
Don’t stop, (oh) Greek, don’t stop; magnify your arrogance!
Rain insults on the head of Turkishness!
This humiliation is insufficient for a sleeping race,
Beat him, his old slave, disgrace him!
Don’t let him sleep, awaken him!

These lines were penned by the prominent thinker of Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp, in 1914, right after the tragic Balkan Wars that would put an end to the Ottoman Empire’s presence in Europe. Titled “Strike, Don’t Stop” [“Durma, Vur”] and written in an almost masochistic tone, this poem holds humiliation as a key to the therapy of a nation. A nation’s own arrogance that impeded modernization could only be overcome by a sense of embarrassment brought on by humiliation. Similar to humiliation, emotions like anxiety, shame, paranoia, suspicion, shock, sorrow, pride, joy, or enthusiasm have played a significant role in the formation of nationalisms. Yet, the study of emotions has been regarded as a dubious endeavor in the social sciences. Therefore, emotions have long been relegated to the margins of academic political analysis with no place in the dominant rational or structural models.

Based on his master’s thesis submitted to Ankara University in 2021, Hikmet Çağrı Yardımcı’s book goes into an analysis of emotions much neglected in modern Turkish history and politics. As the author points out, one can find only a few dissertations that challenge the marginalization of emotions in the Ottoman/Turkish context. They are Nil Tekgül’s A Gate to the Emotional World of Pre-Modern Ottoman Society, Şeyma Afacan’s Of the Soul and Emotions: conceptualizing “the Ottoman Individual” Through Psychology and Nagehan Tokdoğan’s Neo-Ottomanism: Ressentiment, Nostalgia, Narcissism. A recent addition to the growing literature on the topic, Yardımcı’s invaluable contribution to the existing scholarship focuses on the works of a renowned late Ottoman and early Republican personality, namely Falih Rıfkı Atay (1894–1971).

As stated in its introduction, this book aims to examine Falih Rıfkı Atay’s intellectual repertoire pertaining to the question of Westernization (p. 24). Yardımcı evaluates this repertoire through the lens of the history of emotions to create new possibilities of analysis in political history. To achieve this goal, the first chapter is devoted to the conceptual and theoretical framework. Beginning with Lucien Febvre’s 1941 essay “Sensibility and History” and Norbert Elias’ portrayal of civilization in terms of emotional repression, the author demonstrates how the study of emotions challenged the fundamental dichotomy between the individual and society upon which the social sciences of the 20th century were based. Throughout his study, the author positions his perspective in the framework of “emotionology,” which is defined by Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns as “a term with which to distinguish the collective emotional standards of a society from the emotional experiences of individuals and groups” (p. 47). Furthermore, Yardımcı makes use of William Reddy’s concepts of “emotives” and “emotional regimes,” Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of co-existing “emotional communities,” and Monique Scheer’s “emotional practices.”

The second chapter presents a biography of Atay and an overview of his works. “An avant-garde figure and one of the most significant contributors to the founding philosophy of the Republic of Turkey” (p. 65), Falih Rıfkı Atay was a Turkish writer, journalist, and politician. Born and educated in Istanbul, he began his career as a journalist in 1912 at Tanin, the publication of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). During his early years, he was appointed...
to the private secretariats of the CUP leaders, namely Talat Pasha and Cemal Pasha. Following the departure of the two pashas at the end of World War I, Atay established Akşam as an unwavering supporter of the independence struggle in Anatolia (1918–1922). In 1922, he departed for İzmir to meet with Mustafa Kemal, who had invited him along with other notable journalists. Elected as a deputy for Bolu, “Atay turned into a figure of which he will be a part of an ideological construction process” (p. 70). With the establishment of the Republic in 1923, he would become the editor-in-chief of the semi-official newspaper, Hakimiyet-i Milliye (later renamed Ulus), as well as a spokesperson and advocate for the new regime. Atay is among the most prolific of the authors who witnessed the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. His uninterrupted writings from 1912 until his death in 1971 span a vast array of literary genres, from articles appearing in the periodical press to political essays, travelogues, memoirs, and autobiographical notes. Stating that “it would not be possible to evaluate all of Atay’s writings in the scope of this study” (p. 70), Yardımcı limits himself to the published works listed as follows: Ateş ve Güneş (1918), Yeni Rusya (1931), Deniz Aşırı (1931), Moskova-Roma (1932), Zeytindağı (1932), Eski Saat (1933), Londra Konferansı (1933), Taymis Kıyıları (1934), Tunca Kıyıları (1938), Ali Suavi (1954), Babanız Atatürk (1955), Bayrak (1955), Mustafa Kemal’ın Ağzından Vahdideti (1955), Mustafa Kemal’ın İmparatorluk Vahdideti (1963), İnanç (1965), Atatürk Ne İdi (1968), Kurtuluş (1966), Pazar Konuşmaları (1966), and Gezerek Gördüklerim (1970).

The third and final chapter of the book provides a cross-reading of Atay’s works alongside the prevalent literature on the history of the modernization and Westernization process from the institutional reforms of the late Ottoman period to the early Republican period in Turkey. By focusing on Atay’s discourses as a representative example of early Republican history through concepts like “emotives,” “emotional practices,” or “emotional regimes,” the author provides fresh insights regarding the involvement of feelings in the production of historical knowledge and the emotional motives that accompany the construction of the nation-state.

The outstanding observation put forward in the book is that the feeling of inferiority is the most prominent emotion that defines Atay’s historicization of Ottoman/Turkish modernization. Nevertheless, the inferiority complex in Atay’s writings is stripped of its prevalent pejorative meaning of incompetence and transformed into a positive possibility of the “will to power,” to foster society’s full potential and creativity (pp. 110–112). Furthermore, the superiority complex is an integral part of the inferiority complex. For a long time, the Ottomans’ military superiority over Europe led to apathy, especially among the Ottoman ruling class. However, this superiority complex on the part of the Ottoman elites was replaced by feelings of shame and trauma as a result of the military defeats that led to the signing of the Treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718) (p. 81). This emotional transition is also a precursor of a new ontological and epistemological engagement with the West (p. 90).

The main motive that determines Atay’s narrative is the desire to construct an “emotional regime” discourse that will treat the feeling of inferiority. Tanzimat’s promotion of a new official ideology known as Ottomanism brought about a distorted understanding of Westernisation due to its cosmopolitanism (p. 105). “Turkishness and Westernism were not sufficiently emphasized in the Young Ottoman thought to counteract the effects of the Tanzimat” (p. 115). “During the reign of Abdülhamit II, society suffered from a disease of anti-westernisation” (p. 129). Conversely, “the Young Turk movement took more decisive steps to eliminate the sense of inferiority associated with the crisis of Westernisation and
“Turkification” (p. 133). Although the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 was described by Atay as a “Felicitous Revolution” [“İnkilab-ı Mesud”], this feeling eventually gave way to disappointment when the revolution failed to make significant changes in the Ottoman government during the Second Constitutional Period (pp. 140–48). However, founded on October 29, 1923, the Turkish Republic brought an end to the tense relationship between Turkishness and Westernness in a perfect balance, eliminating the feeling of shame and inferiority derived from the past (p. 156). Nothing but a “regime of honor” to be built through the discipline of emotions could show the way out of the deadlock arising from the intertwined complexes of inferiority and superiority and provide a new direction for both the nation-state and its citizens.

Yardımcı’s analyses are thoughtful and enlightening. He provides a straight depiction of how emotions are effectively used in the process of nation-state building. One can make a few minor suggestions. First, as the author emphasizes, the concept of “emotional regimes” presents a key narrative in an understanding of the emotional shift from the Empire to the Republic. Nevertheless, the narrative appears to prioritize elites’ textual production of emotions over other modalities of expression. Moreover, the early Republican context offers different materialities and counter-discourses to crystallize Atay’s discourse of a new “regime of honor.” Another point is that the pages where the author talks about which emotions are forgotten and remembered (p. 230) could have benefited immensely from memory studies. Finally, this study implies that, in addition to Atay’s published works, there are many newspaper articles that have not yet been edited and made available for researchers. Yardımcı’s work could thus be taken as a plea for the meticulous collection and publication of the complete writings of such a prominent personality as Falih Rifki Atay.

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