Turkey: Turks Celebrate Nazi Sympathizer

by Uzay Bulut

caveat: bias

"As the mud will not be iron even if it is put into an oven, the Jew cannot be Turkish no matter how hard he tries. Turkishness is a privilege, it is not granted to everyone, especially to those like Jews... If we get angry, we will not only exterminate Jews like the Germans did, we will go further...." — Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, in his National Revolution (Milli Inkılap) journal, 1934.

Today, behind many of Turkey's continued aggressive policies such as its anti-Armenian, anti-Greek, anti-Cypriot, anti-Jewish, anti-Kurdish, anti-Western, and anti-Israeli activities lie the racist views of Atsız and the like. Millions of Turks have for decades been poisoned with Atsız's Nazi-like views.

In November, the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, led by Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), named a park in Istanbul's Maltepe district after Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, a racist anti-Semite and one of Turkey's most prominent Nazi sympathizers. Pictured: CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu (left), waves to supporters at a rally in the Maltepe district of Istanbul on July 9, 2017. (Photo by Yasin Akgul/AFP via Getty Images)

In November, the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, led by Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), named a park in Istanbul after Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, a racist anti-Semite and one of Turkey's most prominent Nazi sympathizers. The request was made by members of another Turkish opposition party, "The Good Party" (Iyi). Atsız (1905-1975) was known for "measuring skulls" to determine people's "amount of Turkishness."

In March, a member of the Good Party presented a motion to the Istanbul municipal assembly, calling for a park in Istanbul's Maltepe district to be named after Atsız. The motion stated that Atsız spent most of his life in the Köyiçi region of Maltepe, and the subject was put on the assembly's agenda in November. After the motion was passed by the assembly, the park in the Yalı Neighborhood officially received Atsız's name.

According to the official website of the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, the motion passed unanimously. In a video published on social media, the Maltepe branch of the Good Party thanked Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoğlu, a member of the CHP, for his support.

Sadly, Atsız still has many fans in Turkey. On December 11, for instance, Meral Aksener, the head of the Good Party, posted on Twitter:

"I commemorate with respect and grace Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, one of the valuable representatives of the idea of Turkish nationalism and a translator of our feelings, on the anniversary of his death."

So what are Atsız's worldview and legacy?

Atsız promoted Pan-Turanism, also known as Turanism, Turkism or Pan-Turkism, a nationalist, expansionist ideology that emerged in Ottoman Turkey during the Young Turks era (1908–18). Turanism believes in the supremacy of Turks and aims to unite all "Turkic peoples" from Hungary to the Pacific under one roof. The Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which organized the first phase of the 1914-23 Christian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, was also pan-Turkist-Turanist. Turkey's continued aggression towards Armenia, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and other nations in the region today is also motivated by Turkism, among other extremist ideologies.

In her book Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust, scholar Corry Guttstadt describes Atsız as a "Turkish apologist for German Nazism":

"Nihal Atsiz was an avid Nazi sympathizer. He called himself a 'racist, pan-Turkist and Turanist', and was an open anti-Semite. From 1934 onward, Atsiz published the Turanist journal Orhun, in which he advocated a Greater Turkish Empire extending from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. His Turkism was based on ties of blood and race; he advocated a return to pre-Islamic Turkish beliefs."

Professor Jacob M. Landau notes:

"Atsiz was a great admirer of the race theories of Nazi Germany, expressing some of them repeatedly in his own works during the 1930s and 1940s (with the Turks labelled as the 'master race'). His articles insisted, again and again, that Pan-Turkism could – and should – be achieved by war. For years, his haircut resembled Hitler's and his own personal posture had a military way to it."

Atsız's writings led to violence when the Jewish communities of eastern Thrace were attacked during the 1934 anti-Jewish pogrom. Atsız was a literature teacher in the region back then. Guttstadt writes:

"Immediately prior to the events of 1934, threatening articles directed against Jews had also appeared in the journal Orhun, published by Atsiz."

After a trip to the city of Canakkale, for instance, Atsız wrote:

"The Jew here is like the Jew we see everywhere. Insidious, insolent, malevolent, cowardly, but opportunistic Jew; the Jewish neighborhood is the center of clamor, noise and filth here as [the Jewish neighborhoods] everywhere else.... We do not want to see this treacherous and bastard nation of history as citizens among us anymore."

In another article during the same period, Atsız wrote:

"The creature called the Jew in the world is not loved by anyone but the Jew and the ignoble ones... Phrases in our language such as 'like a Jew', 'do not act like a Jew', 'Jewish bazaar', 'to look like a synagogue'... shows the value given by our race to this vile nation. As the mud will not be iron even if it is put into an oven, the Jew cannot be Turkish no matter how hard he tries. Turkishness is a privilege, it is not granted to everyone, especially to those like Jews... If we get angry, we will not only exterminate Jews like the Germans did, we will go further...."

Motivated by the writings by Atsız and other anti-Semitic authors, Turks targeted the Jews of eastern Thrace in pogroms from June 21- July 4, 1934. These began with a boycott of Jewish businesses, and were followed by physical attacks on Jewish-owned buildings, which were first looted, then set on fire. Jewish men were beaten, and some Jewish women reportedly raped. Terrorized by this turn of events, many Jews fled the region. According to historian Rifat Bali, many of Atsız's followers participated directly in the riots.

Atsız contributed a lot to intoxicating Turkish minds with Jew-hatred. According to Dr. Fatih Yaşlı's book, Our Hate is Our Religion: A Study on Turkist Fascism, Atsız wrote:

"Can a child of the Turkish nation who swung swords and spent their lifetime on battlefields for centuries and a child of the Jewish nation who lived their lives in dishonesty and fraud for centuries be equal? Even if they take a Turkish child and a Jewish child born on the same day to the same education institution and teach them only the Esperanto language and give them the same education under the same conditions, the Turkish child will definitely be brave again, and the Jew will be cowardly again."

Atsız often made dehumanizing statements about other non-Turks, as well. Referring to Greeks, for instance, and conveniently disregarding the Turkish genocide of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, he wrote:

"Can Greeks be regarded as human beings?... Greek means a scorpion. Just as the scorpion stung the turtle who helped it cross the river to do it a favor and then said 'what can I do? This [betrayal] is my habit', the Greeks are also shaped by a habit of enmity against Turks."

Atsız hated almost all non-Turkish peoples. In his will, addressing his then one-and-a-half-year-old son, Yagmur, Atsız wrote, in part:

"The Jews are the worst enemy of all nations. The Russians, the Chinese, the Persians, the Greeks are our historical enemies.

"The Bulgarians, the Germans, the Italians, the British, the French, the Arabs, the Serbs, the Croats, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Romanians are our new enemies.

"The Japanese, Afghans and Americans are our future enemies.

"The Armenians, the Kurds, the Circassians, the Abkhaz, the Bosnians, the Albanians, the Pomaks, the Laz, the Lezgins, the Georgians, the Chechens are our enemies within [Turkey].

"One must become well prepared to combat so many enemies."

His son Yagmur, however, grew up to be an individual critical of his father's views. In a book he penned in 2005, he described how his father measured skulls in an attempt to determine people's "rate of Turkishness."

"Nihal Atsız was dreadfully [into] skullcaps. He measured the skulls of people he did not know at all – beside the skulls of his immediate surroundings and neighbors. He then calculated the skulls meticulously, and informed them whether they were Turkish or not. For example, he told them if they were Turkish 37 percent, nine out of ten or 69.4 percent. For those with a low rate of Turkishness, he always had words of 'consolation' on his lips. For instance, he said, 'But you can partially eliminate your innate deficiency through an extraordinary voluntary effort and vigilant national consciousness.'

"Of course, those with a low rate of Turkishness, according to the skull measurement, would leave [our] home extremely distressed."

Yagmur Atsız added that the "tool" that his father used to measure skulls was a kind of a caliper, about 45 centimeters long, and it was always on his writing desk. Atsız added that his father continued the skull measurement activity for decades.

Atsız also continued to affect Turkish political life in the next decades. Guttstadt notes:

"Anti-Semites and fascists, inspired by the German example, became a constant in Turkey's political system in the period after World War II. In 1962, Nihal Atsız, along with like-minded people, founded the Türkçülük Derneği [Turkism Association], a forerunner of the fascist National Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP), which was responsible for countless murders of leftist students, unionists, and intellectuals during the seventies. The leader of this movement was Atsız's comrade in arms Alparslan Türkeş."

The MHP also includes the far-right, racist Grey Wolf movement (Bozkurtlar), which was recently banned in France after a memorial to victims of the 1914-23 Armenian Genocide was defaced. Officially known as Idealist Hearths (Ülkü Ocakları), the movement has been involved in many acts of violence against civilians as well as political and religious figures. This includes the Alevi massacre in the city of Maras in southeast Turkey in 1978 and the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981.

Atsız's racist worldview has led to deaths and destruction for so many. Nevertheless, at least three other parks in Ankara and Antalya and a street in the city of Amasya have been named after him.

So, what is it in Atsız's thoughts and activities that many in the Turkish opposition -- including Istanbul's mayor -- find worth promoting? Is it his "skull measurement," Nazism, racism, Turkish supremacism and hate on which the Turkish opposition also agrees?

Today, behind many of Turkey's continued aggressive policies such as its anti-Armenian, anti-Greek, anti-Cypriot, anti-Jewish, anti-Kurdish, anti-Western, and anti-Israeli activities lie the racist views of Atsız and the like. Millions of Turks have for decades been poisoned with Atsız's Nazi-like views.

Apparently, the opinions of many members of the Turkish opposition do not seem so different from Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's violent, supremacist mindset. Until the Turkish opposition leaders and politicians honestly face and criticize Turkey's history of crimes, slaughter and systematic racism, true democracy there will remain just a dream.