

Who is Afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's Autobiography?

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Ottoman Sufi diaries of the late seventeenth century illustrate the prevalence of early examples of autobiographical writings in the Ottoman context, but autobiographical writings mostly proliferated in the nineteenth century, among which Ahmet Midhat's *Menfa* (Memoirs in Exile) and his experimental auto/biography *Fatma Aliye Hanım yahut Bir Muharrir-i Osmaniye'nin Neşeti* (Fatma Aliye, or the Birth of an Ottoman Woman Writer), and Midhat Paşa's *Hatıralar* (Memoirs) can be included. Autobiographical novels, starting from Halide Edib's *Raîk'in Annesi* (Raîk's Mother) and *Handan* to more recent examples such as Latife Tekin's *Gece Dersleri* (Nocturnal Lessons); Orhan Pamuk's recent ph-autobiography, *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* (Istanbul: Memoirs and the City), and a plethora of political and military memoirs, such as Ali Fuat's *Siyasi Hatıralar* (Political Memoirs), Kazım Karabekir's *Paşaların Kavgası* (The Conflict of the Paşas), and Ebubekir Hâzım Tepeyran's *Hatıralar* (Memoirs) illustrate that the Ottoman and later Turkish context provided fertile ground for the production and publication of personal narratives of state leaders, political intellectuals, nation builders, novelists, journalists, social activists, and artists. A detailed history of the development of the autobiographical genre in the Ottoman and Turkish context has yet to be written. My analysis concerns a specific genre of autobiographies, which I entitle "non-official self-na(rra)tions," produced in response to one particular performance/text, Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* (The Speech).

Narrative Monopoly

After the delivery of *Nutuk* on 15-20 October 1927, Turkish national history was monopolized¹ as alternative narratives were silenced in Turkey.² The backlash to this narrative monopoly was the production of a historically and politically specific genre of auto/biographies, written as a response to the narrative of Turkish

¹ The monopoly of the narrative of Turkish history in *Nutuk* was secured through state rituals, school textbooks, and national monuments, which were constructed to serve the myth of Mustafa Kemal as the sole prophet of the Turkish nation, as well as national holidays, such as 19 May or 30 August, which ritualized the celebration and commemoration of important events as told in *Nutuk*.

² In 1926, the Independence Tribunals executed many Unionists and political opponents of Mustafa Kemal. After the instigation of *Takriri Sükun* (The Law on the Maintenance of Order), the political opposition's press was silenced; a few of the political opponents, such as Dr. Adnan Adıvar, Halide Edib Adıvar, and Dr. Rıza Nur, went into self-imposed exile.

national history in *Nutuk* and the role of Mustafa Kemal in the Independence Struggle of Turkey, and thereafter as the President of the Republic. These autobiographical writings belonged to historical and political agents whose “services to the nation” or agency in the transition from Empire to nation were dismissed or degraded in *Nutuk*. Such “non-official self-na(rra)tions” had precedents in the Ottoman context, particularly during the rule of Abdülhamid (1876-1908), in a number of political memoirs and autobiographies, the most notable of which was Midhat Paşa’s (1822-1884) *Hatıralar* (Memoirs), the life and accomplishments of an Ottoman vizier in the Tanzimat era, who, locked in a prison cell in Taif, clandestinely wrote his memoirs and miraculously sent the manuscript to his family before being executed by Sultan Abdülhamid.³

With the aim of countermanning the Gargantuan *Nutuk*, the Others of the “I-nation”⁴ also wrote encyclopedic accounts, trying to narrate the totality of historical experiences to which they were first-hand witnesses, while simultaneously promoting their perspective of—and their agency in—nation building. Such autobiographies included Kazım Karabekir’s encyclopedic oeuvre, roughly totaling forty volumes, the most significant volumes of which are *Hayatım* (My Life), *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları* (The Facts of Our Independence War), *Paşaların Kavgası* (The Conflict of Paşas); Halide Edib Adıvar’s *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*; Ali Fuat Cebesoy’s *Siyasi Hatıralar* (Political Memoirs), and Rauf Orbay’s *Siyasi Hatıralar* (Political Memoirs). Most of the autobiographers wrote their accounts unaware that others were engaged in autobiographical writing; some autobiographers were in exile in various countries, while others were working on their autobiographies in strict confidentiality in Turkey.

These encyclopedic narratives delegitimized the solipsist and antagonistic account of *Nutuk*,⁶ as they constructed a narrative of self-legitimization and interdependence, illustrating the agency and significance of a plurality of leaders and common people who took part in the Independence Struggle and the process of nation building in the twenties.

³ Midhat Paşa’s *Memoirs* was a self-vindication, written in response to Sultan Abdülhamid’s attempts to libel him as the murderer of Abdülaziz. See Midhat Paşa 1997: 13. The memoir was published after Abdülhamid was overthrown with the proclamation of the Second Constitution in 1908.

⁴ The “unified nation and the unified self are presented in *Nutuk* as interchangeable and intertwined; in general, the nation is denied an autonomous existence extricated from the I of the narrative.” The self of *Nutuk* could more accurately be termed the ‘I-nation.’” See Adak 2003: 518.

⁵ Both works were translated into Turkish as *Mor Salkımlı Ev* and *Türk’ün Ateşle İmtihanı* in the 1960s.

⁶ *Nutuk* “foregrounded the role of its narrator in Turkish history at the expense of defaming or ignoring the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph, the roles of the leading figures in the national struggle, and the establishment of the republic.” See Adak 2003: 509.

Further, these “non-official self-na(rra)tions” challenged the “narrative of discontinuity”⁷ as they narrated in lieu of a rupture, a transition (told through the maturation of the self/narrator) from Empire to nation. Several accounts countermanded the temporal hegemony of Turkish national history over the history of the Ottoman Empire with narratives of nostalgia for Empire (such autobiographies include Halide Edib's *Memoirs* or Rıza Nur's *Atatürk Kavgası* [Conflict with Atatürk]).

Although most of the “non-official self-na(rra)tions” were written in the 1920s and 1930s, their production was not simultaneous with their publication as most were not published until the 1990s.⁸ Most of them were banned because they violated the law, under the heading, “Crimes against Atatürk,” which from 1951 onwards punished those writers who produced works offensive to “the memory of Atatürk.”⁹

Dr. Rıza Nur

One of the most striking examples of “non-official self-na(rra)tions” was by Dr. Rıza Nur. Born to a very devout Muslim and Turkish family in Sinop in 1879, Rıza Nur pursued a medical career until 1908, writing academic books, such as *Fenni Hitan* (Circumcision Operations) and popular books on medicine, such as *Frenji ve Belsoğukluğuna Yakalanmamak Çaresi* (Preventive Measures against Syphilis and Gonorrhoea). At age 29, Rıza Nur became the youngest member of the recently-convened Ottoman parliament. After supporting *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Committee of Union and Progress), Rıza Nur first joined the opposition party *Osmanlı Abrar Fırkası* (Ottoman Liberal Party) and later united the entire opposition to the Committee on Union and Progress under *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Party of Freedom and Understanding or Entente Libérale). In 1910, he co-organized an anti-CUP rebellion in Albania and wrote very critical anti-CUP articles in the press which led him to be exiled in 1913. For six years, he lived in Switzerland, France, and Egypt, only returning to the Ottoman Empire in the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman defeat in World War I, when the CUP leaders had fled the Empire. In 1919, in Istanbul, he joined the Independence Struggle and was one of the delegates in the first diplomatic treaty signed by the na-

⁷ The “narrative of discontinuity” signals the impulse in *Nutuk* and in official republican history, to construct a narrative of “distinct separation from the Ottoman Empire.” See Adak 2003: 518.

⁸ Halide Edib's *Mor Salkımlı Ev* and *Türk'ün Ateşle İmtihanı* are exceptions to this rule. Both works went through serious censorship when they were published in the sixties in Turkey. See Adak 2003: 526.

⁹ The law was passed by the Turkish National Parliament in 1951. As late as the 1990s, authors of works offensive to the “memory of Atatürk” could be punished with up to three years of imprisonment. See Yashin 2002: 202.

tionalists with Soviet Russia in 1921. The Moscow Treaty ended the war on the eastern front, which led to the recognition of Turkey as a legitimate state.¹⁰

From 1920-1921, Dr. Rıza Nur served as the Minister of Education, and from 1921-1923 as the Minister of Health and Social Welfare in the Büyük Millet Meclisi (Grand National Assembly). In 1922, in order to prevent two committees of delegates, that of the Istanbul government and that of the Ankara government (the nationalists) from joining the Lausanne Peace Conference, he prepared a bill entitled the *Tesrinisani Kararı* (The November Decree), with the aim of simultaneously abolishing the Sultanate, giving single-handed power to the government in Ankara, and making the new state of Turkey secular. In 1923, he was chosen as the Member of Parliament from Sinop and was among the delegates participating in the Lausanne Peace Conference. After Lausanne, Rıza Nur supported but never officially joined the political opponents of *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası* (Republican People's Party), knowing that the opposition party would be shut down, and because he feared for his life.¹¹ He wrote a fourteen-volume work entitled *Türk Tarihi* (Turkish History), twelve volumes of which were published during the 1920s.

By 1926, when Dr. Rıza Nur left Turkey to go into self-imposed exile in France, he had lost all confidence in the Republican People's Party and had declined many positions, such as becoming a Turkish Ambassador to one of the European countries, because he considered it a dishonor to work for Mustafa Kemal's government. During his seven-year exile in France (1926-1933), he wrote his autobiography *Hayat ve Hatıratım* and entrusted it to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and the British Museum in London. After doing research on history and literature in Alexandria during his exile (1933-1938), he returned to Turkey following Mustafa Kemal's death (1939) to publish journals on Turkish culture, such as *Türk Birlik Revüsü/Revue de Turcologie*¹² and *Tanrıdağ* (Godmountain).

Hayat ve Hatıratım (My Life and Memoirs)

Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography is a 1,700-page self-encyclopedia, using a multiplicity of styles and covering all the events between 1879 and 1935, the end-point of writing. The encyclopedic scope of the autobiography, aspiring to narrate everything within the self's horizon of knowledge, is a typical response, as most of the other "non-official self-narrations" illustrate, to Rıza Nur's dismissal from the monopoly of the Turkish national narrative in *Nutuk*.¹³

¹⁰ The Moscow treaty also allowed arms and ammunition to be smuggled into Anatolia to help the Turkish struggle against the Greeks.

¹¹ See Nur III 1992: 331.

¹² This journal was published simultaneously in French and Turkish.

¹³ In *Nutuk*, Rıza Nur is mentioned as one of the names on the list of delegates sent to the Lausanne Peace Conference (See Kemal 1999: 934), although his import in this conference as well as other events in Turkish history are ignored. *Nutuk* interprets the rebellion in Al-

Five distinct forms/styles of writing can be traced in the self-encyclopedia:

Confessions: The entire text is a conglomerate of confessions, but the confessional mode is most evident in the first volume of the autobiography, depicting the narrator's childhood, adolescence, and early adult years as a medical doctor, roughly covering 1879-1919. In the prologue to the autobiography, the narrator reveals a Rousseauian impulse unprecedented in the Ottoman-Turkish context. According to Nur, "such a truthful account of a man [as his own account] has never existed," and those negative attributes of the self which Nur could have hidden, he revealed in this honest and truthful portrait of himself.¹⁴ Unlike Rousseau, the confessions do not merge with self-justification but with a cynical analysis of human nature. From the particular, the "I," the narrator derives insights into the evil in human nature.

Memoirs of the Lausanne Peace Conference is an inscription of Rıza Nur's import as the person who wrote the speeches that the head of the Turkish delegation, İsmet Paşa, delivered. This section covers memoirs of a private and public nature, revealing Rıza Nur's weaknesses and strengths at the conference, as well as an objective analysis of the Turkish delegation in comparison to European delegates who participated. There are recurrent references to the foreign press coverage on Rıza Nur, which acts as self-justification and proof of his import in the negotiations at Lausanne.

Political criticism of Turkey in the 1920s mostly focuses on *Nutuk* and the deification of Mustafa Kemal (1923-1930), with extensive comments and criticisms of the reforms, laws, and the press in Turkey.

The lengthy political program of the "Türkçü" Party is proffered by the narrator as an alternative to shape the future of the Turkish Republic. The "Türkçü" Party is to replace the Republican People's Party, appropriating the Ottoman and Selçuk heritage, and clearing Turkey from the state icons of the 1920s. The party is to ensure a secular republic which would restore the institution of the Caliph-

bania not as an anti-CUP rebellion but as one targeted against Turks in Rumelia, resulting in the evacuation of Turks from Rumelia. This, according to *Nutuk*, caused an "eternal and fatal sadness in every Turk." Kemal 1999: 1180. As if this part of Turkish history were recently uncovered in 1927, the "I-nation" of *Nutuk* narrates the overwhelming shock in members of parliament when they discover Nur's misdemeanors against Turks. *Nutuk* presents Rıza Nur as an enemy of the Turk and thus defames Rıza Nur, who, in modern Turkey, becomes an absent name from Turkish history books, schoolbooks, and national monuments, and who, at certain instances, becomes a scapegoat for the shortcomings of the Lausanne Peace Treaty. The original is as follows: "Fakat Türklerin Rumeli'den çıkarılması gibi, her Türkün kalbinde ebedi ve elim bir hicran yaşatan büyük felaket hadisesinde mürit milliyetperver Rıza Nur Bey'in Arnavut asileri ile beraber, Türkler aleyhinde, faaliyetinde bulunduğunu bilmiyorduk. Buna itila hasıl olunca, Büyük Millet Meclis'ini hakiki bir dehşet istila etti" (Kemal 1999: 1180).

¹⁴ Nur I 1992: 70.

ate, take precautions against the intervention of the military into politics, and instigate an Office for Racial Affairs to monitor the pure Turkishness of public officers.

The biography of the self, or what I entitle, “**Rıza Nur tarafından Rıza Nur, or Rıza Nur par Rıza Nur,**” was originally located at the end of the self-encyclopedia. Exclaiming that it is perhaps “bizarre” for a person to describe himself, but that “nobody can know a person better than that person himself,”¹⁵ the narrator undergoes a critical and structuralist analysis of Rıza Nur forty-five years prior to the publication of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. The narrator appropriates the “I” in writing, without depicting the different “I”s of being in history, talks about the general characteristics of the “I” as a sum total (the I becomes a common denominator of the different I’s in history) of the lived experiences until 1930. This “common denominator I” is pure *volonté*, with no sense of pleasure, and a pure commitment to honesty and service to the nation. “Rıza Nur tarafından Rıza Nur” ends with a list and commentary of the published and unpublished works of Rıza Nur.

Misanthro-graphy

Most autobiographies written after *Nutuk*, including Rıza Nur’s *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, are intertextual, not in the sense of interacting with historical, literary, or autobiographical works in the broader sense or with each other, but in the sense of interacting exclusively with one particular work, *Nutuk*. This is because most of the autobiographies written after *Nutuk* have been produced as a response to the particular way Turkish history was narrated in *Nutuk* and the way this narrative was monopolized by the Kemalist regime.

In those autobiographies which the autobiographers decided to publish, e.g. Halide Edib’s *The Turkish Ordeal*, the interaction with *Nutuk* is subtle and implicit,¹⁶ whereas in the autobiographies which were not meant for publication, such as Rıza Nur’s *Hayat ve Hatıratım*,¹⁷ the criticisms of *Nutuk* and the Kemalist regime in the 1920s and early 1930s are rather explicit and severe in tone.

¹⁵ See Nur I 1992: 149.

¹⁶ *The Turkish Ordeal* does not relate the period after 1922 even though its explicit aim is to criticize the Kemalist Regime. The work occasionally hints to the dictatorship in the twenties.

¹⁷ Rıza Nur entrusted the manuscript to libraries in Paris and London to be published after 1960, with the explicit aim of keeping the works out of the reach of Mustafa Kemal and İsmet: It would be a “pity on history if Mustafa Kemal and İsmet get a hold of the memoirs” Nur I 1992: 501. The original is as follows: “Hele Mustafa Kemal ve İsmet’ten evvel ölürsem Hatıratımı behemal elde edip mahvetmeye gayret edeceklerdir. Buna muvaffak olurlarsa tarih için yazık olur.”

The autobiographies written after *Nutuk*, including Halide Edib's *The Turkish Ordeal*, Kazım Karabekir's *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları*, and Ali Fuat's and Rauf Orbay's *Siyasi Hatıralar* are at the nexus of autobiography and biography, and confound the structuralist analysis of each as outlined in Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Contract,"¹⁸ as they give equal emphasis to the involvement of Mustafa Kemal and the protagonist/autobiographer/narrator in question. Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım* complicates this genre in a unique way. Concomitantly an auto- and biography, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is what I would like to coin a "misanthrography," written by a misanthropic narrator,¹⁹ who defines himself unreservedly as such.²⁰ This text diminishes and negates all affirmative depictions of its protagonists and antagonists, including the narrator himself.

Although the auto- and biography work hand in hand, for purposes of analysis, I would like to separate the two. The misanthro(bio)graphy or "biography of Mustafa Kemal" differs from the conventional concept of "biography" as an analysis of a historical actor whose import is taken seriously by the biographer, even in cases when the biographer is critical of the protagonist of the biography.²¹ *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, as misanthro(bio)graphy, diminishes the import of its protagonist, Mustafa Kemal, in the context of Turkish history, illustrating the means by which the Struggle and the establishment of the Republic have been monopolized by the solipsist "I-nation" of *Nutuk*. The "I-nation" of *Nutuk* is not only degraded as a public figure but severely reprimanded for his personal flaws.

Misanthro-biography: Delegitimizing the Narrative of the "I-nation"

If *Nutuk* is the sacred text of the Turkish Republic, Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is a text of blasphemy, profaning not only the sacred text of the Republic but also its author, while attempting to rectify the narrative of the history of Turkey. Published after an extensive process of censorship, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is a cryptic text often difficult to comprehend.

As misanthro-biography, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is replete with blasphemies, serving to desecrate the sacred, to profane the prophet of the Turkish nation, as the text challenges certain myths constructed in *Nutuk*. These include, among others, the myth of Mustafa Kemal as the sole hero or secular prophet in Turkish his-

¹⁸ Lejeune separates the autobiographical pact from the biographical pact by outlining the formula for the former as: "Author is/is not the narrator is the protagonist"; and the latter as: "Author is/is not the narrator is not the protagonist" (Lejeune 1982: 204-5).

¹⁹ The narrator in a self-critical tone analyses his misanthrope as a direct result of some of the traumatic experiences he went through in his childhood. Most of the friends he tried to help cheated and betrayed him. Such experiences taught him never to trust or befriend anyone thereafter (Nur I 1992: 102).

²⁰ Nur I 1992: 120.

²¹ Examples include biographies of Adolf Hitler, such as Joachim C. Fest's *Hitler* or Ian Kershaw's *Hitler: 1936-1945: Nemesis*.

tory, the status of *Nutuk* as a sacred text, the myth of military success, and the narrative of discontinuity of the Turkish Republic from the Ottoman Empire.

Backstaging the myth of the sole prophet of the nation

Hayat ve Hatıratım frequently resorts to depicting the backstage of some of the processes, titles that *Nutuk* would like readers/audiences to take for granted. One such title is that of *başkumandanlık*, or “commander-in-chief” in the Independence Struggle of Turkey, which allowed the “I-nation” of *Nutuk* to legitimize his divine status after the war as the Savior and Conqueror of the Nation.²² The “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* reminds us that the Sakarya Victory was described in *Nutuk* as proof of the “I-nation”’s clairvoyance to predict victory and deliverance from the enemy in the following words: “Whatever happens, we will gain victory. I had foreseen talent in this Nation. I defeated the enemy.”²³ However, the narrative of glory and the triumph of the military leader Mustafa Kemal are described differently in *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, as we are reminded of the events leading to Mustafa Kemal’s unique means of acquiring the *başkumandanlık* title.

In 1922, in parliament, the “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* claims to have proposed that Mustafa Kemal become *başkumandan*, which was confronted by a livid Mustafa Kemal who refused the title because he did not want his name attached to military defeat and humiliation, exclaiming to Rıza Nur in Parliament: “Defeat is certain. You would like me to be commander-in-chief so as to slander my name and destroy my reputation.”²⁴

According to *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, three days after this exchange of belligerent words, Mustafa Kemal proposed accepting the title of *başkumandan* only if all legislative and executive authority over the Assembly was handed over to him. For the first time, the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* claims to have lost consciousness in reaction to this proposal, and forgetting himself, was later told by his colleagues that he was banging his fists on his head, shouting in his frenzy, “What does this man want? What kind of a proposal is this? Can this be given? Can such a thing be requested?”²⁵

²² Adak 2003: 517-518.

²³ The original is as follows: “Ben ise o insanlara behemehal muvaffak olacağız diyordum. Akılım, ferasetim Milletteki bu istidadı görmüştü. Düşmanı mağlup ettim” (Nur III 1992: 212).

²⁴ The original is as follows: “Mağlubiyet mutlak. Sen beni rezil olsun, şerefim gitsin diye başkumandan yapmak istiyorsun” (Nur III 1992: 200). In fact, the “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* argues that for all struggles that carried the potential of defeat, Mustafa Kemal used İsmet and Fevzi Paşas as leaders, just like Hacıvat and Karagöz, but claimed all the victory for himself (Nur III 1992: 212).

²⁵ The original is as follows: “Eyvah, bu adam ne istiyor? Bu nasıl iş? Bu verilir mi? Bu istenebilir mi?” diye bağırışım, durmuşum. Ben farkında değilim. Sonra yanımdakiler söylediler” (Nur III 1992: 201).

The “benevolent “I-nation”” of *Nutuk* then from the point of claiming the title *başkumandanlık* onwards as the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* so accurately predicts, claims divine-like status for himself, making laws according to his will, and executing people according to his will. This, the “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* finds unparalleled in history, with the exception of Julius Caesar, who requested authority over the Roman Senate, proclaiming himself “Half God.”²⁶ The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is not surprised to find out that after the Sakarya Victory, Mustafa Kemal requested the title of “gazi” from the Parliament; this fit in perfectly with Mustafa Kemal’s aspiration to become padişah and to sign his name “el gazi” like the padişahs. Although the “I-nation” of *Nutuk* claims that the Assembly granted the title of gazi to him,²⁷ the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* refers to how the Assembly resisted at first and how Mustafa Kemal also requested a financial reward from the Assembly for his services in Sakarya, which was refused.²⁸

The exploration of the backstage of deification techniques of Mustafa Kemal continue with a plethora of examples of the construction of a deity in the press. The opposition to Mustafa Kemal’s Republican People’s Party is silenced and the journalists are punished severely as the press is monopolized in the 1920s. Most of the prestigious writers of Turkey during the 1920s, including Yakub Kadri and Falih Rıfkı, are mocked by the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, for being the spokespeople of the monopolized press. The journalists describe a paradisaean state of affairs in Turkey and newspapers such as *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (National Sovereignty, a newspaper bought by Mustafa Kemal himself) write about how the Gazi is a genius, and a divine creator (*ulu yaratıcı*), which is a translation from Arabic to modern Turkish of *Halik-i Azim*²⁹. The epithets used include *ulu Gazi*, *yüce Gazi*, *Kudret Haliki*, *Mukaddes Reis*, which the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* finds difficult to distinguish from Abdülhamid’s *zillullah-ı filarz*, meaning “the shadow of God.”³⁰ The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* refers to one particular newspaper which grants Mustafa Kemal a place higher than any epithet likened to Abdülhamid. On 26 March 1928, Mustafa Kemal was introduced as “*Türk Devletinin banisi*,” or “The Creator of the Turkish government,” and in lieu of *besmele*³¹, the picture of the big *münci*, or savior, was placed: “So in lieu of the *besmele*, the picture of Mustafa Kemal. Then he was made God. And this much was not even granted to Abdülhamid. He was only the shadow of God: *zillullah-ı fil arz*.”³²

²⁶ Nur III 1992: 200-201.

²⁷ Nur III 1992: 220-221.

²⁸ Nur III 1992: 221.

²⁹ This is one of the adjectives of God, meaning the Mighty Creator.

³⁰ Nur III 1992: 314.

³¹ The newspapers used to have *besmele* or “in the name of Allah,” on the cover page.

³² The original is as follows: “Besmele yerine Mustafa Kemal’in resmi!...Demek Allah yapıyorlar. Bu kadarı Abdülhamid’e de denmemişti. Herif sade yerde Allah’ın gölgesi idi. “Zillullah-i fil arz...” Nur III 1992: 342.

*“Consequently I am both writing and having put this Nutuk in front of me, I am rectifying the ...”*³³

The “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* does a structuralist analysis of *Nutuk*, criticizing most severely the fact that *Nutuk* is presented as historical fact, when the text has actually distorted or fabricated events which could, at the point of writing, be re-told by witnesses who were still alive. *Nutuk*, according to the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, is a personal struggle (“*şahsi kavga*”) and it is nothing but a personal and subjective account (“*şahsiyattan başka bir şey değildir*”), vilifying those leaders who turned against Mustafa Kemal, justifying the Independence Tribunals and the executions, and illustrating that the “I-nation” accomplished everything single-handedly. The text is a personal epic full of hubris and pride, and prophet-like sayings.³⁴ The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is frustrated most by the attitude of members of parliament as they listen to *Nutuk* like sheep to a shepherd’s pipe for six days. The narrator believes such a speech is unparalleled in history, and cannot comprehend how the MPs actually endured the entire performance. Several of the “sycophants” applaud after the six days while others cry from excitement, speechless under the effect of the eloquence and poignancy of the gigantic epic: “I cannot find words to address my appreciation. My nervousness is preventing me from speaking coherently. This work should be published by the hundreds of thousands and should be distributed all over.”³⁵ According to Nur, the bearer of these words, Necip Asım, must have been paid to utter these sentences. Nur states that Necip Asım was a very successful artist, who ended the show with crocodile tears.

According to the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, the production of *Nutuk* is not as frustrating as its reception. It is not solely Mustafa Kemal, but the sycophant politicians and particularly the monopolized press that make of *Nutuk* a sacred text. An excerpt from Falih Rıfkı’s article on the cover page of *Milliyet* newspaper dated 30 July 1928 is sufficient proof of the sanctification of *Nutuk*:

If the history of the Gazi were left in obscurity, what would our situation be? Do not just read *Nutuk*, keep it like a dictionary/guide at your desk at all times! This book will serve the function of an amulet in times when fables and fairy tales are fabricated, it will save you from all accidents both visible and invisible. The publication of *Nutuk* is a big reform!³⁶

³³ What the narrator is rectifying in *Nutuk* is censored. “Binaenaleyh hem yazıyorum. Hem de bu nutku önüme koydum. tashih ediyorum” (Nur I 1992: 564).

³⁴ Nur III 1992: 308.

³⁵ The original is as follows: “Takdir için söz bulmaktan acizim. Heyecanım mani oluyor. Bu eser yüzbinlerce basılıp her tarafa dağıtılsın” (Nur III 1992: 308).

³⁶ The original is as follows: “Eğer Gazi tarihi meçhulat içinde kalsaydı, halimiz ne olacaktı! *Nutuk*’u yalnız okumayınız, bir kamus gibi masanızın üstünde daima tutunuz! Bu ki-

The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* expresses his anger not only at journalists like Falih Rıfki, but at the Air Force Committee for constructing multifarious statues of Mustafa Kemal and publishing *Nutuk*. The narrator comments in mock tone that perhaps these busts and *Nutuk* are planes and will help in a potential or imminent war. Reflecting on Falih Rıfki's words that *Nutuk* is full of wonders like an "amulet" and will rescue everyone from all accidents and "ill-fate," the narrator exclaims: "Damn them. Why don't you buy a few airplanes instead with that money?"³⁷

Finally, the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* narrates how one of the "chief sycophants," Yakup Kadri, puts a title for the laws, the system, the regime, the sayings, the mentality, the ethics, the "spirit" of this person, all summed up neatly under the title of "Kemalism." Other journalists, such as Giritli Ahmet Cevat, writing in the monthly journal *Muhit*, find solutions to every problem with "Kemalism," which the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* cannot help but describe as "Penasse" (*deva-i kel*), or a solution to all problems, including science, education, ethics, economics, and finance.³⁸

Another deification technique the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* emphasizes is the desecration of the past so that the founder of the new Turkey and the father of all reforms can be presented as the sole prophet throughout Turkish history. The types of vandalism mentioned in *Hayat ve Hatıratım* include erasing names of sultans from history books, eliminating Ottoman history courses from schools, and erasing *tuğras*³⁹ from mosques and fountains.⁴⁰

Self-Legitimization: Transcending the parameters of the Kemalist na(rra)tion:

Critical of Mustafa Kemal's techniques of self-deification, the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* does not attempt to create a prophet-like status for himself in the context of the encyclopedic autobiography. Not claiming transcendence over history, the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* illustrates in detail the self's development or *bildung* through time. The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is not so much concerned about narrating a position of self-aggrandizement within the context of the Kemalist narrative of the nation; rather, he constructs a different and unique

tap size hurafatta muskalara isnat olunan hizmeti görecektir, görünür görünmez kazalardan masun bulunduracaktır. *Nutuk*'un neşri, büyük inkılap..." (Nur III 1992: 363).

³⁷ The original is as follows: "Tayyare cemiyeti Mustafa Kemal'in birçok büstlerini yaptırmış. *Nutuk*'u da o bastırmış. Galiba bu büstler ve *Nutuk* tayyaredir. Yarın harpte imdada yetişir. Zaten Falih Rıfki'ya göre muska gibi mucizeli imiş, her kaza ve belayı def edermiş! ... Körolasılar. Şununla birkaç tane tayyare alsanız ya..." (Nur III 1992: 363).

³⁸ Nur III 1992: 518.

³⁹ The sultan's signature.

⁴⁰ Nur III 1992: 395.

context for the self within a different trajectory for nation building. This trajectory, especially as outlined in the “Türkçü Party Program,” is one of the main traits that distinguishes *Hayat ve Hatıratım* from other oppositional autobiographies written in response to *Nutuk*; for instance, Kazım Karabekir’s *İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları*, which replicates Kemalist national history and tries to re-position the narrator into that same history.

In lieu of the Republic in the 1920s which otherizes Kemal’s political opponents, the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* envisages a Republic which otherizes non-Turks. The narrator preaches a strict ethnic nationalism which will be maintained through an Office for Racial Affairs. The purity of blood that the narrator believes to be a precondition for every Turkish citizen, is exemplified best with him, the evidence of which he provides with reference to his entire family from Sinop, who are of pure Turkish blood and, for the past two hundred years, the narrator assures his readers, have not mixed with other races.⁴¹

The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* provides an extensive account of the context of abolishing the Sultanate, describing in succinct detail how he prepared the bill and how it was passed in the Assembly in 1922. The “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* provides three major reasons for abolishing the Sultanate. First, to separate the Caliphate from the state, to end the conflation of religion and state, i.e. what he found to be the cause of all the problems of the past; second, as national revenge to punish the Sultans whose inconsistent acts during the Struggle had been costly; third, to have the new Turkey represented in the Lausanne Peace Conference (1922-1923) by one government rather than two. With these plans, the narrator started preparing the bill, which he entitled *Teşrinisani Kararı*, or The November Decree. The members of parliament all signed this takrir, or bill, but Mustafa Kemal’s name was toward the end, and allegedly he took a long time to reflect before signing. In parliament, the *Teşrinisani Kararı* passed, receiving big applause. The narrator of the bill considers the preparation of this bill to be one of the biggest services he provided the Turkish nation, quoting the words of a French delegate who witnessed the scene in parliament: “I congratulate you. Mustafa Kemal entered İzmir. He recorded a big victory. Yes, but what you have done is much more significant. This nation may forget Mustafa Kemal. But you never.”⁴²

Being the mastermind behind the *Teşrinisani Kararı*, the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is highly critical however of the abolition of the Caliphate, which he sees to be a crucial position finding its analogue in Christianity in the Pope, whose authority and centrality was strengthened by Mussolini.⁴³ The “I” of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* illustrates the advantages of retaining the position of the Caliph-

⁴¹ Nur I 1992: 73-4.

⁴² Nur II 1992: 183, 185, 186. The original is as follows: “Sizi tebrik ederim. Mustafa Kemal İzmir’e girdi. Büyük zafer kazandı. Evet, fakat, bu senin yaptığın ondan çok büyüktür. Bu millet Mustafa Kemal’i unutabilir. Fakat seni unutamaz” (Nur II 1992: 185).

⁴³ Nur III 1992: 278.

ate, in how the Indians for instance supported the National Army both financially and psychologically in the Struggle.⁴⁴ The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* denies *Nutuk*'s justifications for the abolishment of the Caliphate, claiming that the Republic was pronounced secular together with the abolition of the Sultanate and that the Caliphate did not need to be removed to insure secularism.⁴⁵

Several of the prominent traits upon which the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* builds a different trajectory for the nation-state is the denial to narrate the Independence Struggle as a collective trauma which legitimizes the Turkish nation's being. The end-result of the prioritization of the Struggle is the intervention of the military into politics, which the narrator finds extremely dangerous for the future of Turkey. A second includes inheriting rather than destroying the Ottoman past, be this in the form of national holidays, history, statues, or icons. Lastly, the narrator criticizes the reforms of the 1920s, which he describes as a period of "reform fashion," with no other purpose but to propagate Mustafa Kemal as a *müceddid*, or reformist:

With one law, he had them put on the hat. He closed down the *medreses*⁴⁶ and *tekkes*.⁴⁷ They translated the Swiss Legal Code and executed it. Now there is this reform fashion. They make reforms everyday and write this in bold in newspapers. This situation concerns not only Mustafa Kemal but also his members of parliament. What a contagious disease is this reform disease! Cholera is nothing in comparison!⁴⁸

Claiming originality behind the ideas of reforms for himself, that the Swiss Legal Code, the hat, and the closing of the *tekkes* and *medreses* were discussed in his voluminous *Türk Tarihi* (Turkish History) written in the early 1920s, the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* proceeds to illustrate the problems behind the execution of the reforms. For instance, the Swiss Legal Code has many Christian traditions which need to be adapted to Islamic tradition. This is neglected as the Swiss Legal Code is borrowed lock, stock, and barrel in 1926.⁴⁹

A community of one...

Hayat ve Hatıratım fits into the genre of "non-official self-narrations," complicating the genre with the tension between the impulse for self-justification and self-aggrandizement as vindication of the self's significance in Turkish history

⁴⁴ Nur III 1992: 491.

⁴⁵ Nur II 1992: 260.

⁴⁶ Theological school attached to a mosque.

⁴⁷ Dervish lodges.

⁴⁸ The original is as follows: "BİRER KANUNLA ŞAPKAYI GIYDİRDİ. MEDRESE VE TEKKELERİ İLGA ETTİ. İSVİÇRE KANUNU MEDENİSİNİ TERCÜME ETTİRİP TATBİK ETTİLER. ŞİMDİ DE ARTIK BİR İNKILAP MODASI ÇIKTI. HERGÜN BİR İNKILAP YAPIYOR VE BUNU ŞATAFATLARLAR GAZETELERE YAZDIRIYORLAR. BU HAL MUSTAFA KEMAL VE VEKİLLERİNE DE SIRAYET ETTİ. İNKILAP HASTALIĞI NE SAİR HASTALIKMIŞ? KOLERA YANINDA HALT ETSİN!" (Nur III 1992: 312).

⁴⁹ Nur III 1992: 313.

and the negative and cynical attitude toward the self and humanity. On the one hand, Rıza Nur is the person who named Turkey “*Türkiye*”⁵⁰ and was one of the representatives who conceptualized *Misak-ı Milli*, or The National Pact, of 1920⁵¹, while on the other, he is the one who attempted to rape his neighbor’s daughter in Sinop, who acted as family doctor and gigolo to wealthy married women to rise in his medical profession, who violently beat his wife, who left several slave girls and domestic animals to die in the hands of his sadist wife, and who told countless other misdemeanors and acts of evil in his quest for truth and exploration of the anatomy of the human soul.

Although the narrative of events in *Hayat ve Hatıratım* has the explicit purpose of illustrating the interdependence of effort that went into the Independence Struggle and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, to countermand the solipsist account of Mustafa Kemal’s *Nutuk*, the end-product is a text which acknowledges the significance of the roles of the leaders that *Nutuk*’s account dismisses,⁵² simultaneously vilifying them. Even when giving agency to other leaders in the Struggle, the narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is critical of other leaders’ military or political mistakes.⁵³ If a flaw cannot be found, the narrator resorts to the issue of race. As such, certain leaders are disqualified from serving the Turk if they are not of Turkish descent. This is why, in 1922, Rıza Nur opposes the decision to allow Rauf Bey to head the committee of delegates sent to Lausanne, on the pretense that Rauf is an Abaza⁵⁴ and cannot fully execute “the business of the Turk.”⁵⁵ This is the reason why Rıza Nur convinces Mustafa Kemal to entrust the same mission to İsmet Paşa, whom he later finds out, much to his chagrin and disappointment, is a Kurd from Bitlis.⁵⁶

In the misanthrography, a utopia of purity of blood and race, pure Turkishness, pure devotion to the tenets of Islam, honesty, absolute devotion to serving the Turk and the nation, and absolute truth are put forth, ideals which none of the characters of the autobiography, including the narrator, can fulfill. In this structure of idealism, all historical agents, with the exception of the narrator’s saintly mother, fail, as all protagonists are portrayed negatively, even when the explicit aim is to promote their significance.

The last section of the autobiography, i.e. “*Rıza Nur tarafından Rıza Nur*” carries the sad realization that the autobiographer, the narrator, the biographer, the biographer of the self, the addresser, and the addressee are but one person. The

⁵⁰ Nur III 1992: 54.

⁵¹ Nur I 1992: 542. The pact roughly defined the borders of modern-day Turkey.

⁵² Such leaders include Kazım Karabekir, Halide Edib Adivar, Dr. Adnan Adivar, and Rauf Bey.

⁵³ This tendency is best exemplified in the epithet his friends give the narrator, *kronik muhalif*, meaning chronic opposition or adversary.

⁵⁴ A member of the northwest Caucasian people.

⁵⁵ Nur II 1992: 180.

⁵⁶ Nur II 1992: 234.

lines, "I worked always so as to be called an honest, hardworking nationalist," or the words, "This nation will never forget you" (uttered by the French delegate after Rıza Nur prepared the bill to abolish the Sultanate) echo back to the writer as he adds, "This is what I wanted everyone to say," which conceal the tragic realization that "nobody says this" or "nobody will say this."⁵⁷ The position of not addressing anyone, of not having an immediate reading group to address, comes to the fore here, together with the realization of Rıza Nur's complete alienation from the records and rituals of republican history.

Sixty-eight years after the writing of *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, and roughly forty years after its initial publication,⁵⁸ Turkish readers still have very little to say about this enigmatic yet significant political intellectual's puzzlingly unique autobiography. Very few history books mention Dr. Rıza Nur,⁵⁹ and Kemalist reading groups have used the narrator's confessions as a means of proving his perversity and alineating him from the chronicles of Turkish history. Rıza Nur's Türkçü party program, which includes restoring the Caliphate and revitalizing the dervish lodges, was interpreted not as a different trajectory of nation building that needs to be taken into consideration in evaluating the 1920s in Turkey, but as ideas that need to be condemned. Kemalist reading groups cited Rıza Nur's proposition that women be moved back to the domestic sphere as a regressive tendency that legitimized the condemnation of the entire text itself.⁶⁰

In the 1990s, Islamists appropriated the text, but for the wrong reasons. In the introduction to the autobiography, Abdurrahman Dilipak agrees with the narrator in his oppositional stance toward the deification of Mustafa Kemal and to-

⁵⁷ Nur I 1992: 149.

⁵⁸ The state endorsed a ban on the book after its initial publication in 1967 because it violated the law "Crimes against Atatürk." The book was published in the 1990s by the Islamic Press, İşaret Yayınları.

⁵⁹ This rule applies to critical academic books, such as Erik Jan Zürcher's *Turkey: A Modern History*.

⁶⁰ For Kemalist criticism of Dr. Rıza Nur and his autobiography, see Pulur: 28-30, Güresin: 27; Atay: 19-20. The narrator of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* is rather conservative in his outlook on women. It seems, however, that this problem has its roots again in Rıza Nur's misanthrope. With the exception of his mother, who is described in the autobiography as an angelic figure, the narrator never emotionally bonded with or loved a woman. In "Rıza Nur tarafından Rıza Nur," the "I" of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* describes a misanthropic self unvisited or unhaunted by pleasure. See Nur I 1992: 156. The self is not addicted to anything, not alcohol, not sex, not gambling, not nicotine, not entertainment, not eating. Not interested in women, the narrator recalls the period in his youth when he longed to be a eunuch. His relationships with women consist of pure lust, a biological necessity that the narrator cannot emotionally accommodate because of his hatred and condescending attitude toward women. See Nur I 1992: 150. The narrator looks at women then at a functional and moral level; in the former context, he cannot see women being as competent as men in the professions, while in the latter, he cannot see the rise of morality in society when women are more involved in the public sphere. His cynical perspective on human (or better "male") nature leads him to suspect that society would witness more adultery and prostitution when women enter the professions.

ward the making of official Turkish history into an epic, but tries to fit Rıza Nur into an ideological mould, which condemns all efforts to join the European Union because of the threat to national integrity. Such an ideological context falls short of accurately representing Rıza Nur's progressive ideals.⁶¹

This unique misanthrography still waits in dusty bookshelves of rare bouquinistes in Turkey and in manuscript form at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the British Museum in London, and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin as the modern tragic problem of the narrator is further enhanced: "The torment of a creature condemned to solitude and devoured by a longing for community."⁶²

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⁶¹ See Nur II 1992: 17; Nur III 1992: 17.

⁶² Lukács counterposes the modern tragic problem to classical tragedy where narratives of fate affirm collective unity in the wake of suffering. See Lukács 1971: 45.

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