

Morin, Aysel. *Crafting Turkish National Identity, 1919–1927: A Rhetorical Approach.* London and New York: Routledge. 2021. 222 pages. ISBN 9780367715014

Reviewed by **Güldeniz Kıbrıs**
Leiden University
guldenizkibrıs@gmail.com

Political myths are great stories that narrate the past events creatively¹ and through which ‘collectivities – in this context especially nations – establish and determine the foundations of their being, their systems of morality and values.’² Although myths seem to be rather irrational and secondary in the modern world, people still look at stories about the past may have entered it.³ In her book, based on her doctoral dissertation, Morin sheds light on the use of political myths in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s *Nutuk* (*The Speech*). She makes a full-fledged rhetorical analysis of this text which is about the events between the start of the Turkish War of Independence on 19 May 1919 and the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. It was delivered from 15 to 20 October 1927 at the second congress of the Republican People’s Party (*CHP*). Then, as Zürcher states, it has become the foundational text of official nationalist historiography.⁴ Morin’s book, therefore, is a valuable attempt that makes readers aware of the relationship between nationalist discourse and political-historical context.

The book is divided into three parts with nine chapters. The first part (chapters 1–2) establishes the theoretical framework of nationalism and rhetorical studies besides presenting a historical background of Turkish nationalism. Morin puts forth an elaborate summary of the theories of nationalism and how they might be adopted to understand Turkish nationalism. She adopts a combined approach of primordialist and modernist theories of nationalism. In this regard, she finds Anthony Smith’s discussion of primordialism significant in grasping the processes of myth creation and how myths resonate with the people. The author also mentions the concept of print capitalism and argues that, unlike Benedict Anderson suggests, ‘the introduction and spread of print technology, increasing literacy rates and centralization of education have little to do with the emergence of Turkish nationalism’ (p. 15). This argument is worth an in-depth

- 1 Smith, Anthony D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Ram, Haggay and Saber-Friedman, Galia 1996. ‘The Political Significance of Myth: The Case of Iran and Kenya in a Comparative Perspective’. *Cultural Dynamics* 8.1. 51–78. Here: 53; Frye, Northrop. 1982. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York / London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 31.
- 2 Schöpflin, George. *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 80.
- 3 Geertz, Clifford. 1983. ‘Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power’. In Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 121–146. Here:143.
- 4 Zürcher, Erik-Jan. 2017. *Turkey: A Modern History*. London / New York: I.B. Tauris, 175.

analysis given the vivid printing culture in the Ottoman Empire right after the Young Turk Revolution. Besides, for Morin, there is a relationship between the elimination of the Ottoman Empire and the increasing need for public speech (p. 34). Although it is never the author's intention, this point falsely and simply leads readers to regard the Kemalist Revolution as only an outbreak by ignoring what it inherits from the previous state structure. A further clarification pointing out continuities with the late Ottoman era is lacking here.

The second part (chapters 3–7) is the core of the book. Throughout these chapters, Morin identifies the five founding political myths of Turkey. These myths are the myth of the first duty, internal enemy, ancestor, encirclement, and the myth of modernity. The sixth chapter, about the myth of encirclement, is quite rich in primary sources, including memoirs and passages from newspapers and journals excerpted from Bilal Şimşir's book on the press coverage of the Kemalist Revolution abroad.⁵ The richness of the sources deepens Morin's analysis. The seventh chapter presents the myth of modernity and has several significant points. First, the author mentions two competing perspectives about the West in Turkish political culture. One from the 19th century severely criticizes the West, the other one from the establishment of the Republic that wants to be like the West. This point by Morin is significant because it reveals the transformation in the meanings attributed to political myths. The chapter also includes an analysis of how myths work in relation to the image of Atatürk. Morin rightly declares that Atatürk himself becomes a political myth and an essential reference for the Turkish political culture.

The last part (chapters 8–9) mentions political myths' theoretical and political implications. In the ninth chapter, Morin shows that the vocabulary, language, narratives, and so myths of the foundational ideology have also been used by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, one of the most outspoken critics of Kemalism. Morin's perspective here is significant and shows the current survival of the myths through their recycling. At this point, a reference to the AKP narratives about non-Muslim minorities and LGBTQs as internal enemies harming national unity could enrich Morin's analysis.

Thus, the major strength of the book is Morin's message that the meanings of myths change over time. This means nation is not something dynamic but is reproduced continuously. On the other hand, the main shortcoming is the levels of comparison. Morin refers to Orkhon inscriptions and the *Book of Dede Korkut* to mark changes and continuities and compares their content with Atatürk's *Nutuk* (The Speech). These are significant ancient sources, and for some nationalists, they are the signifiers of continuity in Turkish culture. Here the point is that none of these sources are sufficiently 'Turkish' given the modern construction of Turkish nationhood. They are, in fact, 'Turkic' and belong to a period when no nations and nationalism existed. Although it makes sense to realize how these ancient sources are included in the collectivization process of nations as part of cultural heritage, directly comparing them with a modern source *Nutuk*

5 Şimşir, Bilal N. 1981. *Dış Basında Atatürk ve Türk Devrimi: Bir Laik Cumhuriyet Doğuyor*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.

(The Speech)- is questionable. Instead, the author could have dealt more with the interpretation of these ancient sources by the late Ottoman / early Republican nationalists. Otherwise, the book's period is too large, so Morin's emphasis on recent historical events such as the Korean war, Cyprus issue, and European Union blow in the wind. Moreover, Morin mentions the concept of Turkish political culture several times. A brief theorization of political culture could be helpful for the readers. Lastly, there is a recent mushrooming of literature about conspiracy theories in Turkey.⁶ In fact, these myths are building blocks of conspiracy theories as well. Morin could have mentioned them in the concluding chapter to help the readers consider possible further studies.

To conclude, the book definitely accomplishes its goal of identifying myths in the ideological climate of Turkey. Therefore, it is ideal for those scholars and students of Turkish studies, history, nationalism studies, and rhetorical studies who want to adopt interdisciplinary lenses about the reaches of the history of nationalism.

6 Some of these sources are: De Medeiros, Julian. 2018. *Conspiracy Theory in Turkey: Politics and Protest in the Age of "Post-Truth"*. New York: I.B.Tauris; Gürpınar, Doğan. 2019. *Conspiracy Theories in Turkey: Conspiracy Nation*. New York: Routledge.