

An Infatuation with the Leader: The Fascination with Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and the Construction of a Male Subjectivity in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's Writing and Career

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SYNOPSIS

This paper provides an account of the infatuation, common amongst young Turkish intellectuals of the 1920s, with Mustafa Kemal, the future Atatürk, 'Father of the Turks', by examining the career of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu between 1908 and the late 1930s. In order to explain Karaosmanoğlu's complete turnaround in his understanding of both art and life-style, provoked by his encounter with the powerful figure of the 'Saviour of the nation', this contribution investigates the emasculating and infantilising effects of the long process of Ottoman modernisation imposed upon the empire's Muslim community by the Sultan, traditionally perceived as an imaginary father figure for the faithful, charged with safeguarding the right order of things as prescribed by God. The very fact that the Sultan himself acted as the driving force of the modernisation process deeply troubled the community of the faithful because, in their eyes, this process implied the Sultan's abdication of his traditional duty as a father figure. In his literary production, memoirs, and political engagement, Karaosmanoğlu provides important clues for understanding the effects of these dynamics in the construction of male subjectivity and of power relations in this fundamental period of Turkish history.

KEYWORDS

Turkey; Atatürk; Karaosmanoğlu; masculinity; Turkish literature; Turkish nationalism.

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This paper discusses the literary, journalistic, and political career of one of the most celebrated Turkish writers of the 20th century, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974), and his profound fascination for Mustafa Kemal. Their encounter during the 1920s led to a near total transformation of Karaosmanoğlu's personality and artistic convictions, shaping him into one of the most dedicated contributors to the construction of the future Atatürk's power and personality cult. Not only his artistic convictions, but also the literary genres engaged in by Karaosmanoğlu underwent profound transformations over the course of his long career: from 1909 to circa 1919, he wrote short stories and reviews in a number of literary journals; from 1919 until after the end of the Second World War he composed eight novels, and was highly active as a political commentator and reporter; finally, from 1955 onwards he dedicated



himself almost exclusively to autobiographic writing. Karaosmanoğlu's autobiography reveals a close relationship between his literary creation and his constant search for an authoritative and reliable male figure, which he eventually found in Mustafa Kemal.

Karaosmanoğlu's fervent admiration for the national leader during the 1920s and 1930s cannot be said to have been an isolated or surprising phenomenon. It was, in fact, shared by a considerable number of intellectuals from his generation, testifying to a particular conformation of power and to the way in which that generation of intellectuals related to it. What makes Karaosmanoğlu's case particularly noteworthy and exemplary is the uniqueness of his personal and artistic development. Born and educated as an aristocrat, he was led in his youth — by his elitist gaze, his complete identification with aestheticism, his refinement, as well as the affectation typical of the Ottoman elites, and his contempt for what he saw as the meagreness and coarseness of the lives of the popular classes — to join the literary circle *Fecr-i Ati* ('Dawn of the Future') which was formed during the 1910s under the motto 'Art is personal and sacred' (Karaosmanoğlu 2014, p. 32). As he would recount years later, despite the tragic historical circumstances that were rocking the empire at the time (such as the wars in the Balkans and the Great War), he not only insisted on defining his political commitment as the search for an individual aesthetic, but he swore to defend with all his strength, and against all adversity the motto 'Art is personal and sacred' — a motto he helped to formulate (*ibid.*). He would relinquish this oath only after his encounter with Mustafa Kemal, in his incarnation as saviour of the Motherland; in its stead, a militantly nationalist identity would emerge in the figure of Karaosmanoğlu, who was thus radically transformed into the sworn enemy of any individualistic vision of art.

MODERNITY AND ITS TROUBLES

Like many other Turkish-Ottoman writers who lived between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and between the fall of the empire and rise of the Nation, Karaosmanoğlu had also formed his literary and artistic subjectivity in close connection with the cultural and human consequences of the long process of imperial modernisation. We thus need to look briefly at this process, which was officially set in motion in 1839 with a decree (the *Tanzimat*) issued by the Sultan, requiring the re-ordering of the empire's institutions following European and Western criteria. Modernisation was presented as a necessary step to ensure the survival of the empire which, though it had never been colonised, was nonetheless under the economic and political hegemony of European powers. This 'restructuring' was understood as a move of resistance, an instrument to bridge the gap between the empire and the West. It effectively re-interpreted the naturalising metaphor of domination that was often read as underlying colonialism, that of a masculinised West over a feminised Orient. Whereas this metaphor naturalised the relationship of domination as that of male over female, understood as given, timeless, and immutable, its 'Ottoman' reinterpretation reframed it in a historical and temporal, and thus transitory sense, positing the Orient as an infant rather than as a woman. Through development, mod-



ernisation, and growth, the infant could in turn become a man and hence emancipate himself. The illusion produced by this lasted decades, though already by the early 20th century, Turkish-Ottoman writers were beginning to point to its hopelessness in their novels.¹ Modernity was unattainable; however much the empire's elites rushed to cover the distance, the constant movement that characterised modernity located the goal in an 'eternal future', transforming the mimetic struggle into an act of impotence (Koçak 2010, p. 306). The oriental subject, compelled into such impotent mimesis, was doomed either to become effeminate or to remain forever an infant (Gürbilek 2010, pp. 149–155). He was forced to live with constant frustration, with a feeling of inadequacy and impotence, and with the guilt of not knowing how to grow up and become an adult.

In the case of the empire's Muslim community, such striving towards modernity included the Sultan's renunciation of his traditional role of representing and upholding the Book, the absolute rule that regulated the lives of the faithful. The latter, having thus lost their father figure, were left at a loss, confused by the desires that modernity and the West provoked in them, and which infantilised them and emasculated them (Somay 2014, p. 45). The deep anguish caused by this dynamic would continue to characterise the approach to modernity of generations of Muslims. To understand such anguish, it is necessary to consider the fundamental difference in the construction of paternal power between Western and Oriental civilisations. In the foundational myths of Western civilisation, parricide is a constitutive act;² the brothers kill their father, devour his body, and internalise his power, sharing it among them, and modifying its primordial structure. Oriental mythologies, instead, tell of the competition between brothers who fight for their father's favour, leading them not to challenge the latter's existence, but instead to commit fratricide. The permanent supervision exercised by the father's castrating power over his sons is symbolised by circumcision, the foundational contract of the Abrahamic religions, which gave the father a means to avoid killing his son. God's dominion, to whose words as they are inscribed in the Book all Muslims must submit, is absolute, and as such, it reverberates in Sultans and fathers, the custodians and guarantors of the fulfilment of His rule. The power that results from this is implacable and authoritarian: those invested with it are protective of it to the point of being capable of killing their sons or provoking fratricide in order to preserve it.³ Power can be transferred

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- 1 For an emblematic example, see the passage in which the protagonist burns all of his writings while reflecting on his inability to follow the newest literary developments in Uşaklıgil 1963, p. 160.
 - 2 I am referring here to *Esiodo* and Freud's interpretation of it in *Totem and Taboo*; see Scully 2015 and Freud 2010.
 - 3 As was expressly sanctioned by the constitutive act of the Ottoman empire, Mehmed II's 15th century *Kanunname*, the ascension to the throne of a new Sultan must correspond to the killing of all princes but one. Though modified over the course of the centuries to include the active surveillance of the princes in their apartments at the Court (known as *kafes*, cages), the principle nonetheless did not lose any of its efficacy with regard to the father's ability to keep his sons under constant fear of being castrated or assassinated to ensure that he could continue to hold on to his own power and safety (Somay 2014, pp. 54–57).



to one of the sons only after the death of the Sultan/father, and exclusively on his terms, so as to ensure that his replacement does not affect the primordial power structure.

FATHERS AND SONS

The conservative and authoritarian nature of power, and the impossibility for the sons to conceive of a radical change in the order of things, deeply affected the political movements that arose in the wake of the empire's political and institutional modernisation. During the 1860s, for the first time in the empire's history, the movement of the Young Ottomans had united the highly educated members of a new generation of Muslim imperial elites in an attempt to counter their own fathers' absolute power. The Young Ottomans had rallied behind the claim that the older generation had lost sight of the good of the Islamic community. However, the movement would be defeated due to its lack of authority. Familiar with European languages and culture, as well as with the Enlightenment and the constitutional movements of the time, the Young Ottomans believed that they had the necessary abilities to participate in the government of the empire. They were openly critical of the policies of renewal promoted by the imperial court. They participated in the public sphere created by their peers from the empire's non-Muslim communities; through a number of publications, plays, and novels, they proposed a positive, acceptable vision of modernity, which they hoped would appease the troubled feelings that the innovations of the time had often provoked. At heart, their proposal was to harness modernity, taking on its most useful aspects, while carefully identifying and rejecting those other aspects that might have been dangerous for the community (Parla 1990, pp. 43–64). In their view, there was no doubt that the Muslim community was superior both spiritually and morally; hence, in the union with the West brought about by modernisation, it was up to the Muslim community to take on the masculine role, and to keep in check the femininity represented by the West and its materiality. In other words, they believed that the spirit ought to dominate matter and the desire that the latter could provoke. The Young Ottomans thus attempted to situate themselves in the place of the father who had abdicated his role, and to write the desirable text of Ottoman modernity in his stead. This commitment led them to take on the role of journalists and writers, inspired by Western theatre and novels, genres that they saw as capable of 'educating while entertaining', of narrating modernity while pointing to its potential pitfalls, and of suggesting better ways of approaching it (Evin 1983, p. 43). The new, modern literature in the Turkish language was thus *educational*, politically charged, and socially engaged. It emphasised the collective over the individual. Writing or reading such literature positioned one as favourable to modernity, though at the same time it also expressed a measure of resistance to it, providing a platform on which to negotiate its terms (Gürbilek 2010, p. 178). Motivated by the fear of becoming effeminate or remaining forever infantilised, this resistance confirmed the strongly felt need for the figure of the father, whose absence did not imply the son's freedom but rather his bewilderment, endangering the orderly functioning of the community. The immutable character of the authoritarian structure of power, and the urgency of

the need for a father eventually defeated the Young Ottomans. In 1878, Sultan Abdülhamid II — whom the Young Ottomans had effectively placed on the throne in 1876 thanks to his willingness to establish a parliamentary monarchy — strengthened his own position and revoked the constitution and instead created a modern despotism that he exercised in the name of Islam. Most Young Ottomans fled abroad, while Abdülhamid lay the foundations for a reign destined to last 30 years, setting up an efficient spy network, censoring the press and all intellectual activity, and relocating most officers of the new modernised army to backwaters along the empire's frontiers. Lastly, he strengthened the empire's collaboration with Wilhelmine Germany, and jumpstarted the modernisation of the economic, commercial, and communications infrastructures of the empire, realising thus the desirable version of Ottoman modernity which the Young Ottomans had strived to achieve.



ART

Abdülhamid's rule alienated most intellectual and artistic activity from the sphere of political debate, contributing to the removal of the educational mission to which they had been dedicated by the Young Ottomans. Over the course of the final decade of the 19th century, the link with European, and especially French literary culture became more systematic. A new generation of intellectuals began to study its historical evolution, and to discuss literary theory. These new literary talents began to look for ways to express their anguish at the undeniable crumbling of the empire and of its elite, of which they themselves were a part. In 1896, a group of young writers formed a collective around the journal *Servet-i Fünun* ('Heritage of Knowledge'), headed by the poet Tevfik Fikret.⁴ This circle started the first literary current, known as *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* ('New Literature'), in an attempt to confer new outlooks, greater technical and aesthetic refinement, and artistic and linguistic expressive richness to Ottoman writing, thought of in terms that privileged artistry, beauty, and emotionality. While Ottoman poetry was dominated by the influence of the symbolist and Decadent movements, Ottoman novelists turned towards a more mature search for realism, taking on a more well-defined approach to history, interiorised over decades of contact with modern European culture. Ottoman writers were thus beginning to feel closer than ever to the European narrative models and style of writing about emotions and sentiment. However, at the same time, the Islamic world was being colonised by Western powers, and newly-born Christian nations in the Balkans were advancing increasingly violent claims, while recasting the native Muslim population as an enemy foreign invader.

The cultural formation of Karaosmanoğlu took place against this background. Reading his recounting of his childhood in *Anamın Kitabı* ('My Mother's Book', 1957),

4 Considered the founder of modern Turkish-language poetry, Tevfik Fikret (1867–1915) was influenced by the French symbolist and Decadence movements. He was a humanist, averse to religion. Under his editorial leadership, *Servet-i Fünun*, a journal which had originated in 1890 to broadcast European cultural and scientific debates in the Ottoman Empire, became a platform exclusively dedicated to literature.



it seems that he was deeply affected by it, to the point of inserting the metaphors of modern/primitive, advanced/backward, and central/peripheral in his descriptions of the intimate circle of his family. His love for what he had experienced during the first four years of his life in Cairo — the elegance and refinement of the Egyptian court, which had carried out an early and successful process of modernisation — was represented by his adoration for his mother, who belonged to that milieu, and contrasted with his contempt for his father, who was born in Anatolia to a rich and powerful landowning family, but which was closely linked to the old regime. For Yakup Kadri, his father and his father's milieu were characterised by a coarse, crass masculinity; this judgement on his father, which he dated back to his childhood, would continue to shape Karaosmanoğlu's personal culture, imbuing much of his later work with an 'orientalist' flavour.

Yakup Kadri's entry into the empire's intellectual scene took place at the same time as the unfolding of one of the most important events of late Ottoman history: the liberal revolution of 1908, which was carried out thanks to the cooperation between the Young Turks and the revolutionary groupings of the empire's many religious communities. The Young Turks' determination owed much to the presence of the officers of the modern Imperial army, with which they had united to form the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), an organisation that was dominated by theoretical currents linked to scientific materialism, positivism, and elements of social Darwinism. The CUP had little difficulty in convincing Abdülhamid to reinstate the constitutional monarchy, as they did not press him to renounce the throne. The widespread jubilation caused by the revolution only lasted one year, as a violent counterrevolutionary attempt in 1909 radically affected the outlook and approach of the Young Turks.⁵ The CUP became a political party, headed by two military men, Enver Paşa and Cemal Paşa, and one civilian, Talat. This triumvirate replaced Abdülhamid with a new Sultan, reduced entirely to a figurehead, and established a new authoritarian government. Destined to last until the definitive fall of the empire, with a few short interruptions, the rule of the CUP and its triumvirate favoured the elaboration of Turkism, the first ideological formation to favour exclusively the Muslim, Turkish-speaking population of the empire, while taking into consideration the possibility of extending its political influence to the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia.

In 1908, Yakup Kadri was 19 years old. After completing his secondary education in French and Swiss schools in Cairo and İzmir, he had arrived in the empire's capital to study law (Bertuccelli 2017, p. 46). The revolution had encouraged the creation of new journals in İstanbul's lively political and cultural scene, which provided an outlet for the long-repressed intellectual energies of the empire's elites and seemed to open up new possibilities for them. The literary scene, however, was still strongly influenced by the heritage of *Servet-i Fünun*, which, according to the new generation of literary talents, was too provincial, overly encumbered by pessimistic and melancholic social and political concerns that limited its artistic creativeness, and which were further steeped in a romanticism that effectively overrode the original circle's aspirations to realism. For the new generation, any preoccupation beyond pure aesthetics, any impediment to a free interfacing with European literature, ought to be abandoned.

⁵ With regard to these events, see Zürcher 2004.

In 1910, after many meetings and much discussion, they composed the first literary manifesto in Ottoman history, inaugurating *Fecr-i Ati* ('Dawn of the Future'), in support of the principle expressed by their motto 'Art is personal and sacred'.



THE FRUITLESS SEARCH FOR A NEW LEADER

Decades later, speaking of this early phase of his literary and intellectual career, Karaosmanoğlu attempted to justify his generation's immobilism and lack of faith in collective action, drawing on the consequences of the counterrevolutionary violence of 1909, of the widespread nihilism of the early 20th century, and of the search for the Super-man, the *Übermensch*, influenced by Nietzsche's writings. The experiences of 1909 had led the literary circles he frequented to perceive the songs invoking the constitutional revolution as a load of nonsense, and had made them feel nauseated by the 'heroes of freedom' celebrated by the press. By contrast, the widespread climate of renunciation of the early 20th century had made it easier for them to dedicate themselves to the solitary search, behind closed doors, of a philosophical and scientific support for their disaffection: 'The masters we identified during that search provided us with the illusion of marvellous intellectual adventures; but the comfort we drew from such illusion effectively led us exclude ourselves from history. With their borrowed gaze, we found an easy way of legitimating our repudiation and contempt for the desperation, poverty, and vulgarity of our milieu' (Karaosmanoğlu 2002, s. 21). Most of Karaosmanoğlu's memories of those years portray the frustrating yet constant search for a leader, for an *Übermensch*, capable of leading the community out into the light. The search began with the triumvirate:

Despite our lack of faith, we had sensed an epic potential in the character of Enver Paşa, but we were disappointed to find in him just a modest, clean-faced young man, who had chosen to hang up his combat uniform to become a son-in-law at the Court. Cemal Paşa was intimidating, whereas Mr Talat, thought by many to be the true soul of the CUP, remained a mystery to us, he seemed almost immaterial. [...] A poet [Tevfik Fikret] then appeared on the scene [...] [he] roared like a caged lion from a hill on the Bosphorus. We listened carefully [...] He would say that these false patriots had actually blessed Abdülhamid's tyranny, that they had betrayed the nation, plundered it [...] that they were more ruthless than their predecessors in chaining up anyone who dared to speak the truth, [...] that the country was headed for a catastrophe. We thought we had found [...] the hero we desired. We walked up to the hill where he lived, and found an austere, broad-shouldered man, with a long, pointed, aggressive nose in the middle of his sharp face, resembling the majestic beak of an eagle. When he finally opened the mouth that was underneath that solemn nose and started to speak with a stiff, unintelligent voice, like an angry parrot rattling off a series of denigrating phrases, our disappointment was absolute (ibid., pp. 22-23).

Arguably, the most notable political and cultural novelty of the time was Turkism, which had started to affirm itself after 1909 under the intellectual guidance of Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), an important component of the CUP and one of the few members



of the party to hail from Eastern Anatolia rather than from İstanbul or one of the cities of the Balkans. It seems, however, that at the time Karaosmanoğlu had had little interest in the movement. The aspiration of the Turkists, as set out by their slogan, '*Yeni Hayat*' ('New Life'), was to reorganise every aspect of the social and cultural life of the empire's Muslim Turkish-speaking population; and in light of its organic role within the government, the movement had rapidly expanded to the Thracian and Anatolian territories of the empire. The movement's seats, named *Türk ocakları* (Turkish Hearths), hosted lectures, conferences, theatre plays, as well as historical and linguistic research. Karaosmanoğlu frequented İstanbul's *Türk ocakları*, but the tone in which he wrote about them suggests that he had found them too old-fashioned, provincial, *à-la-turque*, save perhaps for the cutting-edge scientific foundations on which they were theoretically premised. This is how he described Ziya Gökalp:

He looked like a statue of the Buddha, and he spoke to us about the imminent coming of a saviour and of our liberation. [...] it was impossible to attribute a precise age to his portly body. With his unkempt whiskers, meekly flowing down the sides of his chin, and the fez he wore drawn backwards on the top of his head, one could easily have taken him for a Turk from the times before the Tanzimat. The slowness of his movements, his stiff way of speaking, his mouth that seemingly did not know how to smile... he could have been a janissary masquerading as a dervish. Despite his important political position, in private he lived as if he were following the rule of a dervish monastery. He avoided any ostentation, he knew nothing of the pleasures of this world, he was as clueless as a child in the practicalities of life (ibid., pp. 26–28).

There are many similarities between this description and the one Karaosmanoğlu wrote of his father in *Anamın Kitabı*. In the Karaosmanoğlu's eyes, his father's provincialism is already evident in his name, Abdülkadir, and in many more of his traits: in his way of speaking, which made Turkish sound hopelessly vulgar; and in his graceless physique, which compelled the author to pray not to resemble him when he grew older: 'He had a round, bald head, with a circular beard, and he was rather portly. Three physical characteristics that I thought opposite to those that a handsome man ought to possess [...] When I grew up, I wanted to be tall and lean, and have a long, fine moustache, and I wanted to make sure I always maintained that look' (Karaosmanoğlu 1957, pp. 11–12).

A further commonality between Ziya Gökalp and Karaosmanoğlu's father was their shared inclination towards mysticism. During the years the family spent at the Court in Cairo, Karaosmanoğlu's father had indulged in 'pastimes' that his son found repugnant, coarse, vulgar, and in open contempt of his mother's dignity. However, later in life, Mr Abdülkadir frequented the dervishes of his native town of Manisa, just as Ziya Gökalp had been strongly influenced by mysticism during his youth in Diyarbakır. This phase of his father's life, which was also marked by grave illness, led Karaosmanoğlu to associate with him an image of slowness, to the point of immobility. He also recognised this image in Ziya Gökalp's slow movements, his calm, almost sleepy demeanour, as well as his incapacity, owing to his own incompetence, to enjoy life — to the point that Yakup Kadri nicknamed him 'Our *Türkocağı* sheikh'

(Karaosmanoğlu 2002, p. 27). Gökalp's prestige increased in Karaosmanoğlu's eyes, however, when it came to his doctrine:

[...] he would tell us about a French scholar named Durkheim, [...] about his theories on the 'division of labour', on 'professional representation' [...] according to him, any social issue could be explained in light of the formula, 'There is no individual, only community'. [...] One day, closing his eyes as if he were falling into a trance-like state, he explained to us how to solve the apparent contradiction between that formula and our ongoing wait for the Saviour: 'The national hero is not an individual, but the tangible image of the nation' (ibid.).

MUSTAFA KEMAL, THE LIGHT

No one, from the time of the constitutional Revolution of 1908 to the Great War, had been able to rise, in the eyes of Karaosmanoğlu and his generation of young intellectuals, to the role of National Hero. No one, it seemed, had shown the necessary military prowess, or political and cultural savvy. A glimmer of hope, however, was briefly sparked by the rumours surrounding the name of Mustafa Kemal, a young army officer who had even received the praise of the enemy general for his heroic defence of the Dardanelles. But his name was soon forced into oblivion, Karaosmanoğlu later argued, by the envious Ottoman high command, despite the fact that he had been able to bring Turkish soldiers to victory for the first time in 150 years, and despite the enthusiasm he had sparked throughout the nation (ibid., pp. 20–24). The author's alienation from politics only grew when, in 1916, health reasons forced him to travel to Switzerland with a group of compatriots. The 1919 Armistice, which ratified the defeat of the empire by the Entente forces — who had also occupied İstanbul — filled the life of Yakup Kadri and other Ottoman expatriates in Switzerland with further unease and deprivations. In the midst of that period of hopelessness and dejection, however, they received extraordinary news from the local papers regarding a 'Turkish general named Mustafa Kemal' who had rebelled against the provisions of the Entente and was orchestrating a resistance movement in Anatolia (ibid., p. 34). The news marked the beginning of a total conversion for Karaosmanoğlu: from that moment onwards, he began to see Mustafa Kemal as a leader capable of heading the collective action that would bring about the emancipation of the nation from the European colonial yoke. He would later recount what he felt at the time:

A Turkish general named Mustafa Kemal Paşa... Praise be! I had become a new man. My martyrdom, my pain, had finally found their meaning, their aim. Within myself, I would repeat: 'I will go, I will follow his flag'. Like a castaway reciting his last prayer, I repeated his name, 'Mustafa Kemal, Mustafa Kemal', and I could feel that my heart was filled with a deep certainty, a deep calm. And so I began to walk towards him, holding my fate in my hands like a mirror. With the first step I had already shed my old self, like one who takes off a dirty garment. All those unhealthy, wrong ideas from my first youth, I had left in the pockets of that worn-out garment, and I was re-born, naked, ready for a new youth. The more I walked, the more mature



I became. My skin and my flesh turned hard like a shield made of steel, while my feet turned to iron. I was thus able to traverse a dense forest of enemy bayonets without being injured by them (ibid., pp. 36–37).

This turn coincided with Yakup Kadri's identification of Europe as the enemy and aggressor, and of modernity with prevarication. He returned to İstanbul a true partisan. In the editorials he wrote in the influential daily newspaper *İkdam*⁶ he displayed his unreserved support for the Kemalist movement. He exalted Anatolia and the capacity of its poor and materially backwards population to resist and take the initiative against the enemy. Finally, in July 1921, he was invited by his hero to travel to Ankara. He recounted his journey, his impressions, and above all his meeting with Mustafa Kemal on the pages of *İkdam*:

He lives in a typical country house, on a hill known as Çankaya, about an hour from the city centre. [...] When arriving at the house, the visitor's heart begins to beat wildly, anticipating the imminent meeting with this extraordinary man, who is carrying the weight of the universe on his shoulders [...] The robust man who carries the world on his shoulders greets his visitor as if he were an old friend. He shakes his hand with a smile, and, with a gesture of exquisite hospitality, offers the most comfortable armchair in the room. [...] Dressed in civilian clothing, a little taller than the average, lean, blonde; he does not resemble the pictures of him that are published in the papers: his looks are much more amiable, lively, special. The colour and lines of his face remind one of an ancient medallion, carved from bronze. His sharp cheekbones, his mighty chin and hard brow ensure that his gaze expresses all the suffering he has endured, all of his many toils and thoughts, but it bears no sign of tiredness. He speaks in a low voice, his blue eyes gaze out mysteriously, the movements of his body are harmonious, like those of a young panther that has been tamed but remains agile and unyielding [...] The environment he lives in is simple: he sits on a wine-coloured armchair next to a large desk, behind him the curtains cover a wide window. One windowsill is decorated with a bust of von Moltke, whereas another with another bust of Napoleon Bonaparte. There is no pomp, everything is clean and orderly, the walls are almost bare [...] Like all truly great men, he is not blinded by the light emanating from his own star [...] he even seems keen to avoid any praise [...] We are sitting so close that at times I end up touching him with my elbow, other times with my knee. I find myself trembling from the joy that such closeness brings me. This is the most glorious day of my life (Karaosmanoğlu 1965, pp. 113–114).

⁶ *İkdam* began publication in July 1894 and continued until March 1961, making it one of the most long-lived newspapers in the history of the Turkish press. Starting around 1910, it began to follow the Turkist movement, and played a particularly active role in the simplification of the language while continuing to cultivate young writers such as Yakup Kadri who had dedicated themselves to experimenting in the literary and cultural fields, closely following their development in Europe and in particular in France. After 1919, thanks also to Yakup Kadri's decisive contribution, it took on a position that staunchly favoured Anatolian nationalism under Mustafa Kemal's leadership and was the first newspaper to send a correspondent to follow him.

The tone of the description, and the way in which the author and his interlocutor are positioned in it almost seem to depict the scene of a young, undeserving, and inexperienced son as he encounters an idealised father, with an air of incestuous desire. The figure of Mustafa Kemal, despite his humble and generous hospitality, is exalted and perceived as all-powerful by Karaosmanoğlu. The hero embodies the model of masculinity the latter had always dreamt of: tall, lean, blond, composed, courteous, refined. As strong as a panther, but ‘tamed’, able to reserve his strength for when it is necessary. For Karaosmanoğlu, he is the much sought-after *Übermensch*: ‘Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, described the Super-man [...] as he who lived amid danger, [like] Hercules, or Prometheus. From the end of his studies at the Military Academy all the way to the battle of Dumlupınar [where the War of Turkish Liberation was won], Mustafa Kemal was steeped in the afflictions endured by the rebellious God’ (Karaosmanoğlu 2002, p. 38). For Karaosmanoğlu, the War of National Liberation was the moment of the fusion between the Leader and the nation. He asks, rhetorically, ‘How can one man become a nation, how can a nation be encapsulated by one man?’, answering that ‘Future historians will find the answer to this question’ (Karaosmanoğlu 1965, p. 38).



THE NATIONALIST SELF

Yakup Kadri’s relationship with the Leader would continue for the rest of his life. Ever since that first encounter, all of his personal and intellectual energies would be dedicated to drawing out, realising, and narrating Mustafa Kemal’s ideas. In this light, he radically transformed his earlier thought, writing that ‘Art, in the name of the autonomy that I had so strived for, is a good that belongs to the nation, and isolated from its time and function it can have no meaning or value. The autonomy of art is only possible in an autonomous Motherland’ (Karaosmanoğlu 1933, p. 25, cit. in Kara 2013, p. 251). This new understanding of art was formulated in direct opposition to what had preceded it: the emotional link that Karaosmanoğlu had established with the national liberation movement through the figure of Mustafa Kemal had transformed his previous life into a succession of ideological mistakes and youthful dissoluteness.

Of his eight novels, the first six,⁷ written between 1922 and 1936, only a few years before Mustafa Kemal’s death in 1939, offer a narration of the political and social events of the time, from a committed nationalist and Kemalist perspective, with Karaosmanoğlu as the implicit narrator. These novels bear witness to the degeneration of the late imperial Muslim elites, to their guilty ‘cosmopolitanism’, to their inability to identify with the collective, and to the ease with which they had fallen prey to a fascination with the foreign, with all things European. Karaosmanoğlu identified his past self with that world, and saw himself in the protagonists of his novels, finding his own redemption alongside them by coming into contact with the national

7 These are *Nur Baba* (‘Father Light’, 1922); *Kıralık Konak* (‘Mansion for Rent’, 1922); *Hüküm Gecesi* (‘Night of Judgment’, 1927); *Sodom ve Gomora* (‘Sodom and Gomorrah’, 1928); *Ankara*, 1934; *Yaban* (‘The Stranger’, 1936).



liberation movement. The strength of the movement is sufficient to save these elites, who for generations had been deprived of paternal guidance, left alone to face the charms of the West, ethically and morally annihilated to the point that they no longer felt like men, but saw themselves instead as being dominated by their desires — and by their women. When the call of the nation finally awakens the protagonists of these novels, they are freed from their condition, and also begin to be noticed by those same women who had previously humiliated them and even rejected them in favour of foreign officers. But it is always too late for these women; the young male protagonist's gaze has turned elsewhere, towards the immense force that moves history forward and returns him to his forlorn masculinity.⁸

The return of the father also implies a rejection of the mother; the father's strength imposes a new life that cancels out the Imperial past — one that, like a stubborn mother, even after the father's abdication, had continued to nurture her sons with the traditions, culture, and tenderness of a lifestyle built over the centuries. The returned father is inflexible, his will is exclusive, and it rejects the mother's inclusivity. Karaosmanoğlu follows the father's will by contributing to the creation of a nationalist literature that aims to shape a single, homogenous imaginary to find an 'authentically national' aesthetic. In *Yaban* ('The stranger'), a novel in which he describes the difficulty experienced by an intellectual in identifying with the rough Anatolian folk, he identifies a potential solution to this difficulty in the protagonist's love for a young peasant girl, Emine. In her, the intellectual finds a genuine, uncontaminated beauty, which contrasts with the westernised women of İstanbul, and waiting to be moulded into an authentic, national sophistication (Karaosmanoğlu 1993, p. 74). The same perspective can be found in *Ankara*, a novel which described Atatürk's 'miracle', the creation of a modern republic from the ruins of the obsolete cosmopolitan empire. The novel's protagonist, Selma, finds her true self, happiness, and a sense of realisation when, after her third marriage with a nationalist writer, she finally reaches her fulfilment thanks to her work for the good of the nation, alongside her husband.

By 1927, Mustafa Kemal had consolidated his position as sole leader, as he made explicit in the *Nutuk*⁹ speech delivered at that year's congress of the Party he had founded. The speech gave an account of his accomplishments since the moment he had arrived in Anatolia in May 1919 until the glorious struggle for national liberation of 1922; it effectively identified the birth of the nation with Mustafa Kemal's own rebirth as a father. The surname Atatürk, 'Father of the Turks', was bestowed upon him

8 See both *Kiralık Konak*, where the protagonist, Hilmi, gains visibility and recognition as a desirable man by the woman he loves, Seniha, only after desperation over his unrequited love for her brings him to enlist as a volunteer to go fight in the Dardanelles, where he will die. In *Sodom ve Gomore* Necdet is spurned by his betrothed, Leyla, who is enamoured with the officers of the occupying armies and humiliates him by forcing him into becoming the passive spectator of her flirtations; upon the arrival of the nationalist army at İstanbul's gates, however, Necdet regains all his lost masculinity, and Leyla will beg him to take her back, but to no avail.

9 During the 1930s, *Nutuk* constituted the fundamental and uncontested text of the national memory. For decades, it monopolised the historical narratives around the struggle for liberation and the foundation of the Republic. Cf. Adak 2003, pp. 517–522.

by Parliament in 1935, and in 1938, his party defined the nation as ‘the people gathered around its Father (Ata)’ (Bora 2017, pp. 121–123), effectively excluding all those potential citizens who did not recognise his leadership as supreme. Such a father could never have accepted to share his life with a woman as his equal, and he demonstrated this by divorcing his wife Latife two years after their marriage, by having a letter sent to her from parliament asking her to leave Ankara. From the moment he became Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal’s life became a concentrated form of wilfulness. He was free to do anything he wanted, surrounded by young women that he adopted as his daughters, as well as men of rank and intellectuals who would never have dared to consider themselves his peers. He invited Karaosmanoğlu to join the new Parliament, where he would go on to serve as deputy first for Mardin and then for Manisa. In the meantime, as chief editor of *Kadro* (1932–1934), a journal he had created together with some of the country’s most gifted intellectuals — some of them former communists —, Karaosmanoğlu attempted to give theoretical and ideological shape to Kemalism.

For Yakup Kadri, his closeness to Mustafa Kemal was a constant celebration of a returned father. It was precious for him in his efforts to model a new self, a new subjectivity directly correlated with Mustafa Kemal’s, the same course that he proposed for the entire nation through his writing for *Kadro*. In the pages of the journal, identification with the leader conferred a transformative meaning to political action. Mustafa Kemal wanted the nation to become a new entity, shedding any remaining link with the imperial past, and reconstituting itself with the aim of joining the civilised ensemble of European nations. It would have a new alphabet, language, and history, which would correspond to its secularity and purity. It would dress in modern clothes in the public sphere and it would make no distinctions based on gender. *Kadro* theorised a guiding role for intellectuals, who would act as vanguard of the nation, tasked with bringing the light of civilisation to the dark reality of Anatolia. Soon, however, rumours emerged surrounding Karaosmanoğlu and his friends’ theoretical activity within *Kadro*. The journal was accused of being communist, and, in light of his loyalty to his leader, Karaosmanoğlu stopped publication of the journal on his own initiative, and accepted the decision issued by powerful party members to ‘exile’ him to Albania with the role of ambassador (Karaosmanoğlu 1955). There, he would dedicate himself to writing his autobiographical texts. The formation of his autobiographical self continued to perpetuate his identification with the leader, as testified by the fact that his narrative often ran in parallel with the *Nutuk*, deploying long quotes from Mustafa Kemal’s speech as historic evidence in his own text. In this way, Yakup Kadri strongly separated himself from the narrative model adopted in their own autobiographies by Atatürk’s comrades in arms, who, having been either ridiculed or ignored by the leader, often wrote with the clear intent of contradicting the latter’s claims. On the contrary, with his loyalty to the *Nutuk*, and thus to its author, Karaosmanoğlu safeguarded his own respectability, debating and rejecting any other ideas with the authority he derived from having directly contributed to tracing the future of the nation. By positioning his own process of construction of his autobiographical subjectivity within the nation-building process of the Turkish people as it had been set out by Atatürk, Karaosmanoğlu was able to demonstrate that he had not been abandoned by him, and at the same time to rebuke his opponents for derailing the revolution, and thus for isolating him.





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