürkist tendencies were very surprised by the early rise of this new-born party. In 2007, when the date of retirement of the 10th president of the Turkish Republic drew near, it was widely expected that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, prime minister and general president of the AKP, would declare his candidacy for presidency, a candidacy which would have been successful considering that the majority of the parliament members are from the AKP. The escalating success of the AKP was perceived as a threat to the secular Republic by citizens who

⁷³ Devlet, istiklâl ve Cumhuriyetimizin emanet edildiği gençlerin müsbet ilmin ışığında, Atatürk ilke ve inkılâpları doğrultusunda ve Devletin ülkesi ve milletiyle bölünmez bütünlüğünü ortadan kaldırmayı amaç edinen görüşlere karşı yetişme ve gelişmelerini sağlayıcı tedbirleri alır.

⁷⁴ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brezinski, “Youth and Future of Dictatorship”, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1964), p. 40.

define themselves as ‘laicist’ and Atatürkist. The mass media contributed to the escalation of the huge reaction that followed “Are you aware of the danger?”, a slogan produced by *Cumhuriyet* (Republic), a newspaper known for its authoritarian laicist attitude, was effective in mobilizing people.

Infuriated by the possibility of Erdoğan’s candidacy, hundreds of thousands of Atatürkists gathered in Ankara and marched to *Anıtkabir*, holding Turkish flags and Atatürk’s pictures. This was the first of a series of rallies later called Republican Rallies organized by the Atatürkist Thought Association. On April 24, Tayyip Erdoğan, stating that the president they nominate in order to relieve the tension would be worthy of Atatürk’s principles, declared Abdullah Gül’s candidacy for the presidency. Three days later, on midnight of April 27, the Turkish army declared an online memorandum on their website which states that “they are on the side of laicism and its absolute defender”. The statement, after lining up a few incidents such as a girl’s choir singing religious chants with their headscarves on or a groups of women learning religious lessons in a public school, reiterated the words of the General Chief of Staff, Büyükanıt, uttered two days prior to the above-mentioned rally. He had stated that this issue concerns them to the extent that the newly-elected president will also be the Commander in Chief of the Turkish Army and added that he hoped a person who is truly committed to Atatürkism, laicism and the foundational principles of the Republic will be elected as president. Two days after the memorandum, hundreds of thousands of people gathered again in Istanbul to cry out their opposition against Gül’s candidacy and asked for an early general election. Gül had a moustache, a veiled wife and a former Islamist background. These were the facts and they were enough to enrage Atatürkists who organised several more rallies in five different cities in West Anatolia where the population of Atatürkists

were high. Atatürkists acted in a defensive manoeuvre as if there was an actual battle going on in the country arguing that the ordinary/normative citizen defined as the Republican subject was in crisis because ‘others’ were coming to power.

In addition, the Republican rallies demonstrated the influential idea that “the army must do something”. Some openly demanded the army to stage a coup, some implied a subtler manoeuvre; yet, a militarist stance and demand for a state of exception was quite apparent in the rallies which were organized and supported by various sections of society, such as university members, political parties, etc. The young and female participants became the center of attention in the media. The common point that gathered all these different groups from socialists to liberals or conservatives to nationalists was surely Atatürk. They were all there to protect Atatürk’s legacy. The following year, it became apparent that these rallies were to be used by some high rank military officials (retired and regular) to prepare the ground for a coup in order to overthrow the AKP government.

On May 1, after only two of these rallies, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that they would apply to parliament for an early election. The ballot boxes were put in front of the people on July 22. The AKP won 47% of the total votes and gained a historical victory over their opponents. This was a huge disappointment for Atatürkists.

All my informants joined at least one Republican rally and some of them even traveled a long way to attend others. I asked my informants to tell me about their experiences regarding these rallies. The common phrase was that the people attending these rallies were Republican individuals who were aware that the country was going through a time of crisis and that something extreme had to be done. The transmission of their experiences regarding the rallies were highly charged with strong emotions. For instance Elif stated that:

I said “There are people like Atatürk, people like me, as well.” It was an incredible feeling. At that time I was those people, those people was Mustafa Kemal. They were Republican individuals. They were aware of the danger. It was an incredible emotion. I don't remember a moment when I was happy as much as I was then. We were marching on the Street of Lions. I was so excited. I was having a historical day. (...) The red and white were everywhere. You can't shout or chant a slogan because Atatürk is buried there. The soldiers took the posters. The moment when I returned back the stairway leading up to Atatürk could not be seen. They shouted a slogan that I will never forget: “Oh, our father!(?) Atatürk, we came!”, “Wake up Ghazi Mustafa Kemal, wake up! Look at the fickle finger of the fate!”, “We are soldiers of Mustafa Kemal.” Were we shouting “wake up”? It was an impressive slogan. At that moment I thought that if he doesn't get up now he will never wake up at any time. I was so impressed. I asked myself , how would it be if he woke up? My heart said: Would he get up and come? He will come and we will be saved. I believed that.⁷⁵

The enthusiasm, excitement, hope and feeling of unity as a community that has pervaded this statement may give an idea of the extent of the emotional bond that is created in Republican rallies. Needless to say, Elif becomes a perfect example of “Atatürk as a state fantasy” which represents him as the saviour on the path to a perfect and harmonious society which used to exist when he was alive.

The extent and content of the Republican rallies which led to the formation of an over-charged public fascinated me like it did most people. Yet, besides the apparent details such as the variety of colors used, the expression of joy on people's faces or the slogans cried out, I became interested in the way Atatürk was used in images, slogans and even on masks. There were slogans such as “He (referring to Atatürk) has resurrected and has come from 81 cities”, “We are all Atatürk”, “We are the soldiers of Atatürk”, “We are the children of Atatürk”, etc. I think that it is important to analyze the extent of the tendency to identify with Atatürk.

⁷⁵ Atatürk gibi, benim gibi insanlar da varmış dedim. İnanılmaz bir histi. O anda o insanlar bendim, o insanlar Mustafa Kemal'di. Cumhuriyet bireyleriydi. Tehlikenin farkındaydı. İnanılmaz bir duygu bu kadar mutlu olduğum bir an hatırlamıyorum. Aslanlı yolda yürüyoruz. Çok heyecanlıyım. Tarihi bir gün yaşıyorum. (...) Her yer kırmızı beyazdı. Sonuçta orada Atatürk yatıyor. Orada bağırılmaz, slogan atılmaz. Askerler pankartları aldı. Bir döndüm o an var ya, Atatürk'e çıkan yoldaki merdivenler görünmüyor. Bir slogan attılar ki unutamam: “Atam biz geldik”, “Uyan uyan Gazi Kemal, şu feleğin işine bak”, Mustafa Kemal'in askerleriyiz”. “Uyan” diye mi bağırıyorduk? Çok etkileyici bir slogandı. Bir anda böyle “şu anda kalkmazsa hiçbir zaman kalkmaz” dedim. O kadar etkilendim. Şimdi dedim “kalksa nasıl olurdu?”. Bir anda kalbim dedi: “Kalkar mı, gelir mi? Gelecek ve kurtulacağız. İnanırım buna”.

Emotional Bonding with Atatürk: “Winning the Hearts of the People”

Laplanche and Pontalis indicate that there are two distinctive features of the direction in which ‘identification’ operates. One is called heteropathic and centripetal where the subject identifies his own self with the other. The other is called idiopathic and centrifugal in which the subject identifies the other with himself. They further state that:

Finally, in cases where both these tendencies are present at once, we are said to be dealing with a more complex form of identification, one which is sometimes invoked to account for the constitution of a ‘we’.⁷⁶

A strong manifestation of this double-sided identification is the slogan produced by Turkish Youth Unity (*Türk Gençlik Birliği*) which is a wide network consisting of Atatürkist young people.⁷⁷ Their slogan is “Atatürk is coming”. What they mean by Atatürk in the slogan is that the Turkish youth is “coming” to power in order to sustain the Atatürkist ideal which has a peculiar statist character. In their periodical *Kırmızı Beyaz*, it is stated that:

Today, the answer of the Turkish Nation to the crisis is Atatürk... Atatürk is entering the stage of history again... We know where Atatürk is now. Atatürk is the millions gathering in Republican Rallies, the workers defending their factory as their homeland, those who went on the street after our martyrs, those defending the Republican universities, which is us.⁷⁸

In addition, the sayings of Atatürk such as the one below have a huge influence in reviving this process of identification:

There are two Mustafa Kemals: One is me, meat and bone, an ephemeral Mustafa Kemal. I cannot express the second Mustafa Kemal with the word “I”, it’s not I, it’s

⁷⁶ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, “Identification”, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 206.

⁷⁷ Two of my informants were their members.

⁷⁸ “Atatürk Geliyor”, *Kırmızı Beyaz*, 2008, p. 5.

us! It is an enlightened warrior group that works for the new idea, the new life and the great purpose all around the country. I represent their dream. My attempts are to satisfy what they long for. That Mustafa Kemal is you, all of you. It is the Mustafa Kemal who is not ephemeral and who should live and succeed!⁷⁹

By referring to sayings such as this and their personal experiences, my informants told me about the various ways in which they identify or strive to identify with Atatürk in varying degrees. For instance, İbrahim told me that his kindergarden teacher used to call him “My little Atatürk” because of his blue eyes and golden hair. He said that this nickname may have had a minor effect with regard to his identification with Atatürk:

My kindergarden teacher's calling me “My Atatürk” may have a little influence on me. However, I have liked talking since my high school days and I don't like being outdone, which of these two contribute that the profession is politics. So, I have aimed to become Atatürk, patriotic and self-denying as much as him since then.⁸⁰

The phrases “being like Atatürk” or “becoming Atatürk” were also widely used but the meaning attributed to these phrases varied with respect to my informants because they each had a different imaginary regarding Atatürk. The way they relate to their imagined Atatürk has a highly emotional character. Although the choice of words to define their relation to Atatürk may differ, this is apparently a relationship of identification which has a highly emotional character, in effect, my informants generally referred to the way and the reasons they love Atatürk while telling me what “We are all Atatürk” means to them. In her brilliant book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed states:

⁷⁹ İki Mustafa Kemal vardır. Biri, karşınızda oturan ben; et ve kemik, fani Mustafa Kemal. İkinci Mustafa Kemal, O'nu (ben) kelimesiyle ifade edemem; O ben değil bizdir. O burada oturan sizler, memleketin her köşesinde yeni fikir, yeni hayat ve büyük mefkure için uğraşan münevver ve mücahit bir zümredir. Ben onların rüyasını temsil ediyorum. Benim teşebbüsüm onların tahassür duydukları şeyleri tatmin içindir.

⁸⁰ Anaokulu öğretmenimin “Atatürk’üm” diye çağırması az da olsa etkilemiş olabilir. Yalnız liseden beri ben konuşmayı severim ve altta kalmayı hiç sevmem ve bu ikisinin prim yaptığı meslek siyasettir. Liseden beri hep siyaset yapmak istedim. Dolayısıyla o zamandan beri ilerde büyüyünce bir Atatürk olmak, Atatürk kadar vatansever ve özverili olmak amacım olarak var.

Identification is a form of love in which the subject desires to become like the object of love which denotes a distinction between them and also seeks to undo the very distinction it requires: “In becoming more like you, I seek to take your place”.⁸¹

The tracks of the presence of this emotional bonding that determines the way they relate to Atatürk can be pursued through Atatürk’s own sayings which encourage such a style of bonding:

Seeing me does not necessarily mean seeing my face. If you understand my ideas and feel my feelings, that is enough.⁸²

In Atatürk’s sayings that concern the relation between him and his nation, there are efforts to create a process of identification that goes both ways. That is to say, some of them posit a relationship in which Atatürk identifies with the Turkish nation, especially the Turkish youth and others posit a relationship in which the Turkish nation or the youth identify themselves with Atatürk. The saying above is an example of the latter. “Seeing Atatürk’s face” is a metaphor that evokes a close contact with Atatürk in which you not only think in the same way but also feel the same way as Atatürk does. Since Atatürk is not just any person but the most influential political figure whose presence is still very alive, this suggested relationship between Atatürk and his followers implicates a very forceful modality of power which not only shapes the thoughts but also permeates the ‘inside’ of its subjects by regulating their feelings.

In most fascist regimes such as Germany, the leader is highly appraised and loved.

The leader mostly leads the crowd by appealing to their emotions, especially the love they have for the leader. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler states:

The broad masses of a people consist neither of professors nor diplomats. The meagre abstract knowledge they dispose of prompts them to take their cues from the

⁸¹ Sara Ahmed, “In The Name of Love”, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 126.

⁸² Beni görmek demek, mutlaka yüzümü görmek demek değildir. Benim fikirlerimi, benim duygularımı anlıyorsanız ve hissediyorsanız, bu kâfidir.

realm of emotion. This is where their disposition is rooted, be it positive or negative. (...) It is this emotional orientation which makes them so extraordinarily stable. Faith is harder to shake than knowledge, love is less changeable than respect, hatred is more enduring than aversion. (...) One can succeed in winning the soul of the people only if, together with the positive campaign one carries on in behalf of one's objectives, one also destroys him who opposes these objectives.

Similar to the metaphor of "winning the souls of people", one of the best known sayings of Atatürk is "I would like to rule not by breaking but winning the hearts of my people".⁸³ Winning people's hearts is a means of ruling that is closely linked to governmentality. When I asked one of my informants what "We are all Atatürk" means to her, she answered by referring to this saying of Atatürk which encourages them to identify with him:

For instance Atatürk says: Seeing me does not necessarily mean seeing my face. If you understand my ideas and feel my feelings, that is enough. That is just what I mean while I am saying "I am Mustafa Kemal." I am supporting all the values Mustafa Kemal supported. (...) Of course, I am first Elif but when you look at my heart, mind and feeling you will see a person who loves his country so much and a person who will never leave Atatürk's way.⁸⁴

As demonstrated in the interviews, the effects of Atatürk's sayings are manifestations of this intense process of identification. Interestingly, in their well-known psychobiography of Atatürk, *The Immortal Atatürk*, Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz point out the fact that there is a strong double-sided process of identification between the Turkish youth and Atatürk:

What interests us the most in all of this is his peroration addressed to the youth of Turkey, in which he charges them with the protection of the Turkish republic forever...He is himself "the Turkish youth".

⁸³ "Ben halkımın kalbini kırarak değil, kazanarak hükmetmek isterim".

⁸⁴ Mesela Atatürk diyor ki: "Beni görmek demek illa yüzümü görmek demek değildir, düşüncelerimi anlıyorsanız ve hissettiklerimi hissediyorsanız bu yeterlidir". İşte tam da bu, ben Mustafa Kemal'im derken bunu söylüyorum. Ben Mustafa Kemal'in savunduğu bütün değerleri savunuyorum. (...) Tabii ki önce Elif ...'ım ama benim kalbime, beynime, hislerime baktığın zaman vatanını çok seven ve Atatürk'ün yolundan asla ayrılmayacak bir insan görürsün.

In “The Subject and Power”, Foucault states that the modern state should be considered as a very sophisticated entity which integrates individuals under the condition that this individuality is shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of specific patterns.⁸⁵ This means that the state is not constituted above individuals but at the level of individuals in a way that it determines what they are and their very existence to an extent. The form of power in the modern state is both a totalizing and an individualizing form of power. In this sense, Atatürk becomes the point of this individualizing form of power which enables a prelude to governmentality through a pastoral form of power that functions by pervading even the feelings of its subjects. Actually, this is also in accordance with the characteristic of pastoral power which is not only interested in the community as a whole but each individual in particular during his entire life.⁸⁶ This change in power technologies became inevitable because of the radical transition from a traditional form of sovereignty to a modern nation-state.⁸⁷

The individualizing form of power takes place through identifying with Atatürk as an individual whose characteristics are open to interpretation by those who identify themselves with him. In this sense, while talking about their relation to Atatürk, my informants are actually talking about themselves. The way they imagine Atatürk is always already about the way they imagine themselves. For instance, Erol told me the process in which he became an Atatürkist:

I guess I began to know Atatürk when I was in the first or second class of primary school. The time when I came across Atatürk, the ideology at exactly was my high school times, the acting of identifying yourself and so on. I was wondering who that was in the picture, why he was in that picture, also I had a background that is as

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 214.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁸⁷ The conditions that prepare for this kind of change before the establishment of the Republic should also be studied in detail.

follows: Our hodja was swaying us to something while we were reciting or reading Quran from beginning to end. We used to read. We used to recite Quran. Besides, we used to be a muezzin. He was such a person... He was a hodja contributing us a lot. I had an uncle named Ahmet. He also prayed for Atatürk in his every prayer. Among those people... They had a great influence on me. I read Quran from beginning to end when I was at primary school. Then I was a muezzin for few years. Thanks to them, there were people who weren't in conflict with Atatürk and the religion around me.⁸⁸

Erol's perception of Atatürk is closely related with his personal experiences and the way Atatürk is represented to him by the people around him. Therefore, while telling me about how he imagines Atatürk, he is also already telling me something about himself. This difference can easily be seen from the metaphors that my informants choose to define Atatürk. For instance, Elif who was raised by her highly educated parents and grandmother in a middle-class home full of Atatürk's pictures, considers religion as a dogma that constrains the way one thinks and acts. She thinks that religion should be kept between the believer and her/his conscience. In the interview, she referred to Atatürk as "the light" several times:

Atatürk is a light, for me he is the way out. So, Mustafa Kemal is someone who created an ideology that lightened this country and other countries.⁸⁹

"Light" is a much more secular metaphor that involves connotations linked to the Enlightenment. Examples can be multiplied but the point is that how these young people perceive Atatürk is always already about the way they perceive themselves with regard to the processes of subjectivization they went through. This is also what

⁸⁸ Tahminim ilkokulda 1. yada 2. sınıfta ikisi birlikte sanırım tanımaya başladım Atatürk'ü. Ciddi olarak atatürkle ideolojiyle karşılaştığım yıllar lise çağları falan tam o kimliği oturtma falan. İlkokulda o resimdeki kim, o resimdeki niye orda, bir de şimdi benim çevrem şöyleydi açıkçası ilkokul 4.5. sınıfta Kuran okurken hatmederken de hocamız bizi şeye yönlendirirdi. Okurduk Kuran falan okurduk, bir yandan da müezzinlik falan yapardık. O şey bir hocaydı bize çok şey katan bir hocaydı. Benim bir dayım vardı Ahmet dayım o da her duasında Atatürk için de dua ederdi öyle insanlar arasında onların bana etkisi büyük. İlkokulda hatmettim. Sonra birkaç yıl müezzinlik yaptım. Onlar sayesinde dinle atatürkle çatışmayan insanlar vardı etrafımda.

⁸⁹ Atatürk benim için bir ışık, bir çıkış yolu. Yani Mustafa Kemal Atatürk hala bu ülkede ve diğer ülkelere ışık tutmuş bir ideolojiyi yaratmış biri.

makes Atatürk as a signifier so powerful because it opens up a field of meanings open to interpretations that can be attributed to his name. Laclau states that:

Identification presupposes the constitutive split of all social identity, between the content which provides the surface of identification and the function of identification as such- the latter being independent of any content and linked to the former in a contingent way.⁹⁰

These young people identify themselves with Atatürk as a signifier since they define themselves as Atatürkist. However, since the function of this signifier is empty as elaborated in the first chapter, these young people bind themselves to this signifier in a contingent way which is determined by the discursive practices they find themselves in. That is why there are so many different meanings attributed to Atatürk as a signifier and Atatürkism of which meaning is an extension of what is attributed to Atatürk. For instance, when I asked what Atatürkism means, Elif stated:

Atatürkism is progressivism, loving your country and wishing world peace. Everything is in it. The love of nature... You can identify everything with him.⁹¹

The reason why Elif is able to attribute so many different meanings to Atatürk from progress to world peace or from the love of the nation to the love of nature is hidden in the last sentence. “You can identify everything with him” exposes the possible play of differences that can be actualized over ‘Atatürk’. This demonstrates how what is inscribed in “Atatürk” creates a field of sovereignty according to which the decision⁹² on what ‘Atatürk’ stands for is made. “Atatürk” opens up a juridically empty space of sovereignty because it is posed as undecidable. What “Atatürk” refers to is always and already obscured. It changes situationally. What “Atatürk” stands for is convicted to stay in the dark because, otherwise, *it* will be excluded from the

⁹⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, “Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics,” in *The Making of Political Identities*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London; New York: Verso, 1994), p. 35.

⁹¹ Atatürkçülük ilerlemektir, vatanını sevmektir, dünya barışını istemektir. Her şey vardır... Doğa sevgisi... Her şeyi onunla özdeşleştirebiliyorsun.

⁹² By decision, I do not refer to the rational decision-making individual of liberalism. The decision can be made consciously as well as non-consciously. It stems from the subjectivization processes through which the subject is ‘borne’.

law, from the social and from the political since that is where a dead leader really belongs: outside.

In the Name of Love

Ernesto Laclau defines the subject as “the distance between the undecidables in the structure and the decision”.⁹³ The various different “decisions” about what Atatürk means lead to different subject positions which are all Atatürkist in their own sense. The fact that there can be several decisions concerning what Atatürk refers to shows us the deconstructive play of differences regarding Atatürk. By deconstructive, I refer to the different and deferring meaning(s) of Atatürk as an empty signifier upon which the discourse of Atatürkism is built.

Following this line of thought it can be said that Atatürk operates as a huge symbolic capital whose limit is Atatürk’s itself. For instance, love for the nation, leadership, world peace, being a good person and even love for nature are different meanings that are attributed to Atatürkism, yet what Atatürk “is” cannot be defined. That is why it is the constitutive lack which ceases to exist if it ‘stays the same’, if it achieves an internal balance. It is both the lack and the excess.

Identification reproduces itself through a mournful commitment whose excessive power provides it with a fundamental impotence. I see this commitment to be mournful because my informants describe Atatürk as lost not only in the sense that he is a dead man but also in the sense that what is lost with his death could not be regenerated. There is always something more in ‘Atatürk’ than Atatürk’s himself. This indistinctable “more” refers to the Lacanian *objet petit a* of the political in

⁹³ Ernesto Laclau, “Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony”, in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, eds. Simon Critchley and Chantal Mouffe, (London: Routledge Press, 1996), p. 54.

Turkey because it presents itself as “an object that has been fundamentally lost”.⁹⁴

The distinguishing characteristic of objet petit a is its being unfathomable object of desire. Its form’s being ‘empty’ makes it all the more desirable since it cannot be defined precisely, it is not stable. That is why none of my informants have a clear description of who/what Atatürk is. Like Elif states, he symbolizes ‘more’ than who/what he is:

After I reached awareness, after this, I am Mustafa Kemal. I am going to give off light. I am going to explain, lighten, make them wake up and I will never give up loving him or my country. Because he symbolizes much **more** than an ideology. He symbolizes his country, he symbolizes the future. Like a light, he can be adapted to lots of things. Actually, we must thank God for such a leader. I mean, I love him so much.⁹⁵

All my informants told me that they love Atatürk without me having to ask them about their emotions directly. This is expected considering the fact that since Freud, it is known that the relationship between the leader and the led has a libidinal character.⁹⁶ In this sense, Elif, for instance, continued by telling me in a prideful manner how Atatürk is “the man” who comes first in her life:

The only man is Atatürk for me. Sometimes I tell that to my father. My elder sister has got a son. When she was younger, she used to say “I am going to marry my father.” After his son's birth, she began to tell his son “You are the most important person in my life, my only man” and so on. My father reproached her, saying “You used to call me 'my only man'”. Then she returned to me, saying “OK!” and asked “I am still the first for my daughter, aren't I?” I am now so sure that I am going to say it, I revere my father, I love him too much. I held his hand and said “You know how much I love you, however you are the second for me. “You are the first man living but the first one is Atatürk” I said. “My daughter”, my father said, “That's what I want to hear!”⁹⁷

Another female informant told me the way Atatürk makes her feel:

⁹⁴ Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, *Écrits: A Selection*, (London: Routledge Press, 1989), p. 46.

⁹⁵ Ben farkındalığa vardıktan sonra bu saatten sonra ben Mustafa Kemal'im. Ben ışık saçacağım. Ben anlatacağım, aydınlatacağım, uyandıracacağım ve asla O'nu sevmekten, vatanımı sevmekten asla vazgeçmeyeceğim. Çünkü o ideoloji dışında ülkesini temsil ediyor, geleceği temsil ediyor. Işık gibi yani birçok şeye uyarlanabilir. Gerçekten her yönüyle Tanrı'ya şükretmemiz gereken bir lider. Yani onu seviyorum o kadar.

⁹⁶ By ‘libidinal’, I do not suggest that this relation is psychic in the first place, rather I agree with Ahmed that it is social and collective because the individual subject comes into being through its alignment with the collective.

I shiver, it passes right through me. This is such a thing that I cannot feel it when I look at my loved one or someone from my family. It is a very serious emotional intensity. You know how a person tingles right there (she points to her chest), such a feeling comes over me (her eyes filled with tears).⁹⁸

Comparing Atatürk's love with the love for their significant others or family members was a common theme that is used by especially by female informants to describe the intensity of their love. I believe that this gender difference I came across is worth investigating further. In addition, one of my informants who was Alevi situated his love on a more mystical level in accordance with the hierarchy in his sect⁹⁹ by stating that:

Let me say this very clearly: If I did not worship Allah, if I did not believe in Allah, I would worship Atatürk. I mean, Holy Mohammad, Holy Ali, then comes Atatürk.¹⁰⁰

Slavoj Žižek states that all successful political ideologies refer to and produce sublime objects posited by those political ideologies. The political subjects take these sublime objects as their ideologies' central words that mean or name extraordinary things like God, the Fuhrer, the King, in whose name they would break ordinary moral laws and sacrifice their own lives. When a subject believes in a political ideology, this does not necessarily mean that they know the truth about the objects which its key terms seemingly name. Interestingly, this inability of subjects to explain the nature of what they believe in politically does not indicate any disloyalty

⁹⁷ Tek adam benim için Atatürk'tür. Babama şunu söylerim bazen. Ablamın işte çocuğu oldu. Ablam küçükken "ben babamla evleneceğim" dermiş. Sonradan da oğlu için "hayatımdaki en önemli insan sensin, benim tek erkeğim" falan demeye başlamıştı. Babam da "eskiden bana tek erkeğim" derdin diye ablama sitem etti. Sonra da bana döndü ve "Olsun" dedi, "kızım için hala birinci sıradayım ama değil mi?" dedi. Şimdi o kadar emin ki onu söyleyeceğimden ki ben babama taparım, öyle çok severim. Tuttum elini, "Babacığım seni ne kadar sevdiğimi biliyorsun ama benim için de ikinci sırada geliyorsun" dedim. Yaşayan bir numaralı erkek sensin ama ilk önce Atatürk gelir" dedim. "Kızım" dedi, "Ben de bunu duymak isterdim zaten" dedi.

⁹⁸ Bende bir ürperti oluyor ya, içine kadar işliyor. Bu öyle bir şey ki ben kendi sevdiğime bakarken onu hissetmiyorum veya ailemden birine baktığımda ben onu hissetmiyorum. Çok ciddi anlamda bir duygusal yoğunluk oluyor. Hani insanın şurası (göğsünü işaret ediyor) cızlar ya öyle bir his geliyor (gözleri yaşarıyor).

⁹⁹ Alevi believe in the superiority of Allah over Prophet Mohammad and superiority of Prophet Mohammad over Ali. In this way, he adds Atatürk in the religious hierarchy set by his sect.

¹⁰⁰ Şöyle diyeyim çok net: Allah'a tapmasam, Allah'a inanmasam Atatürk'e taparım. Yani Hz Muhammed Hz Ali daha sonra gelecek Atatürk'tür.

to or abnormality of their ideology. On the contrary, it is testimony to their intense commitment to just how transcendent or great their King, God, Freedom is in comparison with the ordinary or profane things in the world. In this case, some of my informants regard Atatürk as something whose Greatness they cannot really express but maybe tell its greatness through the mediation of sublime things such as light or God since Atatürk is the sublime object of Atatürkism.

However, while some of my informants talked about their emotions in an explicit and enthusiastic manner as in the quotes above, some of them chose to define their understanding of Atatürk is in terms of reason rather than emotions. For instance

Derya stated that:

Atatürk is a human after all. I may or may not love Atatürk if he were near me right now. When I look at him as a person I love Atatürk but I have a huge respect for what Atatürk did, what he contributed to us. In the end, he was a human, too. He was not supernatural. I love him for the sacrifices he made and things he did. Some people exaggerate this and hurt Atatürk, cause him to be misunderstood. I frankly do not care the songs Atatürk loved and the foods he liked. What matters are his thoughts and what he did. He must be looked at from this view.¹⁰¹

There is a strongly fetishist attitude in Atatürkism which presents Atatürk almost as a supernatural icon while there is also another, more ‘worldly’ attitude that focuses mainly on Atatürk’s human sides such as his everyday habits, preferences, taste for music or food, etc. While the fetishist approach is explicitly declared in the former attitude, it is disclosed in the latter by pointing to the fact that Atatürk was a human and that he could not be perfect. Derya is obviously disturbed by the way Atatürk is sublimated. Umut also shares this disturbance:

¹⁰¹ Atatürk bir insan sonuçta. Ben Atatürk’ü belki şu an yanımda olsa sevebilirim, sevmeyebilirim. O’na bir insan olarak baktığınız zaman Atatürk’ü seviyorum ama Atatürk’ün yaptıklarını, bize kattıklarına çok büyük saygı duyuyorum. Sonuçta O da bir insandı, insanüstü değildi. Gösterdiği özveri ve yaptığı şeyler için de bir sevgi duyuyorum. Bazı insanlar bunu abartıp Atatürk’e zarar veriyorlar, yanlış anlaşılmasına sebep oluyorlar. Atatürk’ün hangi şarkıları sevdiği, ne yemekten hoşlandığı umrumda değil açıkçası. Önemli olan kısmı yaptıkları ve düşünceleri, bu açıdan bakılmalı.

He is a role model. I cannot say that he is a perfect, unique, always right man but what he did are worth respecting and right. Still, it disturbs me that he is deified and looked upon by wishing that he would come back.¹⁰²

Derya and Umut prioritize the word “respect” over “love” for Atatürk. In my view, that mainly stems from the assumption that people treat Atatürk as a supernatural phenomenon especially out of their love rather than their respect. In this sense, it is the emotions such as love which lead people to do ‘excessive’ things.¹⁰³ İbrahim underlines that his association with Atatürk is solely on a rational level:

I am trying to understand the thoughts, actions of Atatürk and contribute something to myself from them but I do not adapt one-on-one. For instance, I do not smoke. What he did, the thoughts effect me. First of all, Atatürk’s point of view at events and what I admire the most is using his reason and logic in the right way to lead the events. Pure reason, pure logic, thought. That is what I take as an example from Atatürk.¹⁰⁴

So, Atatürk as a transcendent being is fiercely refused in this discourse. Derya and İbrahim stated that Atatürk as a human being has made mistakes but however, none of my informants could tell me one concrete mistake that Atatürk made in his life. In this sense, Elif who defines Atatürk as “the first man” in her life and Deniz who strongly disapproves supernaturalization of Atatürk answered my question about his mistakes in the same manner. Elif stated that “I do not know any mistakes but there absolutely is. After all, he is a human, too.”¹⁰⁵ while Derya stated “I do not think of anything to be specified as mistake right now but he must have made mistakes.

People make mistake”.¹⁰⁶ These statements show that although some of my

¹⁰² Rol model bir insan. Mükemmel, eşsiz, yaptığı her şeyi doğru bir insan diyemem ama yaptıklarına çok saygı duyulacak çok doğru şeyler. Ama o kadar da ilahlaştırıp tekrar gelse diye bakılması beni rahatsız ediyor.

¹⁰³ This latter view reproduces the old dichotomy in linking emotions with the irrational.

¹⁰⁴ Atatürk’ün yapmış olduğu şeyleri düşüncelerini algılamaya çalışıp kendime bir şeyler katıyorum ama motomot her şeyi benimsemiyorum. Mesela ben sigara içmiyorum. Neler yaptığı düşünce kısmı etkiliyor beni. Atatürk’ün öncelikle olaylara bakış açısı ve en çok beğendiğim aklını ve mantığını doğru şekilde kullanması ve olayları yönlendirmesi. Saf akıl, saf mantık, düşünce. Benim Atatürk’ten örnek aldığım budur.

¹⁰⁵ Hata bilmiyorum ama mutlaka vardır o da insan sonuçta

¹⁰⁶ Atatürk şunu yanlış yapmış diyebileceğim net bir şey yok aklımda ama mutlaka hataları olmuştur. İnsan hata yapar

informants accentuated the importance of knowing Atatürk's ideas rather than his image or every-day life, nevertheless, they still attribute some sort of transcendence to Atatürk.

Slavoj Žižek suggests that it is necessary for a hegemonic ideology to fail at totally 'capturing' its subjects in order to be operative. He argues that "all is not ideology; beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person"¹⁰⁷ is the form of ideology at its most practical efficacy because this failure is what allows the subject to maintain a safe distance between herself as a subject and the explicit ideals and prescriptions of the ideology. He calls this "ideological disidentification" through which the subjects voluntarily agree to follow one or other such arrangement by believing that, in doing so, they are expressing their free subjectivity. İbrahim told me about his readings on Atatürk:

When I read those memoirs, I saw that Atatürk has many human sides in addition to his leadership skills. For instance, he has human sides such as his calling out to the guard of Çankaya Mansion, "come on kid, let's wrestle". To be frank, I appreciate these human sides very much. In the end, he is a person who is full of life, who loves to live and who loves to enjoy life. (...) Atatürk is a person who knows how to enjoy, who knows how to enjoy life. He is identical with me in this respect. I mean, I am a person who loves to live even when I am very hopeless, no matter what happens. This side of him associates with me so much. You know, his enjoyment of life, my enjoyment of life. I love this side of him very much. I love the fact that he enjoys life.¹⁰⁸

By accentuating the "human side of Atatürk", they are actually accentuating their human side, too. "Being human" which is associated with more intimate sides of

¹⁰⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "The Empty Gesture", *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London and New York: Verso Press, 1997), p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ O anıları okuduğum zaman Atatürk'ün lider boyutunun yanında çok da insani yönleri var. Örneğin, Çankaya köşkünün muhafızıyla "hadi gel çocuk senle güreş turalım" demesi gibi insani yönleri var ve bu insani yönlerini ben açıkçası çok takdir ediyorum. Sonuçta hayat dolu bir insan, yaşamayı seven, yaşamdan keyif almayı seven bir insan. (...) Atatürk keyif almayı bilen bir insan, hayattan keyif almayı bilen bir insan. Bu yönüyle de benle özdeşik yani ben de ne olursa olsun ümitsiz olduğum zamanlarda bile yaşamayı çok seven bir insanım. Bu yönü de benle çok bağdaştırıyor. Hani O' nun da yaşam sevinci benim de yaşam sevincim. Bu yönünü çok seviyorum. Hayattan keyif almasını çok seviyorum.

Atatürk, from his daily habits to his weaknesses or mistakes,¹⁰⁹ operate in three ways. Firstly, this enables them to align their subjectivity with Atatürk at a more intimate and deeper level since he was a person who used to enjoy life, cry or get hurt just like them. This strengthens the libidinal bond by appealing to emotions which are considered to be non-ideological; yet it is ideology at its purest. Secondly, disidentification allows them to feel that they are performing themselves in being an Atatürkist. It allows them to think they are free subjects who have their own idea of Atatürk/ism and by performing this subject position, they are becoming ‘themselves’. In this context, Atatürkist identity as performed should be recognized as multiple and manifold in its singularity because no ‘performance’ is quite like the other. Each performance of a role or an identity alters it, for repetition always alters the repeated. Thirdly, by claiming to bond with Atatürk at a more rational level and distinguishing themselves from those who explicitly sublimate Atatürk, they can claim that they ‘know better’. For Žižek, ideology is manifest not in what we know but in what we do, in the practices and behaviours that we persist in repeating.¹¹⁰ So, although there is not much difference between the acts of the two types (sublimation vs rationalization of Atatürk) of Atatürkist subjectivity in the end, distancing oneself from the other makes them feel that they are doing ‘it’ correctly.

Love, Fear and Mourning: “Atatürk is Coming”

Love brings along the fear of losing the loved one. This fear was detectable in all of my interviews. Young people were complaining that people are day by day moving away from Atatürk’s ideas and principles which, for them, means that Atatürk is

¹⁰⁹ Esra Ozyurek, “Humanizing Atatürk”, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 107.

¹¹⁰ Jodi Dean, “Introduction”, *Žižek’s Politics*, (London: Routledge Press, 2006), p. 8.

being forgotten. In the interviews, forgetting Atatürk is synonymously used as losing Atatürk. One of the most repeated expression to define this fear was: “If you are going to destroy a country, you shall destroy the most important thing in that country”.¹¹¹ For instance, one of my informants, Ahmet, who used this expression stated:

If this person symbolizes your coming together, your freedom and if he lies at the basis of these, then we must protect him because what is done to destroy a country is this: What is most respected, adopted and leading is attacked. Unfortunately, that is what is being done right now.¹¹²

The most feared end is the destruction of the country which is associated with destruction of Atatürk. Sara Ahmed states:

Fear is that which keeps alive the fantasy of love as the preservation of life, but paradoxically only by announcing the possibility of death... Rather than fear getting in the way of love, we can see that fear allows the subject to get closer to the loved object, through the forming of a home or enclosure.¹¹³

The fear which is escalated by the threatening discourse which claims that Turkey will either divide in itself or become a Shariah rule led people to hold onto Atatürk which is turned into the signifier of the country’s ‘safety’ and well-being. This way, they were preserving the familiarity of the home (nation) by getting closer to the loved object that is Atatürk. In the interviews, the traces of this discourse in which love and fear have a transitive relation can easily be seen by combining love for Atatürk with the love for the nation:

First of all, Atatürk is a patriot. To me, Atatürk is a great patriot and I approve of his principles and the revolutions he made. People may disagree but they need to see that he did everything for the nation and in this way Atatürk as a patriot should take place

¹¹¹ “Bir ülkeyi yıkmak istiyorsan ilk önce o ülkedeki en önemli olan şeyi yıkacaksın”.

¹¹² Eğer ki bu insan temelde sizin bir araya gelişinizi özgürlüğünüzü simgeliyorsa ve bunun temelinde yatıyorsa O’nu korumalıyız çünkü bir ülkeyi yıkmak için şu yapılır: Orada en çok saygı duyulan, benimsenen, yol gösteren şey neyse ona saldırılır. Maalesef bu yapılıyor.

¹¹³ Sara Ahmed, “The Affective Politics of Fear”, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 68.

in everyone's mind. (...) I love him because he is a patriot. You have to love him because he loved his nation even if you think he did wrong. I love him both because I think that he did right and that he loved his nation.¹¹⁴

Love for Atatürk becomes equivalent to love for one's nation. It can further be argued that, in these statements, love for Atatürk becomes an ultimate condition for national love. Love for the nation is translated as an imperative to love Atatürk which becomes the foundation of a community in perfect harmony. The language of threat was most clearly shown in the famous advertising campaign of *Cumhuriyet*: "Are you aware of the danger?". This slogan formed as a question in the ad implied that Islamists (the AKP) are in power and that they will slowly turn this country into a Shariah regime. Ahmed states:

The language of fear involves the intensification of 'threats', which works to create a distinction between those who are 'under threat' and those who threaten. Fear is an effect of this process, rather than its origin.¹¹⁵

Following this line of thought, fear produces the imagined 'us' (Atatürkists) as aligned against the imagined 'them' (Islamists). Atatürk became the ultimate symbol of this struggle for Atatürkists. Nevertheless, the AKP officials did not challenge this dichotomy and refuse the symbolism of Atatürk. On the contrary, they chose to claim that they were actually Atatürkists. On the side of Atatürkists, however, the nation/home is Atatürk's/ours¹¹⁶ against 'them'. This understanding is demonstrated clearly by the next advertising campaign of *Cumhuriyet* of which slogan was: "Claim your Republic". This phrase means that Atatürkists are the owner of the Republic as

¹¹⁴ Atatürk bir vatansever her şeyden önce. Benim için Atatürk büyük bir vatansever ve ben yaptığım ilke ve devrimleri çok yerinde buluyorum. İnsanlar buna katılmayabilir ama her şeyi vatani için yaptığımı görmesi lazım ve bu yönüyle herkesin kafasında vatansever Atatürk'ün oturmuş olması lazım. (...) Vatansever olduğu için sevgi duyuyorum. Yanlış yaptığımı düşünüyorsanız bile vatani sevdiği için Atatürk'ü sevmeniz gerekir. Ben hem doğru yaptığımı düşünüyorum hem de vatani sevdiği için seviyorum.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ The phrase "Atatürk's Turkey" is a very commonly used term to describe Atatürkists' being the full citizens whereas others such as Kurds or Armenians or Islamists are not, since they are not the owners/normative citizens of the country as the real Atatürkists.

inheritors of Atatürk and that they should claim what is rightfully theirs and invaded by ‘others’.

Politically, such a claim carries within itself a complicated and dangerous aspect.

First of all, this is a mighty economy of power that dominates ‘within’ the subjects. It indicates a pattern of internalization of authority par excellence. It is a form of power that emanates from inside of each subject and governs them from within. The power is usually something as coming from outside but in this way it is experienced as part of one’s individuality. The rule which was lived as force now operates without force. Secondly, this internalization of authority also causes the subjects to appropriate the sovereignty attached to that authority. That is to say, the subjects who are engaged with this economy of power, by internalizing the authority, also earn the right to make a claim on the realm of sovereignty that comes along with their sublimated position. One wide-spread manifestation of this can be observed in the widely used discourse of ‘real/essential citizen’ (*asli vatandaş*). For instance, a famous and leading Atatürkist, Türkan Saylan stated in the Republican Rally organized in İzmir in 2007:

We are the real ones. Everybody needs to know that. We are the real ones and we have representatives. We elected or others did. We respect them. They got the majority of the votes. Consequently, it is not possible for something that we don’t want to happen in Turkey. It happens. “I did it, so, it happened”. What did Menderes say? “If I put a piece of wood there, it becomes a parliament member. If you like, we even bring Shariah”. These are things that have happened in the past. What happened in the end? What happened to them? What happened to Turkey?¹¹⁷

I specifically asked my informants, in the interviews, what they thought about this statement which is obviously discriminatory by claiming that Atatürkists are the superior citizens whose approval is needed for anything to happen in Turkey. Elif described the participants of Republican Rallies as follows:

¹¹⁷ <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2718534>

I thought that there were people like Atatürk, there were people like me. It was an amazing feeling. At that moment, those people were me, those people were Mustafa Kemal. They were Republican individuals. They were aware of the danger. (...) We are on the path of Mustafa Kemal. We are claiming his revolutions, the indivisible unity of the homeland. We are not cheering for a military coup. We defend what we believe in. This country is Mustafa Kemal's country, here is Atatürk's Turkey and it will stay that way forever. We will work to keep it that way. I guess that is what Türkan Saylan had said. I mean, she says that this is our reason of existence, this is what we are trying to do.¹¹⁸

Phrases like "People like me, people like Atatürk" and definitions such as "Republican individuals" imply that there is a republican subjectivity which is normal, ordinary and normative and another non-Republican subjectivity which abnormal, extraordinary and nonnormative. This subjectivity by hegemonizing itself as the normative subjectivity excludes all other forms of subjectivities as pathological. Derya defended Saylan's expression as follows:

The Turkish Republic which is founded by Mustafa Kemal will prevail on the way that is assigned by Mustafa Kemal. That is what she means when she says "We are the real ones". I mean, yes, it belongs to real Atatürkists.¹¹⁹

This discourse endows the imagined Republican subjectivity with citizenship rights, while 'others' are deprived of even their basic citizenship rights such as the use of language, right to education, etc. Actually this is an example of the appropriation of sovereignty attached to 'Atatürk' passing onto Atatürkists. I will mention only one of Atatürk's sayings that approves of this kind of inheritance of sovereignty:

I don't leave any dogma or cliché to you. What I leave for you is science and reason. If those who would like to follow me adopt the guidance of science and reason then they will be my spiritual inheritors.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Atatürk gibi, benim gibi insanlar da varmış dedim. İnanılmaz bir histi. O anda o insanlar bendim, o insanlar Mustafa Kemal'di. Cumhuriyet bireyleriydi. Tehlikenin farkındaydı. (...) Biz Mustafa Kemal'in yolundayız. O'nun devrimlerine, vatanın bölünmez bütünlüğüne sahip çıkıyoruz. Biz darbe şaşakçılığı yapmıyoruz. Biz inandığımız şeyi savunuyoruz. Bu ülke Mustafa Kemal'in ülkesi, burası Atatürk Türkiye'si ve sonsuza kadar da öyle kalacak. Böyle kalması için çalışacağız. Türkan Saylan sanırım bunu söylemiştir. Yani varoluş sebebimiz bu, bunun için çalışıyoruz diyor.

¹¹⁹ Mustafa Kemal'in kurduğu Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ilelebet Mustafa Kemal'in işaret ettiği yolda ilerleyecek. "Sahibi asıl biziz" derken bunu kastediyor. Yani evet, gerçek Atatürkçülerdir.

This saying combines the two features that sustain the undecidability of Atatürk and the characteristics of becoming the inheritors of his sovereignty. The absence of any dogma implies the absence of any function regarding content. This leads to Atatürk's becoming an empty signifier. Also, the phrase "manevi mirasçı" was later developed for those who were the 'real' Atatürkists and therefore should have a greater say on what should be done with the country than other citizens who could not be considered as inheritors of this sovereignty since they were not 'fit' to be Atatürkist. This saying, thus, provides the ground for the discourse of citizenship to work as a way of policing and protecting the boundaries of the normative and ordinary national subject.

The reason why such a discriminative discourse of "real Atatürkists" is fiercely defended might be because of the intensity of the fear. After all, "fear is all the more frightening given the potential loss of the object that it anticipates."¹²¹ All my informants were afraid at varying degrees that Atatürk would be forgotten in the future and therefore would be 'lost' completely. Identification with Atatürk is closely related to this mournful commitment that stems from these young people's love for Atatürk.

Love is crucial to how individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal, an alignment that relies on the existence of others who have failed that ideal."¹²²

In this sense, love as a means of identifying with Atatürk brings Atatürkist young people together. The past generations were not able to realize Atatürk's ideals, and

¹²⁰ Ben, manevi miras olarak hiçbir nass-ı katı, hiçbir doğma, hiçbir donmuş ve kalıplaşmış kural bırakmıyorum. Benim manevi mirasım ilim ve akıldır. Benden sonra, beni benimsemek isteyenler, bu temel mihver üzerinde akıl ve ilmin rehberliğini kabul ederlerse, manevi mirasçılarım olurlar.

¹²¹ Sara Ahmed, "The Affective Politics of Fear", *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 69.

¹²² Sara Ahmed, "In The Name of Love", *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 124.

young Atatürkists who are devoted to him can do so by identifying with him not only mentally but emotionally. For instance, Derya, one of the Turkish Youth Unity members, explains their slogan “Atatürk is coming” as follows:

“Atatürk is coming” because we are all Atatürk. I mean it is a slogan that symbolizes being like Atatürk, carrying Atatürk’s ideas, giving his struggle and a walk that combines all of these.¹²³

Mourning is not only about feeling sorry for one’s loss but it is also an attempt to find out “what is lost” through the one who is lost. In a sense, it is not to be afraid of asking “What is it that I have lost in the deceased?”¹²⁴ In the interviews, I came across the fact that this question is not really asked by Atatürkists. Rather, they usually told me how they wanted to actualize Atatürk through themselves. I think that this also has to do with their fear of losing Atatürk in the ‘real’ sense of the word:

When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly.¹²⁵

“The impulse to banish grieving” brings about the same connotations as “melancholia” in which the lack is confused with loss or “impossible mourning” which would have to fail in order to succeed. Through impossible mourning, Atatürk is reconstructed as being ‘here’ and beyond by being transformed to a greater degree. That is why he does not cease to belong to this world., in line with impossible mourning,

In the period of mourning for the deceased, people take on ritual statuses according to which the various duties of mourning assigned.¹²⁶

¹²³ “Atatürk geliyor” çünkü biz hepimiz Atatürk’üz. Yani Atatürk gibi olmak Atatürk’ün fikirlerini taşımak, onun mücadelesini vermek ve o yürüyüşü simgeleyen bir slogan o.

¹²⁴ Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, (London and New York: Verso Press, 2004), p. 45.

¹²⁵ Ibid, pp. 29-30.

¹²⁶ Arnold van Gennep, “Funerals”, *The Rites of Passage*, (London: Routledge Press, 1966), p. 146.

In this sense, Atatürkists produce ‘metaphorical bodies’ for Atatürk as a result of the ‘ritual status’ they assign to themselves and attempt to revive him through their existence. Sara Ahmed states that:

The loss of the object (of love) is compensated for by ‘taking on’ the quality of the object. Mourning and grief become an expression of love; love announces itself most passionately when faced with the loss of the object.

Faced with the loss of the object of love that is Atatürk, Atatürkists reacted by ‘taking on’ what they thought to be the qualities of the object as a necessity of the process of identification. Thus, for Ahmet:

We are all Atatürk. We are not, I wish we were. I mean, in fact, we must all be Atatürk. We would not be like this today if we thought like him and became him. I agree with the slogan but unfortunately, it has no correspondance in practice. (...) For instance, I can take Atatürk’s place, another person can. In the end, why not? Why would it not be possible? There is no such thing as impossibility, I wish everyone tried. Someone might succeed. I mean someone may come closer to succession, even that would be very beneficent.

Do you think that you are like Atatürk?

I am not in the exact sense of the word but I try to be. Frankly, whenever you thought that you are fully like him, you would be mistaken.¹²⁷

A healthy “work of mourning” that is possible is considered as an infidelity to Atatürk because his absence must always be remembered to render him present by Atatürkists. In this context, “being Atatürk” is considered as the sine qua non duty of Atatürkists who take on ritual statuses as a result of their impossible mourning. It is a

¹²⁷ Hepimiz Atatürk’üz. Değiliz, keşke olsak. Yani aslında hepimiz Atatürk olmalıyız. Onun gibi düşünüp öyle olsak bugün bu halde olmayız. Slogana katılıyorum ama eyleme geçmiyor maalesef. (...) Ben Atatürk’ün yerini alabilirim mesela başkası alabilir sonuçta neden olmasın? Neden yapılmasın? Bunun imkansızlığı gibi bir şey yok keşke herkes denese. Birileri başarabilir yani başarmaya yaklaşır, bu bile çok büyük yarar sağlar.

Atatürk gibi olduğunu düşünüyor musun?

Tam anlamıyla değilim ama olmaya çalışıyorum. Açıkçası ne zaman tam olduğunuzu düşündüğünüzde hataya düşmüş oluyorsunuz.

never ending process since impossible mourning is where success fails: “Açıkçası ne zaman tam olduğunuzu düşündüğünüzde hataya düşmüş oluyorsunuz.”

Love has an intimate relation to grief not only through how the subject responds to the lost object, but also by what losses get admitted as losses in the first place.¹²⁸

When I asked my informants about how the death of Atatürk makes them feel, they usually used the metaphor of “becoming orphans as a nation”¹²⁹: For instance Erol stated:

While talking about Atatürk, why is it that an 80 year old figure is still so alive? There is such a thing that we do not understand. It is as if he is the fifth member of a family of four or as if he is in your stirpes, your family. When it is said that “this nation became orphan”, in every 10th of November, it is as if I am losing a loved one again, as if he is still here, as if he still exists. I do not know if making him so alive and present is because of our structure and traditions as Turks. (...) I mean I think it is normal that an 80 year old figure to live among us is normal. He is like a member of the family whose existence is not debatable, is not necessary to debate. I see this more often in villages, because I am myself a villager.¹³⁰

This allegory of “orphanage” is so heavily loaded with emotions for my informants who became really sad while answering this question. I sometimes felt that they were looking at me whether I am sharing their sorrow. Surprisingly, I became sad with them because I could see that there is a mournful person in front of me and personal differences did not matter to each of us at that particular moments. In those moments,

I think I grasped the uniting power of mourning better. For instance, Nihal only said

¹²⁸ Sara Ahmed, “In The Name of Love”, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 130.

¹²⁹ “Millet olarak öksüz kaldık”.

¹³⁰ Atatürk’ten bahsederken neden hala 80 yıllık bir figür hala bu kadar canlı? Böyle bir şey var anlamadığımız. Dört kişilik ailede bir beşinci ya da sülalenin ailenin içinde varmış gibi. “Bu vatan öksüz kaldı” dediğinde 10 Kasımlarda bir yakınımı yeniden kaybediyormuşum gibi, sanki hala burada, sanki hala var. Bilmiyorum bu bizim Türk olarak gelenek olarak yapımızda mı var bu kadar yaşatmak, var etmek. (...) Yani 80 yıllık bir figürün içimizde yaşaması bence normal. Ailenin bir bireyi gibi varlığı tartışılmayan, tartışmaya gerek duyulmayan. Köylerde bunu daha da çok görüyorum, kendimde köylü olduğum için. Belli meydanlarda Atatürk’ün resmi vardır. Bundan doğal bir şey yoktur. Hatta Atatürk resmi görmeyince şöyle bir bakıyorsunuz etrafınızda o kadar müthiş bir alışkanlık ki. Hani bir devrim olduğunu Atatürk’ün silindiğini düşünün yani öksüz kalmak gibi hissedilmesi mesela çok normal. Güzel Atatürk resimlerini görmek, orada var olduğunu bilmek daha başka bir güven veriyor.

“We became orphans” and then her eyes filled with tears and there was a very long pause in which I did not really know what to do.

“We became orphans as a nation” was a commonly used phrase in order to express grief. I find this choice of word interesting because orphanage is the name given to the loss of the mother or sometimes to the loss of both parents. At this point, I should also mention that on the day when Atatürk’s surname is approved by the Parliament, the national radio speaker ‘mistakenly’ announced this surname as “Anaturk”. This was an incident after which a regulation forbidding all uses except Atatürk was passed.¹³¹ When there is a word such as *yetim* which refers to the loss of the father, I find it worth thinking why this certain word that usually refers to the loss of the mother and father is chosen and how come these young people feel such a deeply mournful commitment to Atatürk that is comparable with the loss of their most loved ones. I believe that memory is the key word here because it is a significant aspect of the process of dying, mourning and grief.¹³² Mourning after Atatürk which is a central figure in the construction of national memory is realized by ritualized social practices that mobilize domains of material objects, visual images, slogans, etc. Next chapter will deal with the construction of national memory which is a form of mythologization that enable the conditions of existence that lead to “the presence of Atatürk’s absence”. In addition, I will try to show how images of Atatürk, especially his photographs, effect the personal states of mourning.

¹³¹ Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, “Transformation into Immortal Atatürk”, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 134.

¹³² Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer L. Hockney, “Introduction”, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (New York: Berg Press, 2001), p. 1.

CHAPTER 4
IMPOSSIBLE MOURNING AND MEMORY:
MYTHOLOGIZATION OF ATATÜRK

*King is a Name of Continuance, which shall always endure
as the Head and Governor of the People as long as the People continue,
and in this Name the King never dies.*¹³³

The word fantasy derives through Latin from the Greek term of which meaning is to ‘make visible’. However, it does not refer to making things that cannot be seen with a ‘naked eye’ visible. Rather, “fantasy as a term has come to mean the making visible, present, of what isn’t there, of what can never be directly seen”.¹³⁴ In this sense, fantasy ‘works’ to create the illusion of something that does not exist. So, what is always-already absent becomes present through fantasy. The basis of fantasy is not the achievement of the desired object, rather, it is the setting out of desire. Thus, the pleasure in fantasy lies not in reaching the object of desire but the ‘mise-en-scene’ of desire.

¹³³ Ernst Kantorowicz, “The Problem: Plowden’s Reports”, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 23.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Cowie, “Fantasia”, in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 357.

Fantasy is the support of desire, it is not the object that is the support of desire, it is not the object that is the support of desire. The subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever-more complex signifying ensemble. This is apparent enough in the form of the scenario it assumes, in which the subject, more or less recognizable, is somewhere, split, divided, generally double, in his relation to the object, which usually does not show its true face either.¹³⁵

“If only ‘they’ did not exist, life would be perfect and society would be in complete harmony” is the basic underlying claim of any sort of racism. For instance, the subject of racism in Nazi Germany was ‘the jew’ which is a fantasy figure onto whom all the things that were considered as evil in that society were attributed. The fantasy, here, is the illusion that a perfect and harmonious society is possible in the first place. It is this illusion that led to the extermination of ‘jews’ since that is what it takes to make Germany ‘one harmonious nation’. In this context, the subject of racism conceals the impossibility of a perfect society and therefore making such an impossibility (absent) seem possible (present) by embodying ‘the lack’ of society.¹³⁶ In the case of Atatürkism, although the fantasy of a complete society remains the same, I will claim that there is a reverse setting out of desire with respect to racism. In Atatürkist fantasy, the embodiment of the completeness of society is represented by Atatürk as a signifier. Everyone who challenges this signifier is seen as posing a threat to the completeness of society. In this context, what should be done to sustain the ‘completeness’ of society is to ‘exterminate’ non-Atatürkists by ‘keeping Atatürk alive’ as a fantasy of the state. By ‘alive’, I refer to a field of sovereignty where less valuable lives are distinguished from the valuable ones in order to keep the society in harmony. Atatürk is thus considered as the leader with whom the Golden Age¹³⁷ of

¹³⁵ Jacques Lacan, “The Agency of The Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud”, *Ecrits: A Selection*, (London: Routledge Press, 1989), p. 185.

¹³⁶ As I have explained in Chapter I, society is always and already divided regarding the various incommensurable differences. In this sense, there is no such thing as a ‘complete society’; this argument is crystallized with the well-known motto: “Society does not exist”.

¹³⁷ In the historic and cultural memory of all nations there is an image of a “Golden Age”. Such interpretations of a historical process are inherent in all utopian views about a ‘complete society’ are characteristic.

the Turkish Republic, in which the society became ‘complete’, begins and ends. Yet, he is dead. The nostalgia for such a Golden Age is sustained by a form of mourning in which his name becomes a medium through which a certain field of sovereignty continues to exist. As mentioned in Chapter I, Atatürkists, as melancholic subjects who confuse loss with lack, hold on to Atatürk as a signifier that represents a utopian fantasy world which used to exist when he was alive and which ceased to exist with his death. That is why they are trying to enact ‘the presence of Atatürk’s absence’ with the hope of enacting a fantasy world that never existed. Žižek describes this attitude of the melancholic subject as follows:

Although denied access to the suprasensible domain of ideal symbolic forms, the melancholic still displays the metaphysical yearning for another absolute reality beyond our ordinary reality subjected to temporal decay and corruption; the only way out of this predicament is thus to take an ordinary, sensual material object and elevate it into the absolute. The melancholic subject thus elevates the object of his longing into an inconsistent composite of a corporeal absolute; however, since this object is subject to decay, one can possess it unconditionally only insofar as it is lost, in its loss.¹³⁸

Atatürk as The Spiritual Father: “If Atatürk were alive...”

When the Surname Law¹³⁹ was passed, Mustafa Kemal was given his surname by a special law. This surname is Atatürk which means “The Father/Ancestor of Turks”. This is a clear example of the familial citizenship that tries to create bonds between citizens as if they were members of the same family who are governed by their common father who is the owner of the house (state): Atatürk. Contrary to a repressive form of power that forbids and punishes through the use of force or violence, “modern productive power” in the Foucauldian sense, governs through

¹³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Melancholy and The Act”, *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): p. 660.

¹³⁹ This law annulled the former forms of social addressing and required citizens to adopt and use last names.

naming and determining the truth of its meaning.¹⁴⁰ In this context, naming Mustafa Kemal as “Father/Ancestor of Turks” brings about certain presuppositions.

There are many instances that show that the hegemonic discourse of today’s Turkey is deeply influenced by the common view that sees and accepts Atatürk as the Father/Ancestor of the nation. This is a view which regulates not only social, but also individual conduct of conduct. A quick search via internet can provide many arguments starting with the phrase: “I am an Atatürk child...” as an implication of how the father discourse regulates the conduct of conduct. For example, in an interview, the wife of one of the last Ottoman princes, Zeynep Osman defends her in-between position (traditional Ottoman past vs modern/secular Turkish Republic) in the following way:

I am an Atatürk child. I completed a major part of my education in İstanbul. I was raised with Atatürk principles and love.¹⁴¹

This argument is also used when people are asked if they organize their life in relation to Islam in one way or another. For instance Deniz Seki, a famous Turkish singer, answers a question whether she has been religiously wed to her boy-friend: “*I do not see how they see me fit for such a thing. I am an Atatuk child*”.¹⁴² Examples can be multiplied but the point is Atatürk is a common reference point for defending not only political but also personal positions. The act of reiterating the statement “I am an Atatürk child”, independent of the age of the speaker, reproduces and consolidates an Atatürkist subjectivity as a constructed identity. The productive effects of regulatory power in constructing subjectivities should not be missed since

¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “Power and Truth”, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 201.

¹⁴¹ “Ben Atatürk çocuğuyum. Eğitimimin büyük kısmını İstanbul'da yaptım. Atatürk ilkeleri ve sevgisiyle büyüdüm.” From an interview by Güneri Civaoglu with Prenses Zeynep: “Siyasete Evet”, *Milliyet*, September 2003.

¹⁴² “Böyle bir şeyi bana nasıl yakıştırırlar anlamıyorum. Ben Atatürk çocuğuyum”. (September, 2007), <http://www.ensonhaber.com/Magazin/80517/ben-Ataturk-cocuguyum.html>

they are realized through the regulatory norms which “stabilize over time to produce the effect of boundary”.¹⁴³ Following this line of thought, it can be said that treating the norm as given presupposes and consolidates the subject position which is dependent on a prior field of performatives in the sense that “what can be said” is dependent on “what has been said”. This way, the force of regulatory power accumulates through the repetition of a prior authoritative set of practices.¹⁴⁴ Power operates through the control of the imaginaries of its subjects and their practices, both by defining the terms in which these imaginaries can be articulated, and through the production of those subjects who would for themselves assume and perform these imaginaries. This points to another Foucauldian concept that of “governmentality”, which is about the operation of modern productive power as the “conduct of conduct” through techniques of government that work through the governed. Foucault states that:

“Government” did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed- the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. (...) To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action for others.¹⁴⁵

As mentioned before, familial citizenship provides the point at which the social and the political intersect and exist synchronically which strengthens the effects of the nationalist discourse since it introduces every-day conduct into politics. The manifestations of this imaginary political discourse that regulates the conduct of conduct can also frequently be seen in the political discourses of leaders. Turkish politicians, especially when they are struggling to prove their point in a situation of

¹⁴³ Judith Butler, “Introduction”, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 227.

¹⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 217.

disagreement, claim that Atatürk would have been pleased by their policies if he were alive. So, in a caricaturized form, they present themselves as children fighting to get their father's approval.

The CHP does not usually have to stress its Atatürkist credentials because Mustafa Kemal founded it and today it is known and called as 'Atatürk's party'. But if there is a statement that challenges their politics, they underline their privileged position in Turkish history. For instance, after the last attacks of the Turkish Army on the camps of the Kurdistan Worker's Party in Iraq, the CHP openly criticized the army for withdrawing the troops back to Turkey very quickly. The Chief of Staff criticized the CHP in a very harsh manner. Then, the Vice President of the CHP, Mustafa Özyürek responded: "The Chief of Staff should not talk about CHP which is founded by Atatürk".¹⁴⁶

In addition, politicians from different backgrounds such as Baskın Oran, a leftist professor of politics, or, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, a nationalist theology professor, may also base their arguments on Atatürk to criticize the CHP. For instance Baskın Oran has stated that "If Atatürk were alive, he would have thrown the members of CHP out the window". Likewise, Yaşar Nuri, who was a former member of CHP, left the party stating that it was no longer Atatürk's party.

It is mostly the parties with an Islamic background that usually refer to Atatürk in their discourses. For instance, the President of the Welfare Party (RP) which was closed by the republican juristocracy, Necmettin Erbakan has stated that "If Atatürk were alive, he might have joined the Welfare Party". The President of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is politically more moderate than the RP but which, nevertheless, had to deal with a closure case opened by the republican

¹⁴⁶ "Genel Kurmay Atatürk'ün kurduğu CHP hakkında konuşmasın". <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2621659>

juristocracy, Tayyip Erdoğan has questioned the CHP's Atatürkist character in response to the criticisms offered by the CHP's president Deniz Baykal about the AKP's anti-Atatürkist policies with these words: "Mr. Baykal, you should stop doing politics by hiding behind Atatürk. We know very well about your past. We know very well how the mentality of the CHP has removed Atatürk's picture from the Turkish money right after his death. We know very well how you have removed his pictures from the state offices following his death. The CHP should firstly consider their own past and talk later".¹⁴⁷ A short time after this statement, Egemen Bağış who is the Vice President of the AKP, stated that:

They always scared people. Now they are scaring them with religion. We do not scare anyone but approach with love. They scared with Atatürk, too. Atatürk is our common heritage. I claim that we are the most Atatürkist party in Turkey.¹⁴⁸

Atatürk is also used for validating a political decision such as the issue of possible membership to The European Union which is harshly debated in Turkey. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Babacan stated that "If Atatürk were alive, he would have wanted us to join the EU".¹⁴⁹

Examples can be multiplied. The main point is the fact that 'Atatürk' presents a point of convergence, a common reference point which is always right and the best, in other words, an unquestionable position that represents the eternal rationality and morality in Turkey not only in political but also personal matters.

¹⁴⁷ "Sayın Baykal, artık Atatürk'ün arkasına saklanıp siyaset yapmayı bırak. Biz senin geçmişini iyi biliriz. CHP zihniyetinin Atatürk'ün vefatından hemen sonra resimlerini Türk parasından, devlet dairelerinden nasıl çıkardığını iyi biliriz. CHP, geçmişindeki bu kara lekeleri silip atsın da ondan sonra bunları konuşsun".

<http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2739672>

¹⁴⁸ "Zamanında hep korkuttular. Şimdi de dinle korkutuyorlar. Bizi korkutmuyor, sevgi ile yaklaşıyoruz. Atatürk'le de korkuttular. Atatürk ortak paydamız. Türkiye'nin en Atatürkçü partisiyiz, bunu iddia ediyorum." http://www.cnnturk.com/TURKIYE/haber_detay.asp?PID=318&haberID=460599

¹⁴⁹ "Atatürk yaşasaydı AB'ye girmemizi isterdi".

<http://www.haberx.com/n/1094728/babacan-Atatürk-yasasaydi-turkiyenin-ab.htm>

This implies that there is an imaginary form of spiritual guidance that is attributed to ‘Atatürk’, a fatherly guidance which is still very effective in producing and re-producing the political in Turkey. The main reason is not the fact that there is a naive commitment to Atatürk. It is because Atatürk is the empty signifier at the heart of the political in Turkey and following this claim, it can be stated that this emptiness is related to relations of power, not only to be able to construct a discursive formation, but also as a power-struggle between formations. For Ernesto Laclau, the empty, incomplete character of every discourse is the driving factor behind the political struggle which revolves around the attempt to fill the emptiness with a given content - to suture the rift of the discursive centre. Therefore, it is a struggle of identification, of obtaining a full/complete/positive/essential identity which is impossible and the impossibility of this possibility sustains the Atatürkist fantasy which posits Atatürk as a mythical signifier in which everyone is included and represented in ever-lasting harmony.

Invention of Origins: Atatürk as The Progenitor Father

The Golden Age which is assumed to exist is a myth which forms the basis of ‘Atatürk as the fantasy of the state’. Laplanche & Pontalis describe the similarity between the structures of fantasies and myths:

Like myths, they (fantasies) claim to provide a representation of, and a solution to, the major enigmas which confront the child. Whatever appears to the subject as something needing an explanation or theory, is dramatised as a moment of emergence, the beginning of history.. There is a convergence of theme, of structure, and no doubt also of function: through the indications furnished by the perceptual field, through the scenarios constructed, the varied quest for origins, we are offered in the field of fantasy, the origin of the subject himself.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality”, in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, (London: Methuen&Co. Press, 1988), p. 19.

In anthropological studies that explore Atatürk as a personal cult, the word Atatürk is usually translated as “the father of Turks”. However, the prior meaning of “ata” is “progenitor” which points to the origin. Since naming is not just the pure nominalistic game of attributing an empty name to a preconstituted subject, the reasons and consequences of choosing this surname to refer to the Leader of the country should be analyzed. Naming is defined as the discursive construction of the object itself. In this sense “the father/progenitor of Turks” is what constructs Atatürk discursively. According to anti-descriptivists, the process of naming the objects amounts to the very act of their constitution and their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic rearticulations. It is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object. That “surplus” in the object which stays the same in all possible worlds is “something in it more than itself”¹⁵¹, that is to say the Lacanian *objet petit a*: we search in vain for a positive consistency, that is, because it is just a positivisation of a void – of a discontinuity opened in reality by the emergence of the signifier.¹⁵²

As is known, with the establishment of the Turkish Republic, everything that belongs to the Ottoman-Islamic past was denied. So, giving Mustafa Kemal this surname means also to make him the progenitor of this country. In this sense, Atatürk as a name implies that Turks find their origin¹⁵³ in ‘his existence’ which is continued after his death by keeping the name ‘alive’.

¹⁵¹ This excess flowing out from Atatürk as a signifier leads to the sublimation of the signifier because it cannot be defined directly just like *objet petit a*'s invisibility unless it is looked at from a particular subjective perspective – or, in the words of one of Žižek's titles, by “looking awry”- it cannot be seen at all. A sort of transcendence is attributed to *it* by subjects. This is a process in which the active agency of subjects in constructing this transcendent sublime object is ignored. I will discuss this further below.

¹⁵² Slavoj Žižek, “Melancholy and The Act”, *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): p. 661.

¹⁵³ The word origin should be thought along with its connotations as the first existence/beginning/source/cause of anything.

Naming, which is an authoritarian act about meaning attribution, bears a direct relationship to power. Naming is an authoritarian illusion that negates the former presence of the thing that it names. It pre-supposes a starting point of the absence of everything, a position of “from nothing,” and is both about mastering and annihilating.¹⁵⁴

So, the attribution of origin as ‘the progenitor father’¹⁵⁵ through naming Mustafa Kemal as Atatürk is closely related to the power relations which point to this name as the source of the national character. This name forms the center of the mythologization of history in the nation-state building process. Roland Barthes states that the sign is used as a signifier but in order to make a myth, a new meaning is added which is the signified in order to make a myth. This new meaning is surely not added in an arbitrary fashion. Modern myths are created with a reason. They are created in order to perpetuate an idea of society that adheres to the current ideologies of the ruling class and its media. Atatürkism is not an exception.

The mythologization of history, also known as “the invention of history”, is an act of constructing the past which is directly related with the nation-state building process, political regimes, public memory and also the cultural life of societies during transition periods. This is quite a common phenomenon for nation-states and especially the contemporary post-colonial societies. The Turkish Republic has gone through the same process of reconstruction of the historical past of peoples and the state. The authorities strictly controlled the history writing process, in which “being Turk” was formulated and disseminated as the common collective identity in order to foster collective memories amongst the citizens of the new state. This authoritative process basically intended to justify and give coherence to the emerging modern state

¹⁵⁴ Elif Babül, *Belonging to Imbros: Citizenship and Sovereignty in the Turkish Republic*, (M.A. Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007), p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ It is also interesting to note that Atatürk’s sister Makbule could not have the same surname with his brother but her surname was “Atadan” which literally means “from the Father/Ancessor”. So, even his sister had a surname that means she originated from him.

by bringing groups of people together and strengthening their common sense of identity and social solidarity. The effect was to enable the ruling group and the leader to legitimize their right to power.

Following this line of thought, I refer to mythologization as a dynamic process of story-telling that justifies the historical narratives of the official discourse which is also modified in line with the power operations. In this context, Atatürk is turned into a myth by the generation of various discourses that meet the discursive hegemony of the time. That is to say, several narrativizations of Atatürk point to the character of narrativity as a mode of discourse that makes the negotiation and renegotiation of temporality possible. As I have discussed before, a discourse to be charged with so many different meanings that change within time, entails the formation of an empty signifier. The mythologization of Atatürk is the primary process that turns Atatürk into a mythical signifier and provides 'it' with this 'empty'ness:

The signifier of the myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other. As meaning, the signifier already postulates a reading, I grasp it through my eyes, it has a sensory reality (unlike the linguistic signifier, which is purely mental), there is a richness in it; the naming of the lion, the Negro's salute are credible wholes. As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history, that of the lion or that of the Negro: in the meaning, a signification is already built, and could very well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it and did not turn it suddenly into an empty, parasitical form. The meaning is *already* complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas decisions. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. There is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier... The meaning contained a whole system of values: a history, a geography, a morality, a zoology, a Literature. The form has put all this richness at a distance: its newly acquired penury call for a signification to fill it... It is this form which defines the myth.¹⁵⁶

So, Atatürk as a mythical signifier is emptied of content through this process of mythologization. The empty character of the name is maintained by rendering it

¹⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today", *Mythologies*, (London: Paladin Press, 1972), p. 110.

sacred as in any mythical figure. However, sacralization of the name also leads to the depoliticization of the name in line with Roland Barthes' famous definition: "Myth is depoliticized speech".¹⁵⁷ There is a tacit agreement upon the position of Atatürk as an unpolitical, neutral signifier. It is assumed to be so 'high' that it is exempt from 'worldly' things such as politics. This view is supported by Atatürkists because their most basic claim is that Atatürk should be a common reference point/value for every Turkish citizen.¹⁵⁸ However, people who are certainly not Atatürkists -but pretend to be- also support this tacit agreement because one has to submit to the Atatürkist hegemony in order to be 'included' in the political realm.¹⁵⁹

In the preface to the second edition of *Political Theology*, Carl Schmitt states that "any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision, irrespective of who decides and what reasons are advanced."¹⁶⁰ In this context, by exempting Atatürk as a signifier from politics, it actually becomes and maintains the central position in politics with much greater force because "fantasy has to remain 'implicit' in order to be operative".¹⁶¹ Atatürk is a political signifier which is neutralized or depoliticized in Schmitt's terms. However, Atatürk is political par excellence because there is a whole net of meanings that is attached to this signifier. For instance, the term "Atatürkist nationalism" in the constitution emphasizes an ideal form of society and, in addition, a system that comprises individuals' relations with each other. Atatürk is a signifier that is continually used to approve or deny, in short, to take positions in the political realm. Every sort of neutralization and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 111.

¹⁵⁸ This totalitarian point of view is also stated in several items of the current constitution.

¹⁵⁹ Although it is recently losing ground of legitimacy, Atatürkism is still the hegemonic discursive formation in Turkey.

¹⁶⁰ Carl Schmitt, "Introduction", *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Slavoj Žižek, "The Seven Veils of Fantasy", *The Plague of Fantasies*, (New York: Verso Press, 1997), p. 27.

depoliticization is always political. In this regard, a term, as long as it has the power to effect people, cannot be unpolitical. The character of being unpolitical attributed to Atatürk basically means nothing other than legitimizing a certain status-quo.¹⁶²

Because, depoliticization generally works by declaring someone/something as unpolitical in order to render the ostensibly unpolitical object as purely scientific or purely moral or purely aesthetic in order to gain a superior position over all kinds of debates or polemics.

Structural Nostalgia and The Naturalization of Myth

The construction of Atatürk as a mythical signifier is certainly grounded in the events that transpired during this decade but, particularly in response to an increasingly reactionary socio-political climate. After all, negotiating narratives of public memory is a 'presentist act' that reshapes the contemporary rather than the past inside the relations and structures of power.¹⁶³ A general nostalgia for the period of 1923-1938 has led to mythologization in both the generic and the Barthesian sense of the term. As is well-known, Roland Barthes wrote a series of essays in the mid-50s in which he analyzed various objects and forms of mass consumption-from wrestling to detergents to photography exhibitions-in order to reveal the way in which historically and culturally determined meanings become naturalized through what he called "mythical speech". As Barthes explained, "Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the

¹⁶² The situation is even more ironic because Atatürk himself has declared himself to be non-neutral. He has stated his siding with CHF after the establishment of the second political party in Turkish political history: "Her ikinizin benim nazarımda bir babanın iki evladından farkınız yoktur. Reiscumhur oldukça her ikinize eşit muamele edeceğimden şüpheniz olmasın. Fakat bu iyi anlaşılmalı. Ben her iki taraftan da değilim yahut tarafsız değilim. Ben bir tarafım. Fırkam Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası'dır."

¹⁶³ Esra Özyürek, "Kemalist and Islamist Versions of the Early Republic, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 154.

'natural'.¹⁶⁴ Atatürkism provides its followers with a mythical speech in which the times when Atatürk was ruling and therefore his person is turned into a mythical figure who is “naturally” omnipotent and omnipresent. The traces of this process of naturalization are reflected in several ways in the interviews. Erol believes that Atatürkism is ‘created by this soil’:

People have understood that politics could not be done without Atatürk. In Turkey, Atatürk must be a reference. This is very normal now. In the party program if you do not declare “I will go through Atatürk’s way”, you will stop, when you stop you become a marginal party. People have learnt or understood that without Atatürk there is no politics. If you want to be a mass party, the situation is as such. It is easy to integrate into it without rejecting it since Atatürkism does not have defined borders, it is easy to integrate to it, because it is an ideology that is created by this soil.¹⁶⁵

The ultimate success of a process of mythologization lies in its power of persuasion that the myth exists by nature. Its existence is a result of common sense and therefore does not require any sort of questioning. Atatürkism as perceived as an ideology created by this soil is a metaphor used to reflect the naturalization of Atatürk as a mythical signifier. Barthes explains this process as follows:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. (...) In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions... Things appear to mean something by themselves...¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang Press, 1977), p. 165.

¹⁶⁵ İnsanlar siyasetin artık Atatürk’süz siyaset yapılamayacağını anladılar. Türkiye’de Atatürk’e referans göstermek zorundasın. Çok normal bir şey artık. Bir partinin programında “Atatürk’ün yolundan gideceğim” demezseniz duruyorsun, öyle olmayınca marjinal bir parti oluyorsunuz. İnsanlar şunu öğrendi mi, edindi mi diyeyim: Atatürk’süz Türkiye’de siyaset yok. Kitle partisi olmak istiyorsan böyle. Reddetmeden ona entegre olarak içinden giderek, entegre olması da kolay çünkü keskin çizgileri yok Atatürkçülüğün, entegre olması kolay çünkü bu toprakların yarattığı bir ideoloji.

¹⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today”, *Mythologies*, (London: Paladin Press, 1972), p. 109.

Erol, in the above statement, is also very comfortable with the fact everyone has to articulate their view with Atatürk if they want to ‘exist’ or be legitimate. He does not seem to be bothered at all because he accepts this as given, natural, common sense. Barthes states that “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.”¹⁶⁷ Likewise, Derya states that:

If Galatasaray as well says that they are an Atatürkist club, if they need this, it means that in Turkey, to be an Atatürkist is to be legitimate, that is to say, in order for you to demonstrate that you are legitimate you or your institution must be Atatürkist. We have come to this point.¹⁶⁸

This is an understanding that retaining a mythologized view of this period that stymies the social and political action that is necessary to continue working for what is nostalgically believed to have already been achieved. That is why mythologization and nostalgia are closely connected because nostalgia becomes a means of maintaining a collective sense of socio-historic continuity and solidarity for Atatürkists. As is known, memory practices and experiences shift over time as perceptions of the past are reworked in the context of the present and in anticipation of the future.¹⁶⁹

The point of departure for Atatürkists’ resistance to hegemonic influence (both by the AKP and by external forces such as the USA or the EU) and their defence against anxieties caused by what they perceive as a threat is their sharpened belief in the perfection of Turkey both as a society and state in ‘those times’. They assemble shared story lines and constitute a collective identity based on this narrative of a

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 109.

¹⁶⁸ Galatasaray bile biz Atatürkçü bir kulübüz diyorsa, buna ihtiyaç duyuyorsa demek ki Türkiye’de Atatürkçü olmak meşru olmak anlamına geliyor yani meşruluğunu kanıtlamak için senin veya kurumunun Atatürkçü olması gerekiyor. Bu noktaya geldik.

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer L. Hockney, “Introduction”, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (New York: Berg Press, 2001), p. 3.

Golden Age which is always presented with its links with the-here-and-now. Michael Herzfeld defines “structural nostalgia” as the means through which the peoples of a nation use images of lost perfection to try to resolve the tension between the rhetoric of collective self-presentation, and the embarrassment of collective self-knowledge. He adds that structural nostalgia has a purity-based logic in the form of longing for a perfect time.¹⁷⁰ My informants stated their belief in not only the perfection of the political developments in Atatürk’s time but also in society which is usually imagined to be in ‘unbreakable’ harmony. For instance, Hüseyin stated:

When Atatürk establish a unity, he went beyond all of them, he knocked them down and tried to create an enviroment of tolarance. In fact, Latife Hanım did cover her hair. The system, that is, the one which flattered them was again emperialist powers. He tried to tell and make them conscious of his revolutions. He did not exclude them. Because we did not live this period, there was not a big chaos atmosphere. Everybody were at work, with or without their headscarfs. There was a peacuffull atmosphere.¹⁷¹

Only one of my informants, Derya, stated that he does not really know in what state present-day society is:

I do not know the public’s condition. I mean, it is supposed to be viewed sociologically. There might have been some rebillions for example, however people were being educated. For instance, there were Village Institutes. All in all, bringing science and art to the backward regions of this period provide that consistency, but if you go to an Anatolian village, villagers will wellcome you for days. That is to say, there is still unity. There is (unity) less in the centers of the cities, but degeneration is threatening it.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Michael Herzfeld, “Structural Nostalgia: Time and the Oath in the Mountain Villages of Crete”, *Cultural Intimacy: social poetics in the nation-state*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1997), p. 109.

¹⁷¹ Birlik beraberliği sağlarken Atatürk hepsini aştı, hepsini devirdi ve hoşgörü ortamı yaratmaya çalıştı. Sonuçta Latife Hanım’ın da başı kapalıydı. Sistem yani onları pohpohlayan yine emperyalist güçlerdi. Anlatmaya, bilinçlendirmeye çalıştı. Dışlamadı. O dönemi çok fazla yaşamadığımız için çok büyük bir kaos ortamı yoktu. Herkes işinde gücündeydi, başörtülüyle başörtüsüzüyle. Gayet de huzurlu bir ortam vardı yani.

¹⁷² Halkın durumunu bilemiyorum. Yani sosyolojik olarak bakmak lazım o döneme. Bazı isyanlar olmuş olabilir mesela ama halk eğitiliyordu. Köy enstitüleri vardı mesela. Sonuçta o dönemin geri kalmış bölgelerine eğitim sanat götürmek o uyumu sağlar ama bugün hala bir Anadolu köyüne gidin günlerce sizi ağırlayabilirler. Yani o birliktelik hala var. Bunlar şehir merkezinde az, var ama yozlaşma tehdit ediyor.

Then he continued by complaining about the increasing state of degeneration the people are in:

We are still a nation and we know living together but there is a degeneration. Turkey does not develop well and accurately. When you go to İstiklal Street, you see human types who do not belong to our culture. Now, we can not describe it as freedom or democracy. Though there are some liberals, our culture is not this. Punks for instance... I do not like this sort of things but there is an alienation from our own culture. His hair is very weird ... that is to say, think that people come to visit his parents, for instance this subject is talked, where is the place of this juvenile in there? Has that guy come from the culture of his family? No of course, be it tv programmes or competitions, this “bar/cafe culture” has created this sort of youth. There is nothing like this neither in Islam nor in Turkishness. I observe the effects of such degeneration in the people, compared to the first times.¹⁷³

In this context, there is a structural nostalgia with regard to the mythologization of Atatürk in Turkey. According to this, the times under his rule are considered perfect but lost because of his death. By remembering his death and this loss, the hope (fantasy) of returning or at least reviving the perfection of those times is not only kept ‘alive’ but also presented as the ultimate truth since mourning after Atatürk and yearning for him is the legitimate public discourse. This public mourning and commemoration reproduces the perception that ‘now’ is not and will not be as good as ‘then’, therefore, Turkey is ‘by nature’ in a constant state of *tumultus* which is open to the *iustitium*. That is not to say that Turkey went through all the states of exception because people were mourning after Atatürk but rather mourning after Atatürk as a discursive formation provided the necessary ‘material’ to declare the states of exception in which this discourse was used in some way or another.

Memory and Mourning: A Past Charged with the ‘Time of Now’

¹⁷³ Biz hala milletiz ve bir arada yaşamayı biliyoruz ama bir yozlaşma var. İyi doğru büyümüyor Türkiye. İstiklal Caddesi’ne çıkıyorsunuz hiç bizim kültürümüze ait olmayan insan tipleri. Şimdi buna özgürlük, buna demokrasi diyemeyiz. Ki bazı liberaller var, bizim kültürümüz bu değil. Punkçı mesela çok sevmiyorum öyle şeyleri ama kendi kültürüne toplumuna yabancılaşma var. Saçları acayip acayip yani böyle ailesini düşünün bu insanın aile ziyaretine geliniyor mesela konu açılıyor o gencin insanın orada yeri ne? O çocuk, o ailenin kültüründen mi gelmiş? Hayır tabii ki TV programları olsun yarışmalar, o bar cafe kültürü böyle bir gençlik yarattı. Ne Müslümanlıkta var böyle bir şey ne Türklükte. Böyle bir yozlaşmanın etkilerini görüyorum halkta ilk zamanlara göre.

Memory comes into play as an important aspect of the process of mourning and grief.¹⁷⁴ Despite his critical distance with regard to the state of the people in Atatürk's times, Derya stated that there was an effort towards 'development' but now, in comparison with those times, there is an apparent degeneration. I believe that, in the emergence of such discourses the discourses adopted from the people close to them may be effective too. For instance Hazal stated that:

My grandma is 82 years old. One day I said to her: "Grandma, I am tired now, as a 20 year old person." "I was a child" said my grandma, "there was Atatürk in Ankara". "In my youth, there was Inonu" she said. "I did not think such things" she said. "We were the children of an honoured nation. Those who were in Ankara knew best" she said. Those who were in Ankara knew best in those times. In those times, Republican individuals were growing up. At the Village Institutes art, history, science, culture, sports lessons were being taught. People were more close to each other. This was a great success of Atatürk. When you think about this ... in those times individuals of the Revolution of the Republic were growing up, but now counter-revolutionist are growing up. Today there is a something called political Islam. Where does political Islam locate itself in a secular republic. That's why I say "Oh my Father, do not worry, I am still here, I am doing something. I am sorry, this is What I can I do. If only I could do much more, but I have woken up. I am lightning. I am continuing to wake them up. I will wake them up, don't worry!", however when I look at his my face blushes a little. I cannot stop thinking how we became like this. In order words, in those times people felt more comfortable and secure but today there is nothing like this, absolutely not!¹⁷⁵

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Walter Benjamin states that "history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by

¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer L. Hockney, "Introduction", *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (New York: Berg Press, 2001), p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Anneannem 82 yaşında. Bir gün dedim ki "Anneannem, ben yorulduğum artık", 20 yaşında bir insan olarak. Anneannemse "Ben çocuktum" dedi. "Ankara'da Atatürk vardı" dedi. "Genç kızlığında İnönü vardı" dedi. "Ben hiç bunları düşünmedim kızım" dedi. "Biz onurlu bir milletin çocuklarıydık. Zaten Ankaradakiler en iyisini bilirlerdi" dedi. İşte ankaradakiler o zaman en iyisini bilirdi. O zaman cumhuriyet bireyleri yetişiyordu. Köy enstitülerinde sanat, tarih, bilim, kültür, spor veriliyordu. İnsanlar daha birbirlerine yakındı. Bu Atatürk'ün büyük bir başarısı. Bunu düşündüğünde o zaman Cumhuriyet devriminin bireyleri yetişiyordu, bugün karşı devrimin bireyleri yetişiyor. Bugün siyasi İslam diye bir şey var. Laik cumhuriyette siyasi İslam nereye oturur? Gelecekte daha fazla sorun yaşayacağız. O yüzden Atatürk'ün gözlerine baktığım zaman "Atam, merak etme, ben hala buradayım, ben hala bir şeyler yapıyorum. Üzgünüm elimden gelen bu. Keşke daha fazlasını yapabilsem ama ben uyandım. Işık saçıyorum. Uyandırmaya devam ediyorum. Uyandıracam da merak etme" diyorum ama yüzüne baktığım zaman yüzüm birazcık kızarıyor tabii. "Nasıl bu hale geldik?" diye düşünmeden edemiyorum. Yani o zamanlar insanlar daha emin ve güvenli hissediyormuş diyorsun ama günümüzde bu kalmadı, kesinlikle kalmadı.

the presence of the now”.¹⁷⁶ For my informants, rather than “a past charged with time of now”, the time of the now is charged with a past. In this sense, the present is charged with a responsibility to or for the past. In this way, the past and the present are not only brought together but also pulled apart, providing the historical distance necessary for the present to recognize this image as its own concern. This brings about an understanding of history in which the viewer is asked and even encouraged to participate. It calls for an active engagement on the part of the viewer.

While telling me how her grandmother used to yearn for those days, Hazal is actually telling me her idea of the people and perfect society. A people who are being educated by ‘shining’ Republican individuals through Village Institutes and a society in which members do not even need to question those in power. Nihal stated that:

In that period, people were very unconscious. In this period too our people are very unconscious. As a matter of fact, Turk’s reason is slow in working. I think it concerns people’s level of consciousness. We understand something at the last moment. Today they can be deceived very easily. In that period too they were deceived very easily. In this period too people does not behave consciously. For instance the EU. As if there is a pink coloured movie scene, people look at it without seeing its behind. When they come to the conclusion that the homeland is lost, they say “what a pity”.¹⁷⁷

The hierarchical view in which ‘the people’ are under-developed and those in power are superior was a common theme I came across during the interviews. The word ‘ignorant’ was usually used while describing the people (halk) who are considered as a mass that need to be educated properly in order to learn the value of Republican values. In addition, the assumption that “If Atatürk was alive or only if he could live

¹⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 261.

¹⁷⁷ O dönem halk çok bilinçsizmiş. Şu dönemde de halkımız çok bilinçsiz. Türk’ün aklı sonradan gelir zaten. Bu insanların bilinç düzeyiyle de alakalı sanırım. Bir şeyleri son dakikada anlıyoruz. Bugün çok çabuk kandırılabilirler. O dönemde de rahatlıkla kanıp aldanmışlar. Bu dönemde de halk bilinçli davranmıyor. Mesela AB diyoruz. Sanki toz pembeden boyalı bir film karesi var, insanlar ona bakıp arkasını görmüyorlar. Vatan elden gitti noktasına gelince “böyleymiş vah vah” diyorlar.

a little longer, we would be in a much better state” was accepted by all my informants. Similarly, Nihal stated that:

Anyhow, people we were happy and in peace. They passed through difficult times, and after that I don’t think anybody complained or thought differently. People embraced it, but now nobody embraces it, on the contrary they leave it. Because of this if Atatürk lived a little more, I think most of things would be systematic. That’s to say, everything would be in the right rail and work more systematically. I think today he could carry for instance the things that can generate a chaotic atmosphere to their rail, and solve them systematically. If he lived 10 years more, he could do these things probably.¹⁷⁸

Nihal used a train going steadily on rails as a metaphor while Hüseyin used a wall that is standing firmly:

Because our people are apolitical, they always stumble. If Atatürk lived, the educated, conscious, trained generations would know the meaning of democracy and secularism. They would understand what kind of importance they have and thus people would unite. There is no way that we would have collapsed. They would not win over because people would have been united. As Turkey, we would not have collapsed. We would not have been as we are now. (...) If he lived 10 or 5 years more, the system would be more stable I think. Because the system did not sink in very well. For example think that you build a wall and let’s say there are missing stones in the underside, that wall won’t be strong. Because the system didn’t sink in in the era of Atatürk, the things that were done after this era caused the wall to be shattered (...) If those stones were settled into their proper place, it would be more difficult. All in all this republic is 85 years old. This would not be so easy, they couldn’t have seized something. If he lived at least 5 or 10 years more, those stones, the system would have settled into its proper place. I want to say if only Atatürk were living but this is too much, everybody says this. Avarage age is 70 at best. If he lived to this age, it would not be necessary for him to live to this day. If he lived 5 or 10 years more, everything would be better. If he lived to 70-75, it would be better.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ İnsanlar huzurlu ve mutluydu herhalde bir dönem, çok zor bir dönemden geçmişler, ondan sonrasında da hiç kimsenin şikayet ettiğini yada farklı bir şey düşündüğünü zannetmiyorum. İnsanlar buna sarılmışlar şimdi kimse sarılmıyor aksine terk ediyorlar. O yüzden Atatürk biraz daha yaşasaydı çoğu şey sistematik olurdu sanırım. Yani her şey daha raylı rayında daha sistematik giderdi. Şimdi mesela bir kaos ortamı oluşturabilecek şeyleri daha raylı rayına oturtup sistematik bir şekilde çözümlenebilirdi diye düşünüyorum. 10 sene daha yaşasaydı yapardı herhalde.

¹⁷⁹ Bizim halkımız apolitik olduğu için gelip gidiyorlar götürüyorlar. Atatürk yaşasaydı eğitimli, bilinçli, kendini yetiştirmiş nesiller demokrasi ve laikliğin, çağdaşlığın anlamını bileceklerdi. Bunların ne gibi yaşamsal önemde olduğunu anlayacaklardı ve insanlar birbirleriyle kenetleneceklerdi. Mümkün değil yani yıkılmazdık. Başa çıkamazlardı çünkü halk birbirleriyle kenetlenmiş olurdu. Türkiye olarak yıkılmazdık. Şu andaki gibi olmazdık. (...) Bir 10, en az 5 sene daha yaşasaydı sistem biraz daha yerleşecekti diye düşünüyorum. Sistem tam oturmadığı için. Mesela duvar dizdiğinizi düşünün, altlardan bir tanesi eksik olsun, o duvar sağlam olamaz. Atatürk döneminde sistem tam yerli yerine oturmadığı için sonradan yapılan şeyler sistemin sallanmasına sebep oldu. (...) O taşlar yerine tam otursaydı daha zor olurdu. Sonuçta 85 yaşında bu cumhuriyet. Bu kadar kolay olmazdı, ele geçiremezlerdi bazı şeyleri. En az bir 5 en fazla 10 sene daha yaşasaydı o taşlar, sistem çok ciddi bir

So, the situation that Turkey goes through looks like a train going off its rails and a wall that may go down at any time. These metaphors picture the relationship between society and politics in a monolithic, motionless, static way in which the people is imagined as one, uniform and glued together. This resembles fascism's understanding of society in which any kind of change or difference is considered as a danger to society's and the people's well-being.

The idea that everything would be much better if only Atatürk lived a little longer stems from the attribution of all the best and right qualities to those years because Turkey was under Atatürk's rule. However, the fact that 14 Kurdish rebellions, the Dersim massacre, the Courts of Independence which sentenced thousands of people to death, etc. 'happened' under Atatürk's rule is ignored because of this idealization or aestheticization of history as a result of the process of mythologization of Atatürk. That is why these young people mourn after Atatürk by yearning for a time that they do not really know about, yet, cling onto it in a very strong way. In this sense, the constructed memories operate to render present that which is absent.

The Photograph and The Act of Mourning

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes mentions three levels of photographic meaning.¹⁸⁰

The first level is informational meaning in the sense of denotative signification and the second is symbolic in the sense of connotative signification. The third level of meaning is called "obtuse" which can be defined as "an excess or supplemental

şekilde yerine oturacaktı. Atatürk yaşasaydı şu an böyle olmazdık diyeceğim de o çok şey olur, herkes öyle söyler. Yaş ortalaması en fazla 70'tir. O yaşına kadar yaşasaydı şu güne kadar yaşamasına bile gerek olmazdı. 5 ya da en fazla 10 sene yaşasaydı her şey çok daha güzel olurdu. 70-5e kadar yaşasaydı çok daha iyi olurdu .

¹⁸⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang Press, 1981).

meaning beyond signification”. It is described by Crimp as a “signifier without a signified”:

If we cannot describe the obtuse meaning, this is because, unlike the obvious meaning, it copies nothing: how describe what represents nothing?¹⁸¹

In this context, “what represents nothing” emphasizes what a photograph can ‘present’. As mentioned in Chapter I, hegemonic logics refer to the construction of the political around an empty signifier whose ultimate meaning is continuously differed and deferred in a never-ending play of differences which open a sphere of sovereignty. Ernesto Laclau states that “an empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified”.¹⁸² Following this line of thought Atatürks’ ‘presence’ is sustained through his photographs which have an obtuse level of meaning in line with his ‘existence’ as an empty signifier. His photographs represent him by strengthening his unrepresentability since his photographs do not serve to fill the emptiness with a stable, given content. In this way, it continues to be ‘a name’ that loses its own specificity as it stands in for other specific demands to which it is seen as equivalent. By existing through photography, it represents a hole by representing nothing in particular; in a sense, it continues to be the ‘unrepresentable’ and becomes able to reduce all differences to a partiality within the imagined communitarian whole.¹⁸³ This way, by existing in its loss, Atatürk is posed as the unattainable object of desire which must be followed in order to fulfill the fantasy of a perfect society. In line with the *raison d’être* of *objet petit a* which is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire¹⁸⁴, Atatürk presents an endless source of

¹⁸¹ Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning”, in *The Responsibility of Forms: critical essays on music, art, and representation*, (California: University of California Press, 1991), p. 55.

¹⁸² Ernesto Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?”, *Emancipations*, (London and New York: Verso Press, 1996), p. 36.

¹⁸³ Ironically, Atatürk/ism is usually defined as ‘the cement’ that brings together the Turkish nation; a matter that has neither color nor smell.

¹⁸⁴ Slavoj Žižek, “The Seven Veils of Fantasy”, *Plague of Fantasies*, (London and New York: Verso Press, 1997), p. 39.

desire which cannot be achieved but longed for through impossible mourning. In addition, Stavrakakis states that “the empty signifier can only function as an *objet petit a*”¹⁸⁵ in the case of which the object coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost. The obfuscation between “what is lost” and “what is actually lacking from the very beginning” leads to ‘impossible mourning’ which refers to melancholia in Lacanian terminology.

Mourning after Atatürk is realized by ritualized social practices that mobilize domains of material objects, visual images, slogans, etc. Through these social practices, public mourning also turns into a ‘personal bond’ in which Atatürkists build a personal bond with Atatürk to whom they are mournfully committed. The most important aspect of this mournful commitment relates to their anxiety that Atatürk will be forgotten in time and that they consider it as a personal duty to keep his memory alive. In this context, other than most domains of social practices, visual images of Atatürk stand out as the domain to which they attach a special value and importance.

Nihal gave the example below as an indication that those in power want Atatürk to be forgotten:

They attempt to remove the things about Atatürk from the textbooks. Even the shape of Atatürk’s photographs in the primary school textbooks are changed. There is a suppression from outside for removing Atatürk’s photographs from textbooks. This is illogical too. As a matter of fact we can’t learn our history. I am very afraid of the next generation. The Atatürk pictures in the introductory part of the textbooks for example, are changed terribly. There is a known Atatürk picture which is often used ... they make a disgusting fotoshop on it. His visage is unbelievably destroyed. They changed his eyebrows. The lines showing his eyebrows frowning have been wiped out. They have rejuvenated (the face on) the picture but this not Atatürk no longer since Atatürk’s eyebrows have become oval. I think they want to loose his face.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Encircling The Political: towards a Lacanian political theory’, in *Lacan and The Political*, (London: Routledge Press, 1999), p. 81.

As the example indicates, Atatürk's 'existence' through his pictures is essential for Atatürkists. Therefore, remembering Atatürk has always already something to do with his appearance in the public as an image that makes Atatürkists feel 'safe'.

Nihal's statement is important to the extent that it shows how far this fear of loss goes. Similarly Serhat stated that he would be disturbed by the absence of Atatürk's photograph in a place and that he would even act on it:

The existence of his pictures is not bad, it should be as much as it ought to be, especially in this period. Resimlerinin olması kötü değil, olmalı gerektiği kadar hele de şu dönemde. While the EU is saying "remove these pictures", we have to embrace it more than before but not in a degree of trusting. Because I have got accustomed to his pictures, it seems normal to me. In fact when there is not his picture, it seem weird to me and I question why it is not there.¹⁸⁷

Erol stated that Atatürk's picture in his parents' bedroom had a huge effect on his becoming an Atatürkist:

In our home, there is a poster of Atatürk given as a gift from the factory in which my father works. This Atatürk poster is hung on my wall, it has been there ever since I have known my self... Atatürk has a human aspect but at the same time I like his aspect, his pose as if waiting for something with a dignified manner. He has an importance I didn't realize before. In fact I must have asked who he was when I saw him when I was a child. Today when my nephews come and seehim in my room, today I have taken it there. It is the pose that you probably know, it is everywhere. He is looking forward, toward one side, he is not looking at you. It is not like the pictures in which he is looking at you or at the sky. This pose is calmer and more proud.

"Can you explain what you mean by "as if he is waiting for something?"

¹⁸⁶ Ders kitaplarından Atatürk ile ilgili şeyleri çıkartmaya kalkıyorlar. İlköğretim kitaplarında Atatürk'ün resimlerinin bile şekli şemali değişmiş. Ders kitaplarında Atatürk fotoğrafları kaldırılınsın gibi dışardan baskı yapıyorlar. Bu da mantıksız. Zaten tarihimizi öğrenemiyoruz. Gelecek kuşaktan ben çok korkuyorum. Mesela kitapların giriş sayfasındaki Atatürk resmiyle aşırı derecede oynanmış. O bilindik bir Atatürk resmi vardır sık kullanılanlardan fakat iğrenç bir fotoshop yapmışlar. Çehresi inanılmaz derecede bozulmuş. İşte kaşlarını yumuşatmışlar. O kaşlarını çatık gösteren çizgileri yok etmişler. Resmi gençleştirmişler ama o artık Atatürk değil çünkü Atatürk'ün kaşları falan oval olmuş. Yüzünü kaybettirmeye çalışıyorlar diye düşünüyorum.

¹⁸⁷ Resimlerinin olması kötü değil, olmalı gerektiği kadar hele de şu dönemde. AB, "Atatürk resimlerini indirin" derken bizim daha fazla ona sarılmamız gerekiyor ama sığınma derecesinde değil. Fotoğrafi çok alışığım bir şey olduğu için bana normal geliyor. Hatta olmayınca garip gelir ve onu soruştururum neden olmadığını.

In fact I after all realize its contextual importance. Probably my learning this look and its owner begins at primary school. I think I gave meaning to this picture in my mind after that. There is a thing ... a constitutive thing, all in all it is a name that you come across everywhere. After I learnt that it was Atatürk, for me the beginning of Atatürkism is this picture, true, now it seems dignified, it is a beautiful picture. In a way, I can't explain it with Atatürk exactly, by relating myself with him seriously, in a way by defending his ideology or existence I have made a connection but I don't when it was.¹⁸⁸

Erol explains in detail how much his 'first encounter' with Atatürk affects his processes of subjectivization in becoming an Atatürkist, yet he also admits that he has not realized that before. Most of my informants became familiar with his image before elementary school. This acquaintance is important for them to develop a continuing relation that makes them feel committed, safe, familiar, responsible, etc. So, the effect of photograph(s) of a person that can be seen anywhere is irreducibly complex, especially if that person is known to be the founder of the country who is dead:

The portrait¹⁸⁹ is not one fiction or figure, one face of the figure, among others. Not only because it represents at once the gaze that gazes at us and the head that governs

¹⁸⁸ Bizim evde babamın çalıştığı fabrikadan hediye edilme bir Atatürk posteri vardır. İşte o bende asıldır Atatürk posteri, ben kendimi bildim bileli orda durur... Hem insani yanı vardır Atatürk'ün ama aynı zamanda böyle vakur bir tavırla bir şey bekliyormuş halinde o pozunu yönünü çok severim ben Atatürk'ün. Daha önce fark etmediğim bir önemi vardır. sonuçta çocukluğumda gördüğümde muhtemelen "bu kim?" dediğim bir insan. Bugünde benim yeğenlerim geldiğinde gördüğünde benim odamda bugün oraya aldım. Bildiğiniz bir pozdur muhtemelen, her yerde var. şöyle ileri bakıyor, yandan, size bakmıyor. Mesela size baktığı ya da gökyüzüne baktığı pozları gibi değil. Daha sade daha vakur durduğu bir poz.

"Bir şeyler bekliyor sanki" derken ne demek istedin, açabilir misin?

Aslında şimdi konusunca farkına varıyorum. Muhtemelen o bakışı ve tabii bunun Atatürk olduğunu öğrenmem ilkokulda başlıyor. Resmi de sanırım ondan sonra kafamda anlamlandırdım. Hani orada şeyler, bir kurucu unsur, sonuçta her yerde karşılaştığımız bir isim. Atatürk olduğunu öğrendikten sonra benim için Atatürkçülüğümün başlangıcı o resimdir, doğru şimdi vakur duruyor hoş da bir resim. Bir şekilde Atatürk ile bunu tam açıklayamıyorum kendimi bayağı bir ilişki içerisinde bağlayarak, bir şekilde onun ideolojisine yada varlığını savunarak öyle bir bağlantı kurdum ama tam bunun ne zaman olduğunu bilmiyorum.

¹⁸⁹ In this article, although Derrida starts from "the portrait effect" as I will elaborate on later, he considers photograph just as much important as portrait when it comes to the power of representation through images. He even states that: "The portrait is here the capital representation insofar as it represents the capital element in a power of the image. Forcing things only a bit, one could say that, at least from the point of view of the theologico-political power of representation guaranteed by the portrait of the king, and based on Marin's analyses, there is no difference between painting and photography, for the photographic portrait continues to guarantee, and sometimes even accentuates, the function of the painted portrait. The photographic technique fulfills even more powerfully the pictorial vocation, namely, to seize the dead and transfigure them –to resuscitate as having been the one who (singularly, he or she) will have been."

the body and the chief or head who governs the social body. But especially because, like the photographic portrait, its relation to the referent appears irreducible.¹⁹⁰ Nazlı Ökten¹⁹¹ too, by referring to Silverman¹⁹², argues the link between the

photograph and mourning:

It is not surprising that we want the Atatürk image we see at the public offices, schools, homes sometimes, with his silhouette reduced almost to a logo to look at us. The presumption that the picture you look at is looking at us can be taken as a process avoiding the picture from being a dead object.¹⁹³

In *The Work of Mourning*, Jacques Derrida sets out from Pascal's famous saying "the portrait of the king is the king" and argues the importance of the "portrait effect"

with reference to Marin¹⁹⁴ by accentuating its relation to representation in a

theologico-political way:

This logic presupposes that a sort of death of the king comes in advance to divide the king's body in two: the individual or real body on the one hand; the fictive –ideal or representative- body of dignity on the other. The politico-juridical history of the two bodies of the king in Christian Europe such as it is analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz (...) "The king in his portrait, the king as image, the king-representation, is thus in the 'parable' a parody of the eucharistic mystery of the mystic body and of real presence". One could readily show, in fact, that this logic remains at work wherever there is a monarchy in a Christian country, even in a Christian democracy, I mean in a democratic regime with a Christian culture, as soon as the unity or the independence of the nation-state is represented in the body of a monarch or president, no matter what the length of the term or the forms of inheritance by election (filiation or succession), indeed, no matter what the mode of election.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning", *The Work of Mourning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 156.

¹⁹¹ Nazlı Ökten, p. 340

¹⁹² Kaja Silverman, "Political Ecstasy", *The Threshold of The Visible World*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 96.

¹⁹³ Devlet dairelerinde, okullarda, kimi zaman evlerde, neredeyse bir logoya indirgenmiş silüetliye afişlerde bakıp gördüğümüz Atatürk imgesinin bize bakmasını istememiz şaşırıcı değil. Baktığımız resmin dönüp bize baktığı varsayımı o resmin ölü bir nesne olmaktan çıkmasını sağlayan bir süreç olarak kabul edilir.

¹⁹⁴ Louis Marin, *Portrait of The King*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 187.

¹⁹⁵ Here Derrida talks about the famous book by Kantorowicz who investigated the doctrine of "King's Two Bodies". This doctrine supposes that the King has two bodies which are Body Natural and Body Political. Below is an excerpt which was written in 1816 to explain this doctrine: For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, [...] So that [the King] has a Body natural, adorned and invested with the Estate and Dignity royal; and he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and Dignity royal, but a Body natural and a Body politic together

The logic of representing the national body in one leader is also current in Turkey which is a Muslim country. However, this is not surprising considering the fact that Republican elites approached Ottoman institutions and people with a Western approach that ignores the views and demands of the people.

Through his image, Atatürk is posed both in life and in death. In a way, it is transformed into an object of double exception by belonging to the world of neither the living nor the dead. Atatürk becomes present in his absence by the distribution of his image that takes place almost everywhere, both public and personal. The photograph, by reminding his absence, renders him present in their lives. That is why all my informants agree on the importance of his pictures' being so widespread. For instance, Hüseyin stated:

People must not forget, as a matter of fact it begins to be forgotten because of the things done. This is a fact, then don't touch my picture I mean. Atatürk's picture for example ... there is a photograph on my desk, recently I have showed it to my nephew. "This is Atatürk". Okay, for now it is enough for you to know this much. According to me, it is necessary, it ought to remain there, and conscious people should talk about it. I will put his picture in front of him, introduce it to him, he will learn to recognize this face. He has to be told about Atatürk keeping his young age in mind, it is necessary to make him conscious, this is a beginning.¹⁹⁶

Remembering is an important aspect of mourning, a process in which one is determined not to forget the one who is lost. We mourn as long as we remember. In this sense, getting acquainted with his pictures has a great effect on children as

indivisible.

¹⁹⁶ İnsanlar unutmamalı zaten yapılan edilenlerle unutturuluyor. Bu bir gerçek, bari benim resmime dokunma yani. Atatürk'ün mesela masa üzerimde bir fotoğrafı vardı geçenlerde yeğenime göstermişim. "Bu Mustafa Kemal Atatürk". Tamam, şimdilik bu kadarını bilsen yeterli. Bence gerekli, dursun ve hani bilinçli insanlar da anlatsın. Ben önüne koyacağım resmini göstereceğim, tanıtacağım, sima olarak onu yerleştirecek. Yaşı gereği alabileceği şekilde anlatılması gerekli, bilinçlendirmek için gerekli, bu bir başlangıçtır.

Hüseyin stated. Also, my informants referred to the way they related to his picture in their class. For instance, Serhat stated:

In fact where ever you go, it is as if he is looking at you. Even when there is no picture. When you ruminates in class... you have already looked at him ... otherwise even from that photograph, from his eyes you realize that thing. You can say I will follow your path. Can we do it sufficiently? I see his photograph, I remember it. We are a very forgetful society. Atatürk's picture makes me sad when I look at it, I am trying to be worthy of him now because this what I can do.¹⁹⁷

Walter Benjamin states that the gaze expects to be returned from where it is met.¹⁹⁸

Returning the gaze of Atatürk whose picture is placed in order for 'him' to look upon the class is a common experience of every child. The pictures of Atatürk in schools have a direct effect on children as shown in the study of Esra Elmas.¹⁹⁹ My informants talked about their encounters with Atatürk pictures in a very intense fashion that was emotionally charged with feelings of sorrow, guilt, indebtedness, joy, responsibility; all of which somehow return to their desire to have him back or be 'worthy' of him.

As is known, power was once concentrated at a single site: the state or the king. It was thought to operate only as a negative force that forbids, prevents or precludes.

However, it is no longer conceived as centered. Like Foucault stated:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Zaten o nereye gidersen git sana bakıyormuş gibi geliyor. Resmi olmasa da. Derste dalıp gittiğin zaten bakıyorsun yoksa o fotoğraftan bile, gözlerinden o şeyi alıyorsun. Ben senin yolundan ilerleyeceğim diyebiliyorsun. Ha ne kadar yapıyorsunuz? Ben şu an fotoğrafını görüyorum, hatırlıyorum. Biz çok unutkan bir toplumuz. Atatürk'ün fotoğrafı baktığımda üzüyor beni, bir nebze layık olmaya çalışıyorum şu an çünkü elimden gelen budur.

¹⁹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 75.

¹⁹⁹ Esra Elmas, *Sevgili Atatürkçüğüm*, (İstanbul: Hayy Press, 2008).

²⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, "Punishment", *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1979), p. 194.

It is a generative force that proliferates institutions, forms of knowledge, new subjects and new forms of life. Power is diffused throughout the social order, operating in on the most intimate and particular relations: on how we conceive ourselves, on the categories we employ in negotiating the world, on how we are ‘supposed to feel’, etc. In this context, it not only produces institutions, laws and regulations but also dispositions, tastes, norms, standards, inclinations.

Like Serkan, Hazal stated that she felt responsible to Atatürk when she faced with a picture:

I am protecting the values Atatürk entrusted to me. I am protecting my homeland. I don’t know whether I could manage to be successful as much as Atatürk dreamt but believe me every moment I am working for this. I don’t have another thing. That’s to say, for example when I catch his eyes on the picture I say “okey”. “I know, I am working, I am sorry but I am trying, working for this.” At school I work for this, I contribute to the conservations of the people I meet in the bus, for this. For waking up the people (...) I mean, if one day after I die I meet him, I can likely face with him without feeling shamed.²⁰¹

The existence of Atatürk’s pictures make appear the one who has disappeared.

Images of Atatürk such as photographs, busts, etc. make “him reappear with great clarity or energia”.²⁰² This ‘reappearance’ evokes feelings of guilt that make them feel responsible to him and act accordingly. Derrida, in the same article, continues:

What the portrait says, the title “portrait”, is that what is shown, portraited, is what was (supposed to have been) real, really present. (...) The presidential portraits that can be seen today in all places of public authority (government agencies, town halls, departmental and municipal buildings, police stations) express the origin, identity, and place of the capital gathering of legitimate power insofar as it holds us in its gaze and looks at us looking at it by recalling us to what looks at and regards us, that is, to our responsibility before it and in its eyes..²⁰³

²⁰¹ Ben Atatürk’ün bana emanet ettiği değerleri koruyorum. Vatanımı koruyorum. Ben şu anda Atatürk’ün hayal ettiği kadar, istediği kadar başarılı olabildim mi bilmiyorum ama inan her dakika bunun için çalışıyorum. Başka bir şeyim yok. Yani mesela arasıra bir an bir yerde resmiyle gözgöze geldiğim zaman “tamam” diyorum. “Biliyorum, çalışıyorum, üzgünüm ama deniyorum bunun için çalışıyorum”. Okulda bunun için çalışıyorum, otobüste karşılaştığım insanların konuşmalarına bunun için katılıyorum. İnsanları uyandırmak için. (...) Yani bir gün öldükten sonra onunla karşılaşırsam yüzüm kızarmadan karşısına çıkabilirim herhalde.

²⁰² Jacques Derrida, “By Force of Mourning”, *The Work of Mourning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 157.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 154-6.

Serhat told me that he had an even more intense relation with Atatürk's busts until his adult years:

I don't salute the Atatürk busts anymore but formerly I even stopped and saluted it. *Dou you still still salute them?*

No, before entering the secondary school I gave up doing this. I sometimes stopped and bowed my head and then passed. As an expression of respect.²⁰⁴

In this sense, the image of the national leader that has surrounded both public and personal spheres create a profound effect on people who are in a sense 'interpellated' by the image of Atatürk everytime they see an image of him. The situation in which Serhat has explicitly shown his urge to bow to the leader points to the diffusing character of power operations through which subjects interiorize their subject positions. Power is seen as working on and in the body as diffuse, dynamic.

The reason why Serhat has quit bowing to Atatürk busts at a certain age may be because of the fact that power operations unfold themselves mostly in non-discursive ways because 'the law' is so strong that it does not have to prescribe itself. The hegemonic public discourse is implicitly constructed on the premise that "Atatürk is alive and the eternal leader"²⁰⁵ and Serhat, after a certain age, stopped openly bowing to the busts because he 'realized' the tacit character of this hegemonic discourse.

However, there are those who sometimes disclose the implicitness of this discourse. For instance, General Staff stated that: "May Allah never leave us without Atatürk. May Allah give him a long life".²⁰⁶ This statement reveals the exceptional character of the power operations revolving around Atatürk. People are so accustomed to deny the fact that we are living as if Atatürk were alive, this common lie's attracted reactions

²⁰⁴ Atatürk büstlerine ben, şu an yapmıyorum ama özellikle daha önceleri durup selam verdiğim bile olurdu.

Hala selam verir misin?

Yok, ortaokula yakın bıraktım. Dururdum kafamı eğip sallardım, geçerdim. Saygı ifadesi olarak.

²⁰⁵ With this, I refer to discursive practices of Republican elites who sustain their status quo by relying on this tacit premise.

²⁰⁶ "Allah Atatürk'ü başımızdan eksik etmesin, O'na uzun ömürler versin"

and was found ridiculous when it came out in the open. And yet, the statement in question is not very different from the saying: “The King is dead, Long Live the King!”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ This famous phrase was used by the people after the King died in monarchies such as France. It signifies the continuity of sovereignty, attached to a personal form of power.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have tried to outline and analyze the process of the construction of Atatürk as an empty signifier, as a state fantasy, as a myth; all of which are related to impossible mourning in which the lack is confused with loss. That is to say, something that is never really had is mourned and therefore the mourner is bound to mourn forever unless it is accepted that one never had *it*. By intersecting sovereignty analysis with psychoanalysis, I claimed that Atatürk as a signifier does not represent ‘a thing’ that was lost but a thing that is lacking from the very beginning. It is the positivization of the lack at the heart of the political: the fantasy of pure harmony and a fully united community without any conflicts. Deprived of a stable content, Atatürk as an empty signifier occupies the undecidable position of sovereign exception because the more undecidable it is, the greater the illusion that it can ‘include’ all differences. I argued that Atatürk emerged as the omnipresent and omnipotent national father to whom all the best and right qualities are attributed by translating traditional family codes into modern nation state apparatus. Familial citizenship became the source of the discursive practices in which the totalizing and individualizing practices of power operations intersect. I tried to show how Atatürkism, as an authoritative attempt to create a homogeneous society which is unified around Atatürk as a signifier, sustained its hegemony over the political in Turkey from a historical perspective. I tried to analyze how this empty character functioned as a discursive strategy in the legitimatization of state of exceptions which are made in Atatürk’s name.

I attempted to trace the marks of this particular and historically specific modality of power through the narratives of young people who define themselves as Atatürkists and who are given a special role as in any authoritarian rule. I tried to understand the way my informants, bind themselves to Atatürk. The narrative analysis has shown that my informants identify themselves with Atatürk. This is a highly charged process of identification in which feelings of love, fear of loss and mourning intertwine. The process of identification does not have to be based on a monolithic form. Rather, I tried to show that there are many forms of Atatürkisms which show that Atatürk does not refer to a singularity since it is unrepresentable as such because of its empty character. Following this point, I tried to demonstrate how being an Atatürkist does not have to entail a uniform morality that determines how to think and act. the long overdue occupation of ‘Atatürk’ in the center of the political became possible. Still, it necessitates a view regarding the form of subjectivity of the proper citizen, desired Republican subjectivity. That is to say that it also excludes other forms of subjectivities that do not relate to Atatürkism.

In Chapter III, I tried to explain the peculiarities of Atatürkist fantasy in which the embodiment of the completeness of society is represented by Atatürk who is considered as the leader with whom the Golden Age of Turkish Republic started and ended. As any utopian fantasy, this leads to the desire of keeping ‘him’ alive. I argued that there is a structural nostalgia with regard to the mythologization of Atatürk in Turkey because by remembering his death and this loss, the hope (fantasy) of returning or at least reviving the perfection of those times is not only kept ‘alive’ but is also presented as the ultimate truth, since, this way, mourning after Atatürk and yearning for him becomes the only legitimate political discourse. I tried to show how the nostalgia stemming from Atatürkist fantasy leads to the existence of a certain

field of sovereignty that legitimizes the oppression of non-Atatürkists. Then, I discussed the ways in which mourning after Atatürk is realized such as the ritualized social practices that mobilize domains of material objects and visual images, especially his photographs with reference to “the portrait effect”.

A culture of democratization has denaturalization of settled identities and conventions at its very center. In this way, the final markers that govern people such as God, natural law, the natural basis of traditional identities should be problematized in a real democracy which enables a sphere of ongoing questioning under conditions of ultimate uncertainty.²⁰⁸ However, in Turkey, such a democratic tradition can not be sustained due to our unquestionable and therefore undying father. If the aim is to make Turkey a real democracy, then, perhaps, the last words of Atatürk should be listened for the last time: “I am tired, kid. I want to sleep”.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ William Connolly, “Democracy and Territoriality”, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 154-5.

²⁰⁹ “Yorulдум, çocuk. Uyumak istiyorum”.

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