

Racism in Turkey: The Case of Huseyin Nihal Atsiz

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Introduction

In the quest for Turkish national identity after the break up of the Ottoman Empire, a secular Turkish national identity emerged with the revolution of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. The competing identities of Islam, Ottomanism and Turkism were resolved, or so it seemed at the time, in favor of a peaceful Turkish nationalism that was confined within the borders of the new republic. There was much emphasis on the origins of the Turks and their place in history, manifested in the founding of the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Society. Academic publications and conferences on Turcology proliferated. All citizens were considered to be Turks.

Huseyin Nihal Atsiz articulated a different kind of nationalism; ethnic rather than civic, irredentist and racist rather than peaceful. This is particularly striking since racism is a rare phenomenon in Turkey, even among nationalist thinkers. One reason for this state of affairs is the role of Islam as a significant component of Turkish national identity, despite the secularism of the republican government. This did not necessarily connote religiosity, but simply that when a Turk defines his identity, ethnic Turkishness is complemented with Islam; the two are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing for many people. As the eminent historian Bernard Lewis argues, 'Turks sank their national identity in Islam as the Arabs and Persians had never done'.¹ In this vein, all Muslims were considered brothers in a social, not necessarily in a political, pan-Islamic sense; which ruled out racism.

The existence of very few non-Muslim Turks, unlike the existence of numerous Christian Arabs, strengthened the identification of the Turks with Islam. This is the reason why Huseyin Nihal Atsiz's ideology sounded alien to many since it was devoid of Islam as a central component of Turkish national identity. He was rejected by the majority of the masses and the elite alike. He was more successful in popularizing Turkish history and the imagery of the Grey Wolf with his novels *Bozkurtlann Olumu* (*The Death of the Grey Wolves*) (1946) and *Bozkurtlar Diriliyor* (*The Rebirth of the Grey Wolves*) (1949), which are full of Turkish heroism and hence contributed to pride in the Turkish nation.

Similarly republican nationalism faced a threat or a perceived threat from Islamism throughout the twentieth century, particularly in the last decade of the century in the form of an Islamist political party. The search for the relative place of religion (Islam) and ethnicity (Turkishness) in the composition of Turkish national identity continues at the outset of the twenty-first century.

Huseyin Nihal Atsiz (1905–1975) was one of the most controversial figures in the history of Turkish political thought. However, even though he was active in Turkish nationalist circles throughout his life, he did not gain any material benefits nor did his career opportunities improve. His involvement with Turkish nationalism hindered his

job at the Istanbul University where he was a research assistant. Atsız criticized the people he deemed had negative ideas towards national issues, without distinction, from intellectuals to politicians. His open criticism of the ruling Republican People's Party officials ruled out any possibility for him to stay at the university to continue with his academic research. As a result, he was dismissed from the university and he earned his livelihood publishing journals and serving as a literature teacher at different high schools. Finally he was appointed to the Suleymaniye library in Istanbul where he worked as an expert. Thus it is evident that his ideas had made his life difficult, closing the doors for any ambitious job dreams he might have had. What is critical to mention at this point is that he did not repent; he expressed his ideas no matter how harsh the consequences. An analysis of his articles from the 1930s to the 1970s shows that his ideas did not change at all. From his *Atsız Mecmua*, to *Orhun* to *Otuken* we see the same Atsız with his simple writing style. His insistence on the ideal (*mefkure-ülkü*) he believed and his persecution as a result can be compared with the Islamist Necip Fazıl Kısakurek and leftist Nazım Hikmet. The crux of the matter is that in republican Turkey any expression of an idea or ideology outside official Kemalist ideology is not acceptable and hence not tolerated. The persecution of the Turkists in the 1940s continued with similar measures against the communists. The state apparatus struck both Turanism and socialism with different levels of intensity, yet it is both of their unacceptable natures, as far as the regime is concerned, that is significant to note. Sevkettin Sureyya Aydemir, an intellectual whose personal ideological transformation evolved from pan-Turkism to communism to Kemalism, summarizes the logic of the revolution as such: 'Revolution means the obeying of the will of those who are supportive of the revolution by those who are not supportive of the revolution by force and coercion'.²

Atsız was a thinker, novelist, poet, scholar and ideologue.³ He had a number of original thoughts on Turkish history, including the idea of a monolithic Turkish nation and culture from the Balkans to the Altays and the existence of one or two Turkish states in history unlike the official 16 Turkish states theory which was characterized and distorted by perceiving history from the lenses of dynasties. He was a good novelist, whose books are easy to read and which contain the heroism of ancient Turks and inspired a number of nationalist generations with the imagery of the Grey Wolf. His poems were also successful stemming from his use of simple Turkish. Romanticism is visible in all his writings, although he refuses to consider himself as such.

Nihal Atsız is one of the few Turkish thinkers who openly advocated racism and Turanism. He should be viewed as a separate phenomenon than earlier Turkish nationalists like Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura. Atsız is a product of the 1930s colored with racist theories and the political atmosphere characterized by expansionist and irredentist rhetoric. He simply did not change his views on race, nationality, religion and war. He differed from earlier thinkers also in his thoughts on religion. While he does not openly oppose religion, and writes that it has important social functions, a close reading of his articles demonstrates his anti-religious bias. For Atsız everything should be national: language, literature, music and way of life. In this regard he is not a great believer in the republic because in his opinion Turkey was established in 1044 with the establishment of the Seljuk State. Thus the political regime is not an issue for him, but what matters is whether the state is national or not.

Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, whether one agrees with his views or not, was an original thinker deserving more attention than he has so far attracted. In an age where materialism has replaced all sorts of allegiances, a person who totally disregarded such considerations certainly deserves praise and attention.

This study will start out with a short biography of Atsiz and then will analyze his ideas on nationalism, minorities and religion by directly focusing on his writings.

Life: A Continuous Struggle

Nihal Atsiz was born in Istanbul on 12 January 1905. His parents were from the Black Sea region of Turkey. He attended the primary and secondary schools in Istanbul. In 1922 he was accepted to Military Medical School. He struggled against ‘communists’ in the school and was involved in many incidents.⁴ He was dismissed from the school in 1925 because he did not salute an Arab officer. However, he admits in his memoirs that certain other factors also played in his dismissal such as being rebellious towards his superiors and his involvement with women.⁵

To make a living, he worked at the Kabatas High School as a teacher and then published an article in the journal *Turkiyat* that attracted the attention of the eminent historian Professor Fuat Koprulu. Upon the encouragement of the latter, he enrolled in the Faculty of Literature from which he graduated in 1930. In the same year he became an assistant of Koprulu. In 1931 he started publishing his first journal, *Atsiz Mecmua*, which continued its publication until 1932. His first clash with state authorities, however, was over an intellectual argument.⁶

Atsiz Attacks Turkish Historical Thesis

The First Turkish Historical Congress convened on 2 July 1932. In this congress Anatolia’s Turkishness was ‘proved’ and it was argued that Turks belonged to the white race. Central Asia was the source of all civilization and Anatolian civilization emanated from the immigrants that came from Central Asia.⁷

In one of the sessions Resit Galib, a member of the ruling elite in Turkey, criticized Professor Zeki Velidi Togan by saying that he was very happy that he was not a student of Togan. In response Atsiz sent a telegraph to Galib to the effect: ‘We are proud of being Zeki Velidi’s students’.⁸

In fact Professor Togan was critical of the thesis and the book *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (*The Main Trends in Turkish History*) written by Afet Inan, Yusuf Akcura, Resit Galib and Sadri Maksudi Arsal. With the latter he had his disagreements ever since their days in Russia.⁹ The Togan–Arsal conflict in those days emanated from Togan’s support of territorial autonomy for the Turks in Russia, whereas Arsal supported national–cultural autonomy.¹⁰

Togan criticized the thesis because it resorted to changing history by creating false assumptions. Turkish history did not need such falsifications. He argued that Turkish history was to be analyzed as an indivisible whole.¹¹ On this point Atsiz was influenced by Togan, who also saw Turkish history as having a holistic character. In the congress Professor Koprulu supported Togan rather reluctantly but did not press his ideas with force.¹² As a result of all these problems Togan resigned from Istanbul University.¹³

In the aftermath of the Historical Congress an unfortunate event for Atsiz happened. In September 1932 Resit Galib became minister of education and in 1933 he appointed Atsiz to a Malatya Secondary School in eastern Turkey as a form of punishment. In the same year he was posted to Edirne in western Turkey, where he published the *Orhun*. From 1934 to 1944 he served as a literature teacher in the Yuce Ulku and Bogazici high schools in Istanbul.¹⁴ In 1944 he was accused of Turanism and was arrested, demonstrating the state’s intolerance to rival ideologies. Before going into that, how-

ever, we need to mention Turanist publications and propaganda in Turkey in those years as a background to the political environment.

Turanism in Turkey

Let me start by saying that I employ pan-Turkism and Turanism as identical terms. Thus I do not agree with Georgeon and Landau, who argue that pan-Turanism means unity of Turks, Hungarians, Mongolians and the Finns.¹⁵ Such a union was never seriously envisaged. Manifested in Gokalp's poems, Turanism involves unity of all Turks:

The enemy's country will be destroyed
Turkey will grow into Turan¹⁶

Or more specifically:

Motherland is neither Turkey nor Turkestan
Motherland is a great and eternal country: Turan¹⁷

Turkish nationalism like all nationalisms changes the hierarchy of allegiance in favor of the nation at the expense of religion. In other words the nation becomes paramount. Religion—while not totally disregarded—is assigned a functional role to improve or enhance social cohesiveness and national solidarity. The critique of nationalism from Islamic fundamentalism to Jewish extremism is that nation becomes an idol to worship, thus becoming a secular heresy.

Turanism or pan-Turkism became the 'foreign policy' of Turkism (read Turkish nationalism) aiming to unite all the Turks in the world. Turkish national consciousness could be dated back to the *Orhun* scriptures from the sixth to seventh centuries, the dictionary *Divanu Lugatit Turk* and Karamanoglu Mehmet Bey's making Turkish the official language of the state.¹⁸ Later, in the fifteenth century, under the reign of Murad II, the Ottoman dynasty was linked to legendary Oghuz Khan, a connection that shows its identification with the Turkish past.¹⁹ Thus we could argue that all throughout Turkish history there was latent Turkishness, but nationalism as understood in modern parlance started in the nineteenth century with orientalist work on the history of the Turks and later with similar works done by Turkish scholars. The migration of the Russian Turks to the Empire as well as the political circumstances discrediting Islamism and Ottomanism all exacerbated the rise of Turkish nationalism.²⁰

Atsiz, while he employed Turkish nationalist discourse and was influenced by the earlier writers, was a *sui generis* thinker and differed from them on several issues. He shared, most importantly, with Gokalp, Akcura and Agaoglu, the idea of the strength of the national ideal (*mefkure*) for the nation to exist and achieve great things, but he differed from them in his racism. None of the earlier writers were openly racist. Atsiz, even though he respected Gokalp, criticized him for not being racist. However, one scholar sees a direct link from Gokalp to Atsiz. After the death of Gokalp in 1924 and the closing down of the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) in 1931 Atsiz had become the leader of Turkism.²¹

Atsiz also shared the idea of Zeki Velidi Togan that Turkish history should be viewed as a continuous whole from Central Asia to Anatolia.²² We will talk about Atsiz's views on history below.

As we have noted earlier, Atsiz was a product of the 1930s and 1940s. During those years, at the international level democracies were discredited and racism as manifested in its German version as well as authoritarianism gained ground. Internally there were

numerous publications with racist/Turanist leanings. Besides Atsız's journals there were Reha Oguz Turkkân's *Ergenekon* and *Bozkurt* as well as others such as *Gecit*, *Birlik*, *Çağlayan*, *Tanrıdag* edited by Dr. Rıza Nur, *Gökboru* and *Cınaraltı*.²³ Thus Atsız's activities should be viewed under these external and internal developments.

During the first 20 years of the republic pan-Turkism was not very visible but rather there was latent Turanism. It was only in 1944 that there was a clash between the Turkists and the government. It is hard to determine whether it was because the nationalists had become more assertive or the government wanted to show that there was only one legitimate and tolerated ideology.

The 1944 Racism–Turanism Incident

Nihal Atsız's open challenge to the 'communists' in the state apparatus led to the suppression of nationalist figures. In fact Turanists were accused of having contacts with the Nazi regime in Germany throughout the Second World War.²⁴ Atsız published two open letters to prime minister Sükrü Saracoğlu in *Orhun* dated 1 March 1944 and 1 April 1944. In those letters Atsız criticized communists such as Pertev Naili Boratav and Sabahattin Ali, who were in educational institutions and whom he knew personally. Most importantly education minister Hasan Ali Yücel was accused of courting these individuals and was asked to resign. Sabahattin Ali took Atsız to the court on the charge that he had insulted him. On 3 May (this day is celebrated by the nationalists as Turkism Day each year) 1944 university students demonstrated in front of the court building in favor of Atsız. Later the case became an attack on nationalists leading to the arrest of Zeki Velidi, Reha Oguz Turkkân, Fethi Tevetoğlu, Hikmet Tanyu and Alpaslan Türkeş (future founder and leader of the Nationalist Action Party), who were accused of planning a coup against the government. They were subject to torture in the notorious Sansaryan Han. On 19 May 1944 President İsmet İnönü in his Youth Day speech condemned Turanism, which would jeopardize Turkey's relations with its neighbors and would be in the interest of Germany.²⁵ On 29 March 1945 Togan was sentenced to ten years and Atsız to six years in prison. On 31 March 1947, having stayed in prison for a year and a half, all the defendants were acquitted since the Military Court of Appeal overturned the decision.²⁶ In the proceedings of the court Atsız was accused by the prosecutor of being Greek in origin, a charge that Atsız denied.²⁷ It was later argued by many that this court decision was a political bribe to the Russians who had recently defeated the Germans.²⁸

Atsız and the other accused were criticized by the politicians and the journalists because they saw Turanism as adventurism abroad and racism as an idea that would divide the country internally. However, many of them, including Sükrü Saracoğlu, Falih Rifki Atay, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, said that they were Turkists; nevertheless, they were against racism. Even the conservative novelist Peyami Safa did not identify with Atsız. Furthermore, Kemalism was advocated as the only legitimate ideology while extreme left and extreme right were seen as dangerous ideologies.²⁹ In fact the dismissal of Pertev Naili Boratav, Behice Boran and Niyazi Berkes from the Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, respectively, in 1947 on the charges of their being communists,³⁰ showed the intolerance of the regime towards the left *and* the right. Thus, the 1944 Racism/Turanism case and the 1947 decision regarding the leftist professors should be viewed within the same policy of the state. Nonetheless, the attack on the right was much harsher than the one on the left.

Atsız did not have a job between 1947 and 1949. In 1949 he started working as an

expert in the Suleymaniye library. In 1969 he retired from this job. In his articles in *Otuken* he accused certain parliamentarians of being Kurdistans, which led to another court case against him. He was arrested in 1973 for insulting the people mentioned above. President Fahri Koruturk, however, pardoned him later.³¹ Atsiz died in 1975.

The events in the 1940s showed that any deviation from the parameters of official ideology was not tolerated in Turkey. Atsiz all through his life suffered as a result of the publication of his ideas. He can be compared on this point to Nazim Hikmet, Necip Fazil Kısakurek and Sabahattin Ali. However, Atsiz did not become as famous as those figures. In fact Berkes in his memoirs expresses his surprise at Atsiz being forgotten so quickly.³² Hüseyin Nihal Atsiz lived his life as a man of ideology, not afraid to express his controversial thoughts. His racism in an Islamic milieu—despite the secularization of the country—did not appeal to the masses. Turanism on the other hand was viewed by the state bureaucracy as a dangerous idea that would provoke the Soviets. Thus his ideas had little support whether among the masses or among the politicians. The acceptable form of nationalism was Turkish nationalism within the boundaries of Turkey. It was the Nationalist Action Party of Turkey that to some extent expressed the ideas of Atsiz on the political level. This party too did not have the plurality of the votes, but it was a force to reckon with in the Turkish body politic.

Pan-Turkism at the close of the century had lost most of its aggressive stance. In its stead the emerging cultural and economic cooperation within the Turkish world had become popular. Thus, it might be argued that Atsiz is vindicated on the ideological/political plane as even the leftist parties are supporting the enhancing of relations with the Turkish countries.

Atsiz's *Weltanschauung*

In this section of the study the works of Atsiz will directly be analyzed and quoted in order to present a clear image of Atsiz's worldview. He was candid when expressing his ideas in the journals he had published and in other publications. We see an evident continuity in his thought from the 1930s, when he started writing, to the 1970s when he died. The lack of change in his opinions, without any deviation, for 40 years demonstrates his strength of commitment to the beliefs he held throughout his life.

On Turkish History

Hüseyin Nihal believes that it is impossible to be objective in social sciences. Trying to be objective involves treason of one's national interests. Thus all the historical theses need to be filtered through the national prism.³³ To put it differently, he advocates a national historiography.

However, Turkish historiography was marked by false assumptions. His first and foremost thesis is that Turkish history should be viewed as a single identity and as part of a single process—which is similar to the ideas of Togan. The problem with Turkish historians was that change of a dynasty in a state was viewed as the establishment of a different state; the truth was that in history there were only a few states that were established by the Turks. Change of dynasties meant only a change in the regime, not the formation of a different state.³⁴ Turkey was established in 1044 with the creation of the Seljuk State as a result of their victory over the Ghaznevids. Then came the Ilhanlis and then the Ottomans. There was no Ottoman state but rather an Ottoman dynasty.³⁵

Thus the republic of Turkey is the continuation of those dynasties; it is the same state

with a different political regime. While Atsiz does not openly say so, he is not a great believer in the republican Turkey. For him the Turkish state is paramount, not the type of regime. Dr. Rıza Nur, who Atsiz describes as a great Turkist, first argued the idea that the Turkish state started with the Seljuks.³⁶

Atsiz asked for a Turkish Historical Congress to solve such problems as the categorization of Turkish history, the spelling of the names of historic figures and to decide whether certain warriors such as Timur and Genghis are heroes or enemies of the Turks.³⁷ His opinion on this issue is: both of them were heroes who tried to unite the Turks under one banner. In this regard the Ankara battle between the Ottomans and Timur in the fifteenth century should, according to nationalist historiography, be viewed as a fratricidal war.³⁸

Going back to earlier Turkish history, Huns under the leadership of Mete united the Turks under one state around 220 BC. Mete created the Turkish nation.³⁹ Other dynasties such as the Avars and Gokturks were the continuation of the same state. Thus the eastern branch of the Turks too had more or less one state; hence Atsiz 'proves' the theory of the Turks establishing one or two states.

Nihal Atsiz respected all the Ottoman sultans including Abdulhamid II, who is praised for successfully ruling the country for 33 years. His dissolving of the parliament was a positive decision because in a constitutional system the minorities would have a great say over the political destiny of the country, which is unacceptable for Atsiz. The Committee of Union and Progress is criticized for being responsible for the dissolution of the empire within ten years and being influenced by the Masons—hence the Jews and European imperialism.⁴⁰

In an article he wrote in 1942 for the *Tanrıdag*, he defended all the sultans as being patriotic and—with an exception of a few—as being competent. He refused to accept the last sultan, Vahdettin, as a traitor and believed that he had sent Mustafa Kemal to Anatolia to solve national problems.⁴¹ He concluded the article by saying that respect for the values of the past is essential for nationalism and ethics. 'Even though we are reformists, we are loyal to the past.'⁴²

Atsiz supported the view that each nation has historical enemies; thus a nation should be educated with national love towards one's own nation and national hatred towards the traditional enemies. Furthermore, 'life is war'; those who are afraid to fight should not live.⁴³ And in a letter he wrote in 1974 to Adile Ayda, daughter of Sadri Maksudi, he expressed the opinion that a war with large casualties would rejuvenate the virtues inherent in the Turkish nation and end the immoralities existent in Turkish society.⁴⁴ 'We no longer want humanity and peace but nationalism and war. Humanitarianism is being like a dog. Humanity does not go hand in hand with nationalism.'⁴⁵

In sum Atsiz had some original ideas on Turkish history and related topics. 'Turkism should have a world view' which should encompass everything from clothing and outfit to family life. Atsiz propagated a holistic Turkist *Weltanschauung*.⁴⁶

On Racism and Turanism

Atsiz argued that Turkism has been visible in the writing of Kasgarlı Mahmud's *Divanü Lügati'ti Türk*, who declared that 'God has created the Turks for war' and Ali Şir Nevai's argument that Turkish language was far superior to Persian. Modern Turkism started with Ali Suavi, Süleyman Paşa and Ziya Gökalp, who were not racists, and Dr. Rıza Nur, who was a moderate racist.⁴⁷ The classification of who is a racist according to Atsiz is important in understanding his views. Turkism has two components: racism

and Turanism. Racism involves the protection of a nation's health since mixing with lower races results in favor of the lower ones. Each race has mixed with other races but after some time the blood purifies itself. However, if it continues mixing with other races it is corrupted without any prospect of healing. Racism, furthermore, is a historical consciousness. History shows the betrayal of the Turkish state by the non-Turks. The second component of Turkism is Turanism, which involves the unification of all Turks. It does not include Mongolians, Fins or Hungarians. In sum Turkism aims to unite all the Turks and to protect the Turks from foreign racial influences.⁴⁸

When talking about the Gallipoli victory during World War I, Atsız argued that the Turkish race won the battle and not the Turkish nation, which includes Kurds and other mixed communities. He does not want the Jews or the Gypsies as citizens. Turkification of the Gypsies by spoiling the purity of the Turkish blood is a crime. 'The basis of the Turkish race should be race and blood not language.' 'It does not matter if our numbers are few. It is better to be few and clean.'⁴⁹ 'The best way to get rid of this microbe is massacre. Only the Turks should have the right to live in Turkey.'⁵⁰

Atsız, while sympathetic to racism, refuses that he is pro-German. He sees all ideologies such as democracy, fascism and communism as foreign. Even Islam is not Turkish in origin. Turkism is the only native and national idea. His racism is against all nations: 'I am not a fascist. I am only a Turkist. That is why I do not like any foreign nation ... I am neither fascist nor democrat'. He argues that the Turkish government is also racist. There is a special condition 'to be of the Turkish race', for acceptance into military high school or to the Military Academy. He only wants to extend these conditions to all the people who play a role in Turkish social and ideological life from teachers, doctors, architects to engineers.⁵¹ Atsız is also known to accuse his opponents for not being a true Turk: he accused fellow nationalist Reha Oguz Turkan for being an Armenian, Sabahattin Ali as a Greek and most of the Republican People's Party leadership as not being genuine Turks, e.g. Hasan Ali.⁵²

Only at one point did it look as if he was moving away from racism. He described the Turkish nation as those of Turkish origin and those who are Turkified so much that they have no other racial allegiance.⁵³ Having said that, however, it is very difficult for an individual to be classified as a Turk according to Atsız's standards. He accuses the quasi-Turks (Turkumsu) for the disasters of the empire. Abdullah Cevdet tried to destroy nationality and religion because he was a Kurdish nationalist and Rıza Tevfik betrayed the state because he was half Albanian, half Circassian. In order to be a Turk, he claimed, there is no alternative but to be racially a Turk.⁵⁴ He further tried to prove the Turkishness of Namık Kemal and Ziya Gökalp.

Turanism on the other hand would exalt the Turkish nation and solve the problems, and only those who are not truly Turks would oppose such an idea.⁵⁵ To solve the problems relating to national interests war is the only solution. Two instruments are necessary to be ready for war: technical strength and, more importantly, spiritual strength (*ulku*). This involves the belief in the superiority of the nation and the desire to grow. The national idea, which includes religion, purports to reach an aim called Red Apple (*Kızıl Elma*). National ideals allow the nations to physically exist. The ideal means 'uniting and growing' by which Turanism is meant. Thus ideals are expansionist and aggressive; they cannot be defensive. Economic growth and industrialization cannot be ideals. The ideal has its eyes on a distant past and is like a religion that tries to energize the power of a nation.⁵⁶ However, Atsız does not elaborate on how the

Turks will unite. He simply argues that the Turks will unite. This is the ultimate aim of Turkism.

Atsiz's Militarism

For Atsiz military is the science of confrontation. To live one needs to fight; thus martial arts leads to the right to live, making it the only genuine science. Turkism supports the creation of a disciplined nation, which rules out despotism and extreme libertarianism. The traditional and contemporary enemies of Turkey are the Russians, communism, Masonry and Zionism. To confront these enemies the Turkists need to enter military schools and the School of Political Science (*Mulkiye*) that prepare the future bureaucrats.⁵⁷

In his proposal for reform in secondary education, Atsiz supports the introduction of theoretical as well as practical military education. National sports such as wrestling should be taught at the schools.⁵⁸ One of Atsiz's slogans was 'All Turks are one army'.⁵⁹ He also believed that national economics, which included national agriculture, was essential to feed the army.⁶⁰

On Moral Values

While Atsiz's views on religion will shortly be analyzed, his secular worldview included a high degree of worldly moralism. We have mentioned above that every field of life—ethics, literature, music, diet, law, family, tradition and clothing—was to be national. The protection of family values was the utmost duty of women—who while being equal to men had the duty to be good mothers and wives.⁶¹ He stressed the importance of spiritual values as national ideals that should have higher value over material development such as building factories or improvement of science and technology. The media and recreational centers such as bars, soccer fields, beaches and cinema are all detrimental to the moral values of the nation. This lack of morality was because of the quasi-Turks (*Turkumsu*) and the converts (*donme*).⁶² Thus he supports Turkification while criticizing the extreme form of Westernization.⁶³

For Atsiz spiritual values had a superiority over material values. He did not like the Western way of life manifested in such things as bars and parties which led the youth to become lax. He advocated strong military discipline at schools, preparing the students for future confrontations. In other words his was a secular criticism of materialism.

On Religion and Ideology

It should be clear from the discussion of Atsiz's ideas that Islam does not play a major role in his thought. As among most nationalists religion is subordinated to the nation. In fact the idea is 'nationalism ... is superior to religion'.⁶⁴ 'Is not your [new] Kaba Canakkale, Sakarya and Dumlupinar?'⁶⁵ However, he does not deny the social function of religion as a force of solidarity. He argues that the Turkish world is based on Islam, and when the Turkish union is established non-Muslim Turks such as the *shaman* and Christian Turks will become Muslim. Religion, however, should become a social institution, not something that divides the people. Religion is a necessity of the soul but the wrong attitude of republican Turkey towards religion led to the emergence of certain fundamentalist groups such as the Ticanis and the Nur movement. Said-i Nursi,

the founder of the latter Islamic community, is an ignorant Kurd whose real motive is Kurdish nationalism. He saw his movement (*Nurculuk*) at the same footing with communism, both having emerged as a result of a lack of national ideal in the country. He advocated the imams' obtaining university degrees. Atsiz also strongly condemned attempts at pan-Islamism whose advocates were intoxicated by imaginary ideals, and Islamic Sufism, which he described as the philosophy of beggars.⁶⁶

He described communism as being pro-Russian and as open treachery. He saw communism (*Moskofculuk*), Kurdism and political Islam (*siyasi ummetçiler*) as the enemies of Turkism that should be fought with utmost force. He accused certain parliamentarians as being Kurdist.⁶⁷ Atsiz described the right as nationalist and conservative regarding morals. He argued that rightist parties should be sensitive to national issues and that they should encourage a disciplined society. Since the leftist parties were internationalist, they were under no such responsibility. Furthermore, a rightist party could support social justice. What counts, however, is its being nationalist, which has a direct relationship with being rightist. In other words the more a party is nationalist the more it is rightist. Islamists and the communists are leftists because they are internationalists. Communism is a wrong ideology because people not only have stomachs but also beliefs. He sees none of the political parties in 1970 as Turkist and a Turkist party could be established in the future, although it is not essential for the creation of a nationalist government.⁶⁸ Four years earlier, however, he admitted voting for Turkes. Atsiz also supported the Justice Party for its anti-communism.⁶⁹

He was critical of Bulent Ecevit when he became the leader of the Republican People's Party, accusing him of socialism and being anti-nationalist. He was furious when Ecevit supported the idea of general strike for the workers because Atsiz saw it as a manifestation of the destruction of Turkey.⁷⁰ Indeed, any ideology that was not perceived as national was condemned by Atsiz, who described it as detrimental to the interests of the Turkish nation. His worldview, in short, was totally colored with Turkism.

Conclusion

Viewing Atsiz's ideas from different dimensions, his aggressive, nationalist, militarist and racist opinions are easy to detect. He was a believer in brute force and irredentism. He deviated from official ideology, Kemalism, which purported to develop economically at home and as a consequence of the Enver Pasha Syndrome perceived any involvement with Outside Turks as adventurism. While Atsiz praised Atatürk, he was not a great believer in republicanism and all that the new regime brought. This does not mean that he preferred the Ottoman state. For him Turkey was the continuation of the Ottoman Empire as both were the same state. Only the political regime had changed. For him national state was paramount, not the political structure of the state.

It is no longer possible to find pure Turkists such as Atsiz, as Turkish nationalism became more eclectic and infiltrated by Islamism and neo-Ottomanism.⁷¹ Such an ideological eclecticism can be traced in the ideology of the Nationalist Action Party, which incorporated Islamic symbols in its slogans and discourse and which was the reason Atsiz stopped supporting the party. Today there is, as there has always been, figures supporting the ethnic nationalism of Atsiz within the Nationalist Action Party, but the ideology of the NAP can more correctly be described as Turkish-Islamic synthesis, first articulated by Professor Ibrahim Kafesoglu. Both Islam and Turkishness seem to constitute significant, *albeit* ambivalent, parts of this ideology.

Almost 20 years after Atsiz's death, his fellow Turkist and rival Reha Oguz Turkkan asked the rhetorical question whether the imagined *Türk* of Atsiz had ever existed or whether he exists today.⁷²

Huseyin Nihal Atsiz was an idealist and he was courageous in defending his ideas regardless of the consequences. Throughout his life he propagated the same ideas with little, if any, deviations. Such a state of affairs led to his imprisonment and being fired from his academic positions. He was sincere in his beliefs and did not recant. The extremeness of his views prevented him from being adopted by the majority of the people. His novels in particular have literary value, but his association with a certain ideology rules out the possibility of them being read by moderate intellectuals. That is the reason why Atsiz is not much known outside nationalist circles.

NOTES

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4. Mustafa Ozden, 'Olumunun 21. Yildonumunde Kusaklara Oncu olmus Buyuk Onder: H. Nihal Atsiz' ('Great Leader Atsiz, Who Has Been a Guide to Generations, on the Twenty First Year of his Death'), *Turk Dunyasi Tarih Dergisi (History Journal of the Turkish World)*, Vol. 21, No. 121, 1997, p. 46.
5. Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, *Canakkale'ye Yuruyus. Turkçuluge Karsi Hach Seferleri (March to Canakkale: New Crusades to Turkism)*, Istanbul: Irfan, 1997, p. 232. For an alternative version of his dismissal, see Sakin Oner, *Nihal Atsiz*, Istanbul: Toker, 1988, p. 10.
6. *Atsiz'dan Adile Ayda'ya Mektuplar (Letters from Atsiz to Adile Ayda)*, Ankara: no publisher, 1988, p. 12.
7. Nadir Ozbek, 'Zeki Velidi Togan ve Turk Tarih Tezi' ('Zeki Velidi Togan and Turkish Historical Thesis'), *Tophumsal Tarih (Social History)*, Vol. 8, No. 45, 1997, p. 21.
8. Atsiz, *Turkçuluge Karst*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
9. Turgut Akpınar, 'Sadri Maksudi Arsal', *Tarih ve Toplum (History and Society)*, Vol. 27, No. 162, 1997, p. 57.
10. Ozbek, 'Zeki Velidi Togan', *op. cit.*, p. 21.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Jacob Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*, London and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 95.
14. *Atsiz'dan Adile Ayda'ya Mektuplar*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
15. Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, *op. cit.*, p. 1; and François Georgeon, *Turk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri, Yusuf Akcura (1876–1935)*, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayinlari, 1996, p. 50.
16. Ziya Gokalp, *Kizil Elma (Red Apple)*, Istanbul: Toker, 1995, p. 108.
17. Ziya Gokalp, *Turklesmek, Islamlasmak, Muasirlasmak (Turkification, Islamization and Modernization)*, Istanbul: Toker, 1988, p. 63.
18. Ali Engin Oba, *Turk Milliyetçiliğinin Dogusu (The Birth of Turkish Nationalism)*, Ankara: Imge, 1994, pp. 13–15.
19. David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876–1908*, London: Cass, 1977, p. 2; and Lewis, *The Middle East*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108–109.
20. Ziya Gokalp, *Turkçulugun Esaslar (The Principles of Turkism)*, Istanbul: Inkilap, 1994, pp. 4–11.
21. *Atsiz'dan Adile Ayda'ya Mektuplar*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
22. Ozbek, 'Zeki Velidi Togan', *op. cit.*, p. 25.
23. Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–92.
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26. Mustafa Ozden, 'Atsiz ve 1944 Irkcilik–Turancilik Olayi' ('Atsiz and the 1944 Racism–Turanism

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27. Ugur Mumcu, *40'lerin Cadi Kazani (Cauldron of the 40s)*, Ankara: Tekin, 1992, p. 82.
28. Ozden, 'Atsiz ve 1944', 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
29. *Irkcilik–Turancilik, op. cit.*, pp. 36–38.
30. Mumcu, *40'lerin Cadi, op. cit.*, p. 99.
31. *Atsiz'dan Adile Ayda'ya Mektuplar, op. cit.*, p. 15.
32. Niyazi Berkes, *Unutulan Yllar (The Forgotten Years)*, Istanbul: Iletisim, 1997, p. 172.
33. Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler (Issues in Turkish History)*, Istanbul: Irfan, 1997, p. 5.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 31, 33.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–19, 24.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
39. Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, *Türk Edebiyati Tarihi (History of Turkish Literature)*, Istanbul: Irfan, 1992, p. 17.
40. Atsiz, *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler, op. cit.*, pp. 82–83, 85.
41. 'Osmanli Padisahlari' in *ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 121.
44. *Atsiz'dan Adile Ayda'ya Mektuplar, op. cit.*, p. 60.
45. Atsiz, *Canakkale'ye Yuruyus, op. cit.*, p. 21.
46. Atsiz, *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler, op. cit.*, p. 29.
47. Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, *Icimizdeki Seytan (The Devil in us)*, Istanbul: Irfan, 1992, pp. 60–62.
48. Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu (The Turkish Ideal)*, Istanbul: Irfan, 1992, pp. 95–96, 99.
49. Atsiz, *Canakkale'ye Yuruyus, op. cit.*, pp. 8–11.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
51. Atsiz, *Icimizdeki Seytan, op. cit.*, pp. 63–68; *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, p. 36.
52. Atsiz, *Canakkale'ye Yuruyus, op. cit.*, p. 298.
53. Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, pp. 51–52.
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55. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
56. Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, pp. 7–8, 12, 19, 21, 25–26, 29.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104, 106–107.
58. Atsiz, *Makaleler III, op. cit.*, pp. 189–190.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 253. 'Butun Turkler bir Ordu'.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
61. Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, pp. 83, 105.
62. Atsiz, *Makaleler III, op. cit.*, pp. 31, 157.
63. Ozden, 'Atsiz ve 1944', 1997, p. 48.
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66. Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, pp. 101, 115 and *Makaleler III*, pp. 214, 451–452, 455, 469, 504.
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68. Atsiz, *Türk Ulkusu, op. cit.*, pp. 56–57, 133.
69. Atsiz, *Makaleler III, op. cit.*, p. 52.
70. Atsiz, *Makaleler II, op. cit.*, pp. 249–250, 278.
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