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The Changing Portrayal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Television: A Comparison between Liberation (1994) and Crossroad (2012)

Zhao, Yutong

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**The Changing Portrayal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Television: a
Comparison between *Liberation* (1994) and *Crossroad* (2012)**

By Yutong Zhao

MA Thesis Middle Eastern Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University

Dr. Petra de Bruijn

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Introduction

The construction and reconstruction of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's (1881-1938) image in cultural products is not a recent phenomenon, and the reason of this constant dissemination of his image can be traced back to the history of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk is not solely recognized as the country's founder but also revered as its "eternal leader". Even after his death, the cult of Atatürk continued to grow.¹ For some people, he is a symbol of modernity, secularity and Westernity, the opposite of Islamism. This is why in 1997, opponents of the Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) used his image in street protests and advertisements, expecting his portrait to speak for them.² In other cases, he is equaled as the nation itself. No matter the Atatürk films devised in the 1930s to proclaim Turkey's modernity to the world, or the plan to restore Turkey's international prestige with Atatürk documentary in 1980s, his image was tied to the country's image closely. In the 1980s, the state owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) started to produce TV series about the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) with the state's support.³

Although the taboos of portraying Atatürk by actors were broken in the 1980s due to a liberalized political economy, Dinç considered the TRT series about the War of Independence such as *Liberation* (Kurtuluş, 1994) and *Republic* (Cumhuriyet, 1998) produced in the 1990s to be essentially retellings of official history, with very little innovation.⁴ However, in 2012, TRT aired two historical series center the Atatürk period, *Crossroad* (Yol Ayrımı, 2012) and *Law of Wolf* (Kurt Kanunu, 2012), and the latter was advertised with the slogan "make alternative history with series".⁵ These two TV series can be seen as part of a trend in historical TV series production by the Turkish government that aimed to convey national values after 2011 in response to the TV series *Magnificent Century* (Mühteşem Yüzyıl, 2011-2014).⁶ It would be interesting to study these more recent Atatürk series and analyze the transformation of the portrayal his image from the 1990s to today, especially under the context of the changing political environment in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey. Thus, this thesis will explore the two Atatürk TV series *Liberation* (1994) and *Crossroad* (2012) produced by the state-owned TRT at different times, attempting to explain whether their portrayals of Atatürk differed and what accounted for these differences.

¹ Ryan Gingeras, "The Eternal Leader", in *Eternal Dawn* (Oxford: University Press, 2019), 387.

² Kimberly Hart, "Images and Aftermaths: The Use and Contextualization of Atatürk Imagery in Political Debates in Turkey", *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 22 (1999), 68-75.

³ Derya Genç Acar, "Atatürk and Cinema: Atatürk Movies in Turkish Cinema", *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, no. 69 (2021), 298.

⁴ Enis Dinç, *Atatürk on Screen: Documentary Film and the Making of a Leader*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 209.

⁵ Acar, "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's View of Cinema", 362; Hasan Bülent Kahraman, "Making Alternative History with the Series", accessed 20 December 2022, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/pazar/kahraman/2012/02/12/diziyle-alternatif-tarih-yapmak>.

⁶ M. Sami Okumuş, "TRT Historical Tv Series from 1974 to 2020:", *Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1, no. 39 (n.d.), 42.

State of the Art

Previous research examined the historical process of constructing the myth of Atatürk well, and confirmed the media that carry his image also serve this process. Zürcher noted that, charismatic elements were used constantly in his biographies and image. In photographs, he is often engaged in activities symbolizing modernity, teaching the new alphabet, or looking down on his people from above as the “eternal leader”.⁷ Besides, Zürcher and other scholars such as Goldman and Türkölmez also mentioned that the range of media carrying Atatürk's image has expanded since 1990s, his image was commodified and incorporated to popular culture.⁸ These research focused more on the historical accounts and political contexts of the veneration of Atatürk. Other scholars noticed the phenomenon of his static image being used in the media by different people, in different contexts, and for different purposes. For instance, Cetin found that the press in the early Republic often used previous photographs of Atatürk to announce the latest events. Apart from the lack of funding, the legitimacy and persuasiveness that the image of the Atatürk brought to the news content was an important reason for featuring his image in media.⁹ Bayraktaroğlu and Çeliker used Atatürk's early newspaper photographs as example to prove the importance of photographic skills in constructing images of leaders.¹⁰ Öztunç and Bedir analyzed the Atatürk Commemoration Day posts on Instagram in 2019, especially how different organizations used his image to support their own position since Atatürk is still an important symbol of national identity.¹¹ In posts from organizations that follow Kemalism, he appeared more in a parliamentary setting in a suit, while conservative nationalist organizations depicted his image more as a soldier.¹²

The aforementioned studies partly investigated the function of visual elements, including settings, props, and costumes in static images which presented Atatürk as a great leader and national symbol. However, studies that focused on moving-image media, such as film or TV series were relatively rarer. In his book, Dinç analyzed how the portrayal of Atatürk on film served the image building of him as an omnipotent leader as well as Turkey as a civilized and modernized country from 1919 to 1938.¹³ He argued that the early Atatürk films laid the framework for maintaining the Atatürk

⁷ Erik-Jan Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father, the Teacher and the Hero: The Atatürk Personality Cult in Turkey”, in *Political Leadership, Nations and Charisma* (Routledge, 2012), 152-3.

⁸ Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”; Onur Türkölmez, “Hegemonik İdeoloji Dönüşürken: Popüler İdeoloji Olarak Türk Milliyetçiliği ve Kemalizm”, *PESA Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2020): 22–31; Anat Goldman, “Privatized Commemoration, Political Polarization, and the Cult of Atatürk since the Mid-1990s”, *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 2 (3 April 2018), 146.

⁹ Idil Cetin, “Photographs of Atatürk in the Early Republican Press: How His Image Was Used to Visualize Events?”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 5 (3 September 2019), 712.

¹⁰ Ali Bayraktaroğlu and Murat Çeliker, “The Function of Photography in Creating a Leader’s Image”, *Art-e Sanat Dergisi* 4, no. 7 (20 June 2011), 16-9.

¹¹ Müge Öztunç and Umur Bedir, “New Media and National Identity: The Representation of Atatürk on NGO’s November 10th Instagram Posts”, in *Communication and Technology Congress. Ss*, vol. 491, 2021, 220.

¹² Öztunç and Bedir, “New Media and National Identity”, 219.

¹³ Dinç, *Atatürk on Screen*, 4-6.

myth and official history in the future decades, and his image as a flawless leader had not been challenged until 21st century.¹⁴ In another research, Akter and Incirlili analyzed the representation of Atatürk in seven films and documentaries produced from 1998 to 2012. Their findings showed that despite attempting to highlight Atatürk's humanitarian qualities, the film *Mustafa* (2008) received significant criticism due to its deviation from the established conventions of prior Atatürk films.¹⁵ While scholars like Dinç, Akter, and Incirlili noticed the changes in the portrayal of Atatürk's image on film, as well as sociopolitical shifts, they did not thoroughly investigate the trajectory of this transformation nor conduct a comparative analysis between the past and present, especially concerning TV series.

Overall, previous literature on Atatürk's representation generally focused on its relationship to the construction of national identity. His images on traditional newspaper and new media and the portrayal of him in documentaries and biographical films from different periods were analyzed. However, previous studies have not highlighted changes in his image and how these messages were crafted by visual elements in cultural products over time. Additionally, television has not received much attention as a medium that represents the image of Atatürk.

Research Question

As previous studies have paid little attention to the portrayal of Atatürk in TV series and rarely compared works from different periods, this thesis will use to case studies to answer the question: “How does the portrayal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in *Crossroad* (Yol Ayrımı, 2012) differ from the earlier TRT-broadcasted series *Liberation* (Kurtuluş, 1994), and to what extent is it influenced by the socio-political changes between the 1990s and 2010s?” The two selected TV series were produced during different time periods that witnessed the increasing divide between Secularism and Islamism, as well as the consolidation of Erdoğan's power. To address the main research question, this thesis must also elaborate how the veneration of Atatürk has been transformed by the social and political changes from the 1990s to 2010s. Finally, if we assume the moving pictures were created with the intention of impacting the viewers, which textual and cinematic techniques were used in these series to portray the image of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in different scenes? While analyzing the series within the context of their production, can we determine whether they are created to reflect politics, to influence politics, or both? The above questions will be answered in following chapters of the thesis.

Theoretical Framework

¹⁴ Dinç, *Atatürk on Screen*, 209.

¹⁵ Tutku Akter and Serife Incirlili, “The Reciprocal Relationship between Turkish Cinema and Politics: The Portrayal of ‘Atatürk’ as a Political Leader in Filmic Narrative”, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 6, no. 1 (2017), 81.

Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community," and argues that print technology played a crucial role in the creation and preservation of national identity.¹⁶ According to Billig, the established state provides a constant reminder of nationhood and serves as the background for political discourse and cultural productions.¹⁷ Given Atatürk's status as a national symbol, theories about the construction of national identity are crucial for understanding the political and social messages conveyed by TV series about him. Besides, Sachleben's book will also be consulted to understand how cultural products interact with politics and the endogenous relationship between them.¹⁸ Since the ideal national identity promoted by Kemalists and Erdoğan are different, this change might be reflected in the *Atatürk* TV series produced by the state-owned TRT. To examine these differences, I will consult Mikos' Film Analysis method to compare the two series on five levels (Content and representation, Narration and dramaturgy, Characters and actors, Aesthetics and configuration, Contexts). I will also use Bordwell and Thompson's introduction to the cinematic techniques to analyse what kind of image the producer intended to present in the different scenes.¹⁹

Outline of Chapters

The text is divided into five chapters except the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter explains the theoretical framework used to analyze Atatürk's portrayal in the two TV series. I will use theories on nationalism to explain how Kemalist nationalism shaped Turkish national identity and the image of Atatürk. The competing identities in the Turkish society for example a more conservative nationalism will also be elaborated. Additionally, I will use Sachleben's theories on the relation between popular culture and politics to explain how the political sphere influences cultural production.²⁰ In the second chapter, I will examine the biography of Atatürk and the official narrative surrounding him in order to understand the producers' aims while representing the War of Independence and the opposition party formed in 1930. I will also introduce the significant political changes from the 1990s to the 2010s particularly how the rise of Islamist parties affected the perception of Kemalism and the veneration of Atatürk in society. In the third and fourth chapters, I will present the data collected from the two series using Mikos' film analysis methods. After describing the content and portrayal of Atatürk in *Liberation* (1994) and *Crossroad* (2012), I will compare them and try to explain the results in relation to the social-political contexts, in other words, to examine whether they are created to reflect

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism", in *The New Social Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020), 59.

¹⁷ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, England: Que Corporation : Sage Publications., 1995), 8.

¹⁸ Mark Sachleben, *World Politics on Screen: Understanding International Relations through Popular Culture* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 3.

¹⁹ Lothar Mikos, "Analysis of Film", *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2014, 407–23.; David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edition (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2016).

²⁰ Sachleben, *World Politics on Screen*.

politics, to influence politics, or both. What are the differences or similarities between the portrayals of Atatürk in the two series and what factors contributed to the results? While analyzing the series within the context of their production, can we determine whether they are created to reflect politics, to influence politics, or both? Finally, I will summarize my findings and answer the questions.

Chapter 1. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Atatürk is an essential national symbol in the Turkish identity. Analyzing the ideological settings that influenced Atatürk 's position in Turkish nationalism throughout time is necessary to understand why Atatürk has been portrayed in certain ways in popular culture over time. I will examine the development of Turkish nationalism in this section from Atatürk's time to the present political climate under Erdoğan. To understand how politics interacts with popular culture, it is necessary to introduce some important terms and theories. Besides, I will also consult film analysis to examine what aspects of his personality and ability are stressed through the series.

1.1 Turkish Nationalism and Atatürk

Scholars who hold the primordialist perspective believe that the foundations of nations and nationalism can be traced to ethnicity, and often draw on ancient origins to explain the development of nations.²¹ These efforts have often relied on a single criterion, such as language or ethnicity, or a combination of factors, such as shared territory, history, and cultural characteristics. However, Hobsbawm argues that relying solely on objective criteria such as language, ethnicity, shared territorial, historical, and cultural characteristics to explain what constitutes a nation is not sufficient since not all entities that fit such definitions can be considered nations at any given time.²² In contrast, scholars who subscribe to the modernization theory of nationalism view the notion of a "nation" as a modern concept that has emerged in recent times.²³ According to Anderson, A nation is an imagined political community that is limited and sovereign. It is imagined since it is impossible for its members to know all their fellow members, even in the smallest country. Although each member in a community is aware that there are other members whom they do not know, they can still imagine a connection between them.²⁴ In addition, Anderson emphasizes the role of modern systems and technology. The emergence of new communities was made possible by capitalism, new communication technology, and human linguistic diversity. This interaction created a scenario in which the concept of new communities could be imagined and ultimately formed.²⁵

Christian Jansen and Henning Borggräfe note that "nationalism" encompasses two separate phenomena. The first is a combination of political ideas, emotions, and related symbols that can potentially form a cohesive ideology but may not necessarily do so. The second is the political movements that espouse these ideas. As a social movement, nationalism calls for state unity and autonomy for a specific group

²¹ Morin and Lee, "Constitutive Discourse of Turkish Nationalism", 488.

²² Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 5.

²³ Morin and Lee, "Constitutive Discourse of Turkish Nationalism", 489.

²⁴ Anderson, "Imagined Communities", 5-7.

²⁵ Anderson, "Imagined Communities", 42-3.

deemed to be a nation, resulting in the creation of a nation-state. Following the establishment of a nation-state, nationalist movements strive to uphold and frequently strengthen the state's internal unity and political effectiveness.²⁶ Kemalist nationalism covers both aspects. In the early Republic, Kemalism, which is based on secularism, statism, populism, and nationalism sustained a new imagined community.²⁷ Among other important national symbols, Atatürk has been the central figure in Turkey's official narrative regarding its founding myths.²⁸ His involvement in the First World War, particularly the Gallipoli campaign (1915-1916), and the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) was used as material to create a narrative where he is depicted as the only hero.²⁹ Besides, this ideal national identity was reinforced and given form in a series of subsequent reforms aimed at modernization, Westernization, and secularism. Atatürk's reforms covered a wide range of areas in social life, including both symbolic changes such as the adoption of Western-style clothing, the use of the Latin alphabet, the Gregorian calendar, and the metric system, as well as structural changes such as the secularization of education, law, and the legal and judicial systems.³⁰

In his book *Banal Nationalism*, Billig argues that in established nations, there is a constant effort to reinforce and remind people of their national identity through the use of symbols such as flags. During normal days, they can be observed casually engaging in mundane forms of nationalism, carried along by the routine and familiar currents of everyday life.³¹ People can't forget their nationality, not because they are reminded of it during the moment of crisis, but because the forms of banal nationalism are seen in the routine and familiar currents of everyday life.³² In other words, nationalism is not only a social movement or a special moment like national days, but also a background to everyday life.³³ Nowadays, in Turkey, one can find numerous equestrian statues and busts of Atatürk in public spaces.³⁴ Legally, all schools and public buildings are required to display portraits and busts of Atatürk. Across the country, there are main streets named after him and squares featuring his statues.³⁵ However, Atatürk is not only commemorated on national holidays or in national space such as *Anıtkabir* (the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) consciously, but he has also become a part of people's everyday lives. Glyptis argues

²⁶ Christian Jansen and Henning Borggräfe, *Nation–Nationalität–Nationalismus*, vol. 1 (Campus Verlag, 2020), 18, cited in Edward J. Erickson and Peter Hart, "Turkish Nationalism: From Gallipoli to Contemporary Neo-Ottomanism", *Nationalism in a Transnational Age*, 2021, 42.

²⁷ Türköz, 'Fathering the Nation. From Mustafa Kemal to Atatürk', 59.

²⁸ Meltem Türköz, "Fathering the Nation. From Mustafa Kemal to Atatürk", *Traditiones* 43, no. 1 (2014), 55.

²⁹ Frank Jacob, "Gallipoli. The Rise of Mustafa Kemal, and the Martial Creation of the Turkish Nation", 2021, 14; Erickson and Hart, "Turkish Nationalism", 27.

³⁰ Morin and Lee, "Constitutive Discourse of Turkish Nationalism", 501.

³¹ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, England: Que Corporation : Sage Publications., 1995), 8.

³² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 8.

³³ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 45.

³⁴ Türköz, "Fathering the Nation. From Mustafa Kemal to Atatürk", 56.

³⁵ Goldman, "Privatized Commemoration, Political Polarization, and the Cult of Atatürk since the Mid-1990s", 146.

that the prevalence of Atatürk-related items cannot solely be attributed to state support. Atatürk's image can be found in a variety of places, such as behind supermarket counters, in barbershops, video stores, bookshops, and banks. People even hang Atatürk talismans from their car mirrors and wear Atatürk pins on their lapels.³⁶

1.2 Turkish Nationalism: from Atatürk to Erdoğan

The rulers and intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire attempted to maintain its unity in face of the empire's collapse. They considered ideologies such as Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, and Turkism. Ottomanism aims to promote political equality among the diverse Ottoman population, irrespective of their race or religion.³⁷ Pan-Islamism advocates a common Muslim identity.³⁸ However, after the Empire's disintegration after World War I, both Ottomanism and pan-Islamism were proved impractical, and Turkish nationalism gained increased significance.³⁹

The rise of Turkish nationalism can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when a number of factors, including the independence movements of other ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire, the impact of Turkology studies, and the ideologies of external Turks, all contributed to its emergence.⁴⁰ When the Republic was established, the official Kemalist nationalism exhibited significant elements of territorial and civic nationalism, but also had prominent ethnic undertones.⁴¹ Atatürk clearly rejected both pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism, which aimed at unification beyond the borders of the Republic, in his Speech (*Nutuk*) in 1927.⁴² Besides, religion was considered as an obstacle towards modernization. Thus, the state adopted a top-down approach to impose secularization, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Constitutional Court and the military were some of the state-controlled agencies to preserve it.⁴³ During his rule, Atatürk actively promoted the glorious Turkish history and language, leading to the establishment of institutions such as the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) and the Turkish Language Society (Türk Dil Kurumu).⁴⁴

³⁶ Glyptis, "Living up to the Father", 356.

³⁷ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 21.

³⁸ Reza Azarian, "Nationalism in Turkey: Response to a Historical Necessity", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 12 (2011): 72–82.

³⁹ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 28.

⁴⁰ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 2.

⁴¹ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 3.

⁴² Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 105.

⁴³ Taydas, Akbaba, and Morrison, "Did Secularism Fail?", 536.

⁴⁴ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 102-3.

In the past few decades, a form of conservative nationalism has steadily become prominent. The rise of Islamic discourses during the 1940s and 1950s were contributed by the multi-party politics, the Cold War dynamics and anticommunism.⁴⁵ As noted by Zürcher, an influential term is "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis," coined by İbrahim Kafesoğlu, which served as the central ideology of the *Aydınlar Ocağı* (Hearths of the Enlightened) established in 1970. This ideology highlights the resemblance and unity between Turkish pre-Islamic culture and Islam, considering both the Turkish and Islamic elements as fundamental to Turkish culture. In the late 1970s, it gained appeal within the political right, and after 1983, it served as a guiding philosophy for Özal's Motherland Party.⁴⁶

In a time of conservative politics, the rise of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) in 2002 signified a decline in Kemalist nationalism.⁴⁷ Breaking away from the Kemalist national identity, the AKP created a new Muslim identity which revitalized the significance of Ottoman history.⁴⁸ All of the AKP's leaders openly identified as devout Muslims, and many of AKP politicians openly promoted traditional values through their statements.⁴⁹ The AKP has adopted an Islamic discourse that emphasizes Sunni Islam and Ottoman history as guiding principles for their followers' lives and identities.⁵⁰ Besides, the AKP is actively constructing a neo-Ottoman narrative in their diplomatic efforts that presents themselves as the rightful successors to the Sunni Muslim community.⁵¹ For AKP supporters, Turkishness is not a central identity.⁵²

Importantly, the rise of Islam also resulted in the resurrection of Kemalism, which gave rise to a neo-Kemalism that opposed to right-wing domination and the Islamist movement.⁵³ Islamic political parties have been involved in the Turkish political system since the 1960s. In the 1990s, Islam had already become a legitimate political force.⁵⁴ As the Welfare Party gained power, the veneration towards Atatürk came to a turning point and a new civil Atatürk cult began to develop.⁵⁵ In the 1990s, the presence of Atatürk's image increased in the private sphere and became commodified

⁴⁵ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 219.

⁴⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 293.

⁴⁷ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 122.

⁴⁸ Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 223.

⁴⁹ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 349.

⁵⁰ Cenk Saraçoğlu and Özhan Demirkol, "Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (3 July 2015), 316-7; Taydas 546

⁵¹ Ihsan Yılmaz, "The AKP's Authoritarian, Islamist Populism: Carving out a New Turkey", report (Deakin University, 5 February 2021), 14.

⁵² Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, 223.

⁵³ Tanil Bora, "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003), 439.

⁵⁴ Taydas, Akbaba, and Morrison, "Did Secularism Fail?", 535.

⁵⁵ Goldman, "Privatized Commemoration, Political Polarization, and the Cult of Atatürk since the Mid-1990s", 145.

as a tool against Islamic symbols.⁵⁶ Some retired bureaucrats and army officers started to organize civil society organizations such as “Society for Atatürkist Thought” (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği, 1989) and “Society for Supporting the Contemporary Way of Life” (Çağdaş Yaşama Destekleme Derneği, 1989).⁵⁷ The Kemalist nationalism transformed from being an official ideology to a more civic movement, particularly when compared to the early Republic.⁵⁸

1.3 Politics and Popular Culture

The mass media plays a significant role in the construction and dissemination of national symbols. As Hobsbawm correctly points out, the mass media erases the boundaries between public and private spaces, as well as national and local identities, resulting in the integration of national symbols into daily life and popular culture.⁵⁹ This phenomenon was particularly evident in the Turkish government's struggle to repeatedly engineer film and television series projects about Atatürk's life for national anniversaries, even though most of the projects were eventually cancelled. But it also proves Dhoest's point that television serves as a means to visually create representations that give tangible form to the abstract concept of the nation, and that television dramas play a significant role in contemporary society as storytellers and creators of myths.⁶⁰ It is precisely because of the ability of television dramas to turn the abstract concept of the nation into concrete and mythical creations that films and dramas embodying Atatürk's perfect image face many limitations.

Rather than regarding popular culture as merely a form of entertainment, it is important to examine the ways in which cultural products intersect with politics. Sachleben proposed three potential relationships between world politics and film, each of which is distinct: (1) popular culture serves as a reflection of political issues; (2) popular culture can influence political outcomes; or (3) a symbiotic relationship exists between popular culture and politics, in which both realms inform and shape one another.⁶¹ While the values promoted by popular culture may reflect prevailing social norms, the creators of cultural products may also intentionally construct and convey different political messages. Even films without explicit political messages can still convey cultural norms and provide implicit suggestions about how the world should operate.⁶² The ability of TV series to persuade people and disseminate

⁵⁶ Ebru Asal, “Atatürk İmgeleri ve Hatırlama Biçimleri: Kemalizm, Post-Kemalizm ve Erdoğanizm”, 7.

⁵⁷ Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”, 7.

⁵⁸ Tanil Bora, “Nationalist Discourses in Turkey”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003), 439.

⁵⁹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), cited in Öztunç and Bedir, “New Media and National Identity”, 214.

⁶⁰ Alexander Dhoest, “Negotiating Images of the Nation: The Production of Flemish TV Drama, 1953-89”, *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 3 (1 May 2004), 394.

⁶¹ Mark Sachleben, *World Politics on Screen: Understanding International Relations through Popular Culture* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 3.

⁶² Sachleben, *World Politics on Screen*, 5-19.

ideological messages is often considered part of a country's "soft power" (the ability to influence people by setting agendas). For example, the historical dramas produced by TRT under the AKP government are considered to have played a significant role in shaping domestic public opinion.⁶³ Therefore, in order to understand the portrayal of Atatürk in these two dramas, it is necessary to consider how the content of the dramas reflects the political climate and the potential for political power to use television dramas for propaganda purposes.

1.4 Film Analysis and Important Terms

As pointed out by Mikos in his article "Analysis of Film", film and other forms of moving images can be seen as a media of communication. Film texts are received and assigned meanings by audience while watching, then further appropriated in their daily life as a source to shape their identity and social relationships.⁶⁴ Mikos describes five cognitive purposes that can guide the analysis of audiovisual material: content and representation, narration and dramaturgy, characters and actors, aesthetics and configuration, and contexts. Firstly, film as a sign system creates representations that indicate societal structures. Everything said and shown, more specifically, the topics discussed in a film can be understood as the content.⁶⁵ Narration is the process of placing characters, situations, and activities into a story, while dramaturgy is the arrangement of the events in a proper way that can elicit cognitive and emotional responses from the viewers.⁶⁶ Besides, characters and figures are crucial to plot progression and reflect the concepts of self and identity determined by society.⁶⁷ Configuration refers to the certain organization of individual images that depict specific things to create a continuous stream. Aesthetics and configuration are essential to the analysis because it is the formal aspects of film that engage the viewers and affect overall experience of the film.⁶⁸ Finally, viewers interact with films within social and cultural contexts to ultimately generating specific meanings.⁶⁹

If we assume that the portrayals of Atatürk in the two series are comparable, there must be a formal or textual pattern that can technically reflect the character's features such as appearance, personality, identity, and experiences. In essence, the term film style can be defined as the patterned and significant use of techniques, with different interpretations depending on the object of analysis. It is possible to analyze a film's style, which refers to the recurring patterns of techniques in a single film, a

⁶³ Senem B. Çevik, "Turkish Historical Television Series: Public Broadcasting of Neo-Ottoman Illusions", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2 (3 April 2019), 238.

⁶⁴ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 3-4.

⁶⁵ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 7.

⁶⁶ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 8.

⁶⁷ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 10.

⁶⁸ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 12.

⁶⁹ Mikos, "Analysis of Film", 14.

filmmaker's style, which refers to the repetition of patterns throughout their career, or a group style, which is the consistent use of techniques across the works of multiple directors.⁷⁰ The form and the content should be seen as harmonious and interdependent dimensions thus able to reveal all possible shades of significance and clues.⁷¹

In Bordwell and Thompson's book, *Film Art: An Introduction*, they provide very insightful explanations of cinematic techniques' functions. Mise-en-scene, which is central to the production art, means "putting into the scene" in French originally. This term overlaps with theater art, including elements as setting, lighting, costumes, makeup, staging and performance.⁷² Most of the time, mise-en-scene entails premeditated planning that showcase the director's control over the film's composition. Each element has its own unique function and works together to add expressive qualities to the mise-en-scene. For instance, the setting can impact the narration by generating expectations and influence our understanding of the plot's progression. Costumes can serve as motifs and enhance the depiction of characters, while makeup can aid in adjusting an actor's appearance to resemble historical figures. Lighting can accentuate textures and shapes by creating highlights and shadows, build a shot's composition, convey emotion, and produce dramatic effects. The director controls its quality, direction, source, and color to realize the designed scene. Staging (encompasses acting and movement in the shot) enables the figures to express emotions and thoughts while dynamizing the scenes with moving patterns. In addition, performance can also differ in style, in some cases aiming for surface realism while in others being exaggerated.⁷³

If mise-en-scene concerns the content (what is filmed), then cinematography is about the manipulation of the camera (how to film).⁷⁴ The use of photographic techniques can have an impact on the audience. For instance, the filmmaker can create a boundary between what is onscreen and offscreen, indicating the presence of objects or characters beyond the visible area through control of the framing.⁷⁵ Framing is also responsible for establishing a vantage point, which is determined by its distance, angle, and elevation. Additionally, it can also change position in relation to the

⁷⁰ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 20.

⁷¹ Anna Maszerowska, "Casting the Light on Cinema – How Luminance and Contrast Patterns Create Meaning", *MonTI: Monografías de Traducción e Interpretación*, 1 January 2012 71.

⁷² Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 113.

⁷³ Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 113-140.

⁷⁴ Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 13.

⁷⁵ Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 183-6.

subjects being shot.⁷⁶ Deciding the position of the camera entails considerations such as the angle, level, and height distance. Shooting a character from a lower angle can create an impression of their power, whereas a higher angle may make them appear defeated, although the impact largely depends on the surrounding context. The background appears more dominant than the figure in a long shot, whereas in a medium shot, the figure's gestures and expressions are more noticeable.⁷⁷ The repositioning of the camera through its motion can cause reframing, which involves alterations in angle, level, height, or distance. It may either move alongside the subject or move independently.⁷⁸

In sum, at the content and representation level, there may be recurring themes in television dramas, where characters are assigned with various societal identities. The producers might strive to depict historical facts accurately or attempt to influence people's perceptions of reality. Furthermore, the arrangement of events or the narration could be utilized to evoke diverse emotions in the audience and may emphasize certain traits of Atatürk in portraying character personalities. At the aesthetics and configuration level, specific cinematographic techniques might recur, showcasing his character or the dramatic conflicts within the story. Lastly, the production of the television dramas within a specific socio-political and economic context is also a focal point of examination, since it might influence people's understanding towards the series and the producers' intentions. Therefore, after reviewing the historical background relevant to the themes of the television dramas, I will analyze these two shows separately across these five dimensions and ultimately proceed with a comparison.

⁷⁶ Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 181.

⁷⁷ Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 198.

⁷⁸ Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 201.

Chapter 2. Historical Background

In this chapter, serving as a preliminary exploration prior to conducting an analysis of Atatürk's representation within the television series, I will introduce the life of Atatürk in history, with a specific emphasis on the crucial events presented by the series that he was involved in. While his remarkable military and diplomatic capabilities demonstrated during World War I and the War of Independence are undeniable, I will review in this chapter certain perspectives that may contradict official narratives such as in his six-day speech Nutuk. This is for a more straightforward evaluation of the narrative utilized in the series during subsequent analysis. For instance, *Liberation* (1994) elucidates his achievements as a military leader during the War of Independence, while *Crossroad* (2012) portrays his efforts in establishing a loyal opposition party in 1930. This chapter will offer background knowledge on the two topics. In addition to the historical events directly connected to the TV narratives, the final part of this chapter gives a short explanation of the changes in politics that happened from the 1990s when center-right parties were in power, to the time when AKP, an Islamist party defined itself as moderate, started gaining influence. This section aims to offer a necessary socio-political explanation to understand the contexts under which the two series were produced.

2.1 Atatürk's early experiences and military achievements

Zürcher claims that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's story can be seen as a representation of the common experiences of the generation of Young Turk officers to which he belonged.⁷⁹ Around 1880 or 1881, he was born in a Muslim family in Thessaloniki, the largest city in the Ottoman Balkans. He received his second name Kemal according to the ottoman custom in primary school and was later bestowed the name "Atatürk" by the national assembly in 1934. He acquired a military education modeled after that of Europe in Istanbul and became a member of the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress in 1908.⁸⁰ In a 1922 interview with Ahmet Emin Yalman, Atatürk reflected on his early experiences and character traits, saying that he had already demonstrated exceptional academic abilities throughout his student years and had adhered to conscience with a sense of dedication. Thus, along with other young officers, he joined the Young Turks in protest against Abdülhamid II's

⁷⁹ Zürcher, "In the Name of the Father".

⁸⁰ Zürcher, "In the Name of the Father".

authoritarian government.⁸¹ He actively participated in the constitutional revolution and suppression of counterrevolution and served in Libya in 1911.⁸²

He distinguished himself in service on the Gallipoli front, in Palestine, and Eastern Anatolia during World War I.⁸³ Within the CUP, he may have belonged to Cemal Pasha's faction and had a close relationship with Ali Fethi (Okyar), a rival to Enver. As a result, Mustafa Kemal was left outside the center of power once Enver emerged as the foremost military leader after 1913. Fortunately, his estrangement from Enver and Talât allowed him to maintain clean hands in 1919.⁸⁴ In the winter of 1918-1919, he failed to establish himself in politics, thus yielded to the urging of fellow Young Turk officers to journey to Anatolia and lead a resistance movement against the partitioning of the country by the World War I victors and their allies.⁸⁵ He later referred to his departure to Anatolia in May 1919 as an endeavor of his own making.⁸⁶ It is similar in the six-day speech (Nutuk) of 1927 which starts with “I arrived in Samsun on the 19th day of May in 1919”, a narrative centering himself.⁸⁷ In the next chapter, we will continue to see this narrative around himself reproduced in TV series.

The Turkish War of Independence took place under the Allies’ attempts to carve up the former Ottoman territories after World War I. The Armistice of Mudros signed in 1918 marked the Allies’ demand for the Ottomans to relinquish control of their Arab territories and permit the victors to capture "strategic points", whenever they perceived a threat and grant them full authority to partition the empire. Furthermore, the Greek kingdom believed it had the right to claim territorial demands over Western Anatolia, a region with sizable Greek communities, due to the unclear commitments made by the British.⁸⁸ As a result of these proposals, the nationalists in Anatolia mobilized for war. It is worth noting that in 1918, the CUP branches in many areas had already begun to promote and support the resistance led by the Defense of

⁸¹ Sadi Borak and Utkan Kocatürk (eds), *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri: Tamim ve Telgrafları*, Cilt V (Ankara: Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1972), 90-5. Cited in Gingeras, “The Sacred Leader”, 63-4.

⁸² Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”.

⁸³ Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”.

⁸⁴ Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”.

⁸⁵ Zürcher, “In the Name of the Father”.

⁸⁶ Borak and Kocatürk (eds), *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, 90-5. Cited in Gingeras, “The Sacred Leader”, 63-4.

⁸⁷ “1919 senesi Mayısının 19uncu günü Samsun’a çıktım.” Cited in Hasan Ünder, “Atatürk İmgesinin Siyasal Yaşamdaki Rolü”, in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 2 / Kemalizm (Ciltli)*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 143.

⁸⁸ M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, “Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography”, in *Atatürk* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 86-88.

National Rights using nationalist-Islamic discourse. The Imperial government offered Mustafa Kemal a position as an inspector to stop the conflicts and dissolve the nationalist committees. Mustafa Kemal embarked for Samsun one day after the Greek occupation of Izmir and promptly became a resistance leader, taking part in meetings organized by nationalists to critique the government. Subsequently, the Sultan removed him from his position.⁸⁹ He participated in the first regional congress of Resistance due to the initiative of the nationalist Islamic leadership and was elected as chairman. After two weeks of discussion, he declared a united front against foreign intervention in the eastern Black Sea and Anatolian regions. He declared the establishment of a parallel government in Anatolia which would be in charge of a new national resistance movement known as the Anatolia and Rumelia Defense of Rights Society, at the next all-Turkish congress in Sivas as the head of Board of Representatives.⁹⁰

They also succeeded in forming a new parliament in Ankara on April 23, 1920, despite pressure from the British and the central government, renaming it the Grand National Assembly to emphasize its exceptional power. Notably, it adopted a clear Islamic stance right away under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The inauguration was planned to take place on a Friday after prayers at the main mosque.⁹¹ This reference to Islam is not surprising since Mustafa Kemal was largely considered as an enthusiastic defender and follower of the Ottoman Sultanate throughout the early phase of the Turkish War of Independence.⁹² Hanioglu noted that he was effectively using Islamist language as well as stating his resistance to imperialism as a nationalist, giving off the impression of a Muslim communist during this period.⁹³ From this perspective, his self-portrayal as a Muslim communist at that time might have been a prudent guise before attaining power.

The nationalists, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, fought on two main fronts from 1919 to 1922, against the Armenians in the East and the British-backed Greeks in the West.⁹⁴ As noted by Dural, the War of Independence is generally considered to consist of three main phases. Beginning in 1920, when the Turkish forces were still in

⁸⁹ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 97.

⁹⁰ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 99.

⁹¹ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 102-3.

⁹² Gazi Dogan, "The Establishmen of Kemalist Autocracy and Its Reform Policies in Turkey", 2016, 369.

⁹³ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 105.

⁹⁴ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 89-91.

the process of mobilization, the Greek military gained control over Western Anatolia and Eastern Thrace. Following this, during 1921 and 1922, the Turkish soldiers under Mustafa Kemal's command resolutely withstood the more powerful Greek forces, forcing the Greeks to retreat to the west of the Sakarya River. At the same time, the allies of the Greek army gradually withdraw their support. Finally, by 1922, the Greek military was scattered and forced towards the coast of Izmir. Atatürk gained the position of commander-in-chief with a three-month limit after the loss in the Kütahya-Eskişehir Wars (July 1921) despite facing the criticism from his opponents.⁹⁵ However, the decisive success in the Battle of Sakarya (August-September 1921) helped him silence the opponents and resulted in the recognition of the Ankara government by France. After the Battle of Sakarya, Atatürk was granted honorific titles "Marshal" and "Gazi (victorious fighter for the Islamic faith)" by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.⁹⁶

The process of war can also be seen as his process of gaining power. In fact, at that time, the Grand National Assembly was an all-encompassing institution, making elected speaker Mustafa Kemal essentially vested with comprehensive authority. After appointed as the supreme commander of the armed forces, he was reappointed for several times and elected in 1922 again without a specific term limit.⁹⁷ Even though his heroic role during the War of Independence is frequently uncontested in official accounts, in fact, some of his supporters were worried about his swift rise to power at the time. For instance, shortly after the meeting in Sivas, Fevzi Çakmak, a future valued friend of Atatürk, reportedly started to doubt Kemal's intentions to establish a dictatorship.⁹⁸ Additionally, it appeared that over time, this opposition to him had not diminished. In each case, critics voiced their disapproval with the decision to give Mustafa Kemal unrestrained power.⁹⁹

Following the military victory, the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed on October 29, 1923 and Atatürk was elected its first president.¹⁰⁰ Ünder argues that it is reasonable to say that Atatürk won out completely throughout the power struggle

⁹⁵ A Baran Dural, "The Leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: Turkish Independence War", 185-190.

⁹⁶ Dural, "The Leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: Turkish Independence War", 193-4.

⁹⁷ Hanioglu, "Atatürk, An Intellectual Biography", 116-7.

⁹⁸ Gingeras, Ryan. "The Sacred Leader". In *Eternal Dawn*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020, 88.

⁹⁹ Dogan, "The Establishmen of Kemalist Autocracy and Its Reform Policies in Turkey", 369.

¹⁰⁰ Zürcher, "In the Name of the Father".

from 1923 to 1927 when he gave his speech Nutuk. He established the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP), designated Ankara as the capital, abolished the caliphate and elected a more loyal parliament.¹⁰¹ At that time, the fall of the Terağkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Progressive Republican Party, PRP) and the suppression of the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, who were against Atatürk's reforms, signified the death of opposition politics in this period.¹⁰² After suppressing the early opposition during the founding of the nation, the republican regime had to wait for another attempt of establishing a multi-party regime, till it completed its revolutions.¹⁰³

In the 1920s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk adopted secularism as the primary foundation for society organization. His vision was for it to renounce its ties to religion and ethnicity and become a modern, Westernized nation. The Republic abolished the caliphate, dismantled Sharia courts and tightly controlled religious matters in the following years. Political parties had to follow democratic and secular principles outlined in the constitution, and the military and the Constitutional Court served as a supervisory authority to safeguard Turkey's secularism.¹⁰⁴ The Kemalist revolutionary elite frequently believed that they were in charge of nurturing the values and moral character of the populace. As noted by Dogan, the elite and the ordinary masses were actually kept apart as a result of this top-down secularization.¹⁰⁵ It is important to consider that Atatürk's reforms implemented between 1923 and 1929 had a gradual and slow impact, but affected primarily the upper class.¹⁰⁶ In the following section, we will review the political experiment of the short-lived The Freedom Party in 1930, highlighting the social divisions and disparity between the Kemalist elite and ordinary people.

2.2 *Democratic experiment*

The Freedom Party was not the first opposition party in the history of the Republic, however the PRP formed in 1924, led by some of the popular generals of the War of Independence, was soon dissolved being accused of supporting the Kurdish rebellion

¹⁰¹ Ünder, "Atatürk İmgesi", 143.

¹⁰² Gingeras, "The Sacred Leader", 128-132.

¹⁰³ Elnur Hasan Mikail and Andaç Karabulut, "The Political Developments in Turkey during Atatürk's Period", *Open Journal of Political Science* 7, no. 4 (25 August 2017), 513.

¹⁰⁴ Zeynep Taydas, Yasemin Akbaba, and Minion K. C. Morrison, "Did Secularism Fail? The Rise of Religion in Turkish Politics", *Politics and Religion* 5, no. 3 (December 2012), 537.

¹⁰⁵ Dogan, "The Establishmen of Kemalist Autocracy and Its Reform Policies in Turkey", 34-6.

¹⁰⁶ Dogan, "The Establishmen of Kemalist Autocracy and Its Reform Policies in Turkey", 467.

of 1925.¹⁰⁷ In 1930, Atatürk decided to form a loyal opposition party. The background of the formation of the Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Free Republic Party, SCF) was during a period marked by a global economic crisis. Some of the factors that contributed to this downturn in Turkey included insufficient private enterprises, increasing government involvement, and an absence of rival political parties to supervise the government. Thus, Atatürk decided that a new political party would be introduced in parliament. He gave this task to Ambassador Fethi (Okyar) in Paris, who soon publicly stated their aim to tackle economic challenges and criticize government actions within the parliament.¹⁰⁸ Fethi was chosen to lead the party as he was a respected, experienced leader, but not likely to challenge Atatürk. Besides, he was supportive towards Atatürk's cultural reforms and was an expert on economics. The other candidates in parliament are mostly people close to him and of personal prestige. Weiker points out that the only controversial choice was Ahmet Ağaoğlu, a professor of law and literature originating from Azerbaijan and had previous connections with the Pan-Turkism movement. He was an influential government critic but also a respected intellectual within many circles.¹⁰⁹

On August 17, 1930, the first gathering of the Free Party took place at Galata's Nazlı Han building. They discussed establishing branches in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir and organizational matters.¹¹⁰ Following the formation of the new party, Atatürk immediately advised Fethi to travel to Western Anatolia, where unrest was particularly on the rise.¹¹¹ The first city Fethi's team traveled to was Izmir where the citizens had numerous complaints. Due to merchants' and factory owners' reduced pay, workers went on strike. Taxes made life difficult for small business owners, and the large number of Greek immigrants increased housing demand and rent prices.¹¹² Thus, when the SCF opposed high taxes and argued that the government was overspending on infrastructure projects such as railways, it rapidly gained support among these social groups that were struggling with financial issues. In Izmir, Fethi and his team were welcomed by enthusiastic citizens. Due to the people's enthusiasm, the Izmir Governorship became cautious and considered canceling Fethi's speech due

¹⁰⁷ Jacob M. Landau and Metin Heper, *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (Routledge, 2016), 77.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmet Kuşçi and Mustafa Duran, 'Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası', *Dünya Multidisipliner Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5, no. 2 (25 December 2022), 1-3.

¹⁰⁹ Jacob M. Landau and Metin Heper, *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (Routledge, 2016), 86.

¹¹⁰ Kuşçi and Duran, "Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası", 6.

¹¹¹ Cem Emrence, 'Politics of Discontent in the Midst of the Great Depression: The Free Republican Party of Turkey (1930)', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 23 (October 2000), 39-40.

¹¹² Emrence, "Politics of Discontent in the Midst of the Great Depression", 35-6.

to possible security issues. Fethi immediately sent a telegraph to Mustafa Kemal, who expressed support to the SCF and declared that the Ministry of Interior and Izmir Governorship were responsible for ensuring the meeting to be held safely. Following Atatürk's instructions, İsmet İnönü conveyed this message to the Izmir Governorship, emphasizing the need to provide a safe setting for the leaders and members of the SCF to express their ideas.¹¹³

However, the unexpected success of the Free Party seemed to have exacerbated the conflict between the two parties. In fact, the SCF had been experiencing stress as a result of Fethi's economic criticism from the very beginning. The ruling party felt concerned because of the critical perspectives he expressed in the media the enormous media coverage of his trip to Izmir.¹¹⁴ The CHP even criticized the SCP for spreading rumors that "taxes would be abolished, Arabic script would be reinstated, tekkes (Sufi lodges) would be reopened, fez hats would be worn, and even Mustafa Kemal might leave the CHP to exclusively collaborate with the Free Republic Party."¹¹⁵ The CHP was particularly alarmed by a number of violent occurrences that occurred during Fethi's visit to Izmir. In one of these conflicts, a 14-year-old kid named Necati was killed when police forces opened fire on the crowd when the printing press of the Anadolu newspaper, which supported the CHP, was attacked. Necati's father conveyed a shocking statement to Fethi: "Here is the first sacrifice, we are all sacrifices for the cause, as long as you save us ! "¹¹⁶

Consequently, Yunus Nadi composed a critical public letter addressed to the SCF and published it in the Cumhuriyet newspaper, which received a reply from Atatürk. Atatürk's response conveyed: "The People's Party is the offspring of the Association for the Defense of Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia that was established and started working with me from the moment I first set foot in Anatolia. I am historically

¹¹³ Kuşçi and Duran, 'Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası', 6-7.

¹¹⁴ Kadir Şeker, 'Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası'nın Kurulması ve Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası'nın Gelişmelere Bakışı', *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 32 (19 January 2015), 5-6.

¹¹⁵ Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA), 6 Eylül 1930: 490/01-1/4/14, cited in Kuşçi and Duran, "Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası", 8.

¹¹⁶ "İşte ilk kurban, hepimiz yoluna kurbanız, yeter ki sen bizi kurtar!" Barış Ertem, "Siyasal bir muhalefet denemesi olarak Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası", *Ordu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (1 June 2010), 80.

committed to this organization. There is no reason or necessity to break this bond. And there won't be."¹¹⁷

In the elections in Izmir, the People's Party earned 14,624 votes, while the Free Party received 9,960. Despite CHP triumphed in the end, SCP's unexpectedly substantial amount of support was notable. Although the opposition was only successful in 30 of the 512 localities, the CHP was widely accused of electoral fraud in its success.¹¹⁸ After the CHP's poor performance in local elections, Atatürk floated the idea of creating a national bloc and soon gave up since it would make the creation of opposition parties meaningless. Although Fethi and members of the SCF wanted Atatürk to stick to the idea, CHP members flatly refused. On November 15th, when Fethi criticized Sükrü Kaya for manipulating the local elections, only 10 members of his owned party expressed support. Therefore, two days later, he wrote to Atatürk that he would dissolve the Free Republican Party because he could not stand against Atatürk.¹¹⁹ In fact, according to Mango, İnönü tried to keep a low profile during this period because he was convinced this political experiment would fail and he was right. Even before the SCF dissolved, İnönü was already invited back at Ghazi's table discussing how to improve the government without the opposition.¹²⁰ Shortly after, the violent conflict caused by religious fanatics in Menemen intensified Atatürk's anger as he saw it as a potential part of a wider conspiracy connected to the dissolved Free Republican Party.¹²¹

The SCF's eventual failure, as pointed out by Weiker, actually led to an amplification of the CHP's dominance throughout the 1930s.¹²² Çaymaz also noted that the brief existence of this party could be viewed as a political instrument used by Atatürk to consolidate authority under his own leadership.¹²³ Since establishing an opposition party can facilitate the identification of opponents of reforms and the CHP government. Nevertheless, subsequent to these developments, Atatürk integrated individuals who exhibited leadership qualities within the SCF into the CHP, including

¹¹⁷ "Cumhuriyet Halk fırkası, Anadolu'ya ilk ayak bastığım andan itibaren teşekkül edip benimle çalışan Anadolu ve Rumeli Mudafaa Hukuk Cemiyetinin mevlududur. Bu teşekküle tarihen bağlıyım. Bu bağı çözmek için hiçbir sebep ve icap yoktur. Ve olmaz." M. Kemal, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 10 Eylül 1930, 1.

¹¹⁸ Walter F. Weiker, 'The Free Party, 1930', in *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (Routledge, 2016), 80.

¹¹⁹ Mango, *Atatürk*, 473.

¹²⁰ Mango, *Atatürk*, 474.

¹²¹ Mango, *Atatürk*, 474-5.

¹²² Weiker, "The Free Party, 1930", 83.

¹²³ Çaymaz, "The Construction and Re-Construction of the Civil Religion around the Cult of Atatürk", 949.

figures like Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar. The SCF's experiment also offered legitimacy to their defection from the RPP in 1946.¹²⁴ Overall, this occurrence remains a notable, spontaneous effort towards political liberalization in Turkey.¹²⁵ It also demonstrated that the outcomes of Kemalist reforms at that time might not have been as optimistic as envisioned by the elites.

2.3 Atatürk's old Turkey and the AKP's new Turkey

The veneration of Atatürk was crafted already during his lifetime. Ünder argues that Atatürk used mainly two strategies to establish himself as the only and eternal ruler: one was constructing statues all around the country, and the other was by creating a historiography that was devoted only to himself.¹²⁶ The continuation of mourning and veneration for him after his death should be attributed to several reasons. For instance, the later Turkish ruling elites, including İnönü and Celâl Bayar adhered to his principles and the military always took measures to stop political activities that were considered went against his values. Atatürk's reputation is also consistently spread through education among younger generations.¹²⁷ Besides, showing respect towards Atatürk and his ideologies have become a method of to gain legitimacy employed by many later political parties, including the AKP. For example, when the Democrat Party came into power after 1950, they enacted the law on crimes committed against Atatürk to safeguard the legitimacy of their regime against possible challenges from İnönü. In addition, after each military intervention, there was a notable rise in the Atatürk cult as he serves as a legitimacy source for interventions.¹²⁸

Although the state had become more tolerant of religion in the 1950s, and Islamist parties had emerged in the 1970s, one of the favorable conditions for the Islamists to increase their social influence in the 1990s was the collapse of the center-right. After Turkey's transition from military rule in 1983, Özal led the Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party, ANAP) implementing liberal reforms that increased efficiency and improved infrastructure, but his government was also involved in corruption scandals and lost public trust. Between center-right leaders Demirel and Özal, and their successors Tansu Çiller and Yılmaz, there was fierce competition. Inflation and unemployment soared after Ciller (Doğru Yol Partisi, True Path Party, DYP) became

¹²⁴ Weiker, "The Free Party, 1930", 90-1.

¹²⁵ Weiker, "The Free Party, 1930", 83.

¹²⁶ Ünder, "Atatürk İmgesi", 143.

¹²⁷ Ünder, "Atatürk İmgesi", 143.

¹²⁸ Zürcher, "In the Name of the Father".

prime minister in 1993, and arguments between DYP and ANAP accusing each other's parties of corruption also led to a loss of public confidence in the center-right.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, economic liberalization and a more open approach to political Islam in the 1980s and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis theory promoted a more tolerant understanding of which religious reference were harmless expressions of a common culture, and the military supported compulsory religious classes in public schools.¹³⁰ It is worth noting that while the center-right advocates a more tolerant treatment of religion, it is not inherently anti-secularist government.

The AKP was established in 2001, the group of islamists led by Erdoğan took the lesson from the RP, which was closed down after the intervention from the military, and gave up on the National Outlook philosophy which provides religious morals. Embracing the principles of Turkish center-right politics, the new party adopted democratic values, pro-Western foreign policy, free-market economics, and "soft-secularism."¹³¹ Besides, by promising they will advance Turkey's EU membership application they attracted a wider range of people who did not necessarily share the party's political-religious concerns.¹³² The AKP's economic achievements had also ensured the AKP's popularity in the early 2000s. Turkey was experiencing a serious economic crisis prior to the 2001 elections, but from 2002 and 2007, the country saw an remarkable period of economic growth and political stability under the AKP government.¹³³

However, Yilmaz states that although Erdoğan initially posed as a Muslim Democrat, he shifted to a populist autocratic style after the 2011 elections.¹³⁴ This is because Erdoğan's efforts to dismantle secular institutions had become more and more evident. From 2008 to 2011, hundreds of suspects were jailed and subjected to court proceedings in cases like "Sledgehammer" (Balyoz), following the original Ergenekon arrests which were against the military. The detainees included academics, police personnel, journalists, secularists, and those who were perceived to be Erdoğan and

¹²⁹ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 64-6.

¹³⁰ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 60.

¹³¹ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 83.

¹³² Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 83.

¹³³ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 90-1.

¹³⁴ Ihsan Yilmaz, "Erdoğan's Political Journey: From Victimised Muslim Democrat to Authoritarian, Islamist Populist", 2021, 12.

the AKP's opponents.¹³⁵ According to Cagaptay, the AKP's deeply ingrained illiberal past with Islamist roots was ultimately exposed after the 2013 Gezi Park protests were put down. Nevertheless, it was already too late to stop any modifications.¹³⁶

In fact, soon after assuming office in 2003, Erdoğan reduced the Turkish National Security Council to an advisory body with a minimum of executive authority as part of harmonization measures for EU membership negotiations.¹³⁷ The military failed to take any further measures in 2007 during the "e-coup" to avoid Erdoğan or Gül's nomination as president. Erdoğan's success marked the absolute power of the traditionally dominant secular institution was about to come to an end.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, his populist approach became increasingly apparent. Erdoğan argued that the AKP candidate represented the "people," while the secular institutions represented the elites, in the 2007 elections when the Constitutional Court annulled the results of the first round of presidential elections due to a quorum of two-thirds was not reached. However, by linking the majority in the parliament with the "national will", he asserted that the Parliament would ultimately decide the results of the presidential elections. The central idea of the Kemalist motto, "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation," was appropriated by Erdoğan, who ironically used it to condemn the Kemalist structure.¹³⁹

Additionally, starting about 2010, the highest AKP members started using the slogan "New Turkey" (Yeni Türkiye) more frequently in their speeches, and in 2014, the phrase was included to the party's platform. According to Christofis, Erdoğan's AKP promoted the idea that the current Turkish government had entirely split with its Kemalist past and was presenting itself as a new country. Erdoğan made the decision to restore the illustrious Ottoman past, placing a stronger focus on Islamic law. He underlined his identity as a "devout Muslim" in a speech in 2014 by making reference to the Fatiha, the first chapter of the Quran.¹⁴⁰ According to Christofis, the actions done by Atatürk following the War of Independence are strikingly comparable to the current endeavor to change Turkey's perception as a nation.

¹³⁵ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 117.

¹³⁶ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 104.

¹³⁷ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 93-4.

¹³⁸ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 111.

¹³⁹ Şakir Dinçşahin, 'A Symptomatic Analysis of the Justice and Development Party's Populism in Turkey, 2007–2010', *Government and Opposition* 47, no. 4 (2012), 632-3.

¹⁴⁰ Christofis, "The AKP's 'Yeni Türkiye'", 18.

Although Erdoğan and his AKP are often considered to represent values that are opposed to the modern and secular national identity, it doesn't mean that they did not inherit legacies from the Kemalist state. Aram Bakshian Jr. defines Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the "anti-Atatürk", because he idealizes a romanticized version of the Ottoman-Islamic era, which was the past that the Kemalist state wanted to delete from the collective memory. This nostalgia, Bakshian argues, is a result of a feeling of injustice among Turkish Islamists who believe that the Islamic world's golden age was dismantled by Western powers. Bakshian criticizes Erdoğan harshly for initially positioning himself as a democratic reformer but later shifting towards authoritarianism.¹⁴¹ However, Cagaptay argues that Erdoğan is an "anti-Atatürk Atatürk". Although he does not share the same values, he has adopted Atatürk's methods. In other words, he is also shaping a new country according to his own vision, but one that embraces an Islamist stance in both domestic and foreign affairs, aiming to restore Turkey's position as a prominent player on the international stage.¹⁴²

Although he managed to dismantle the secular institutions in the end, Erdoğan had been avoiding direct confrontation with Atatürk and the Kemalist discourse. As noted by Birol Çaymaz, the AKP has also been utilizing symbols associated with the cult of Atatürk in order to legitimize their role in Turkish politics. For example, Erdoğan frequently refers to him as "Ghazi" to connect Atatürk with an Islamic undertone.¹⁴³ Bagdonas also noted that, there has always been space for successors to use Kemalist terms and add their own interpretations because of the two dimensions of Kemalism, the security-centered and the democracy-centered interpretations.¹⁴⁴ Erdoğan thus described Turkey's ambition to join the EU in 2002 as the endeavor to actualize Atatürk's vision of attaining the standards of modern civilization.¹⁴⁵ In this regard, Erdoğan portrayed himself as a moderate Islamist from the start in order to avoid conflicting with the security-centered Kemalism doctrines, successfully utilized the democratic interpretations of Kemalism in order to fulfill his own goal of seizing power over the country. Çakmak and Özekmekçi noted that Erdoğan integrates memories of previous "father figures" (Sultan Abdülhamid II and Atatürk) to serve

¹⁴¹ Aram Bakshian, "Erdoğan, the Anti-Atatürk", *The National Interest*, no. 127 (2013), 57.

¹⁴² Soner Cagaptay *The New Sultan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, *The International Spectator* 53, no. 4 (2 October 2018), 5-7.

¹⁴³ Birol Çaymaz, "The Construction and Re-Construction of the Civil Religion around the Cult of Atatürk", *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 6 (2 November 2019), 952-955.

¹⁴⁴ Özlem Demirtaş Bagdonas, 'The Clash of Kemalisms? Reflections on the Past and Present Politics of Kemalism in Turkish Political Discourse', *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (1 March 2008), 99.

¹⁴⁵ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 93-4.

his own self-fashioning.¹⁴⁶ In other words, Erdoğan committed himself to presenting himself as recognized by the “father figures” to the voters, improving his legitimacy, and creating an image of himself as the country's father figure. His efforts eventually led to the reshaping of a New Turkey which was in line with his own image.

¹⁴⁶ Alper Çakmak and M. İnanç Özekmekçi, ‘Retrieving the New from the Legacy of History: Discourse and Symbols of History in Modern Turkey’, *Journal of Language and Politics* 20, no. 6 (2021): 873–93.

Chapter 3. The Portrayal of Atatürk in Liberation (1994)

Liberation (1994) is a TRT series written by Turgut Özakman and directed by Ziya Öztan. It can be said to be a faithful retelling of official history, as Atatürk is still portrayed as an undisputed hero. However, it also reveals some aspects of his private life, such as his relationship with Fikriye was depicted as quite close.¹⁴⁷ The story starts from the end of the II. İnönü Battles (April 1921) and ends with the Mudanya Armistice on 11 October 1922,¹⁴⁸ did not reflect the later power struggles. This series is praised for its realistic style, reproducing authentic settings such as the building of the first Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the Izmir Kordonboyu, the battlefields, and other locations.¹⁴⁹ In this chapter, I will follow Mikos's film analysis methods to analyze how *Liberation* tells the history of the War of Independence, and how the themes, events, and cinematic skills are arranged to depict Atatürk's image as a perfect leader.

3.1 Content and representation

Firstly, a prominent theme in *Liberation* is the detailed categorization of Atatürk's enemies. For instance, the series begins with a scene depicting Lloyd George's support for the Greek occupying forces, asserting that they must force Mustafa Kemal and his supporters to accept the Treaty of Sèvres, as the establishment of an independent Turkish state could potentially inspire other Muslims within British colonies to seek for independence¹⁵⁰ Simultaneously, the Greek military perceives themselves ultimately contending against the entire Turkish nation, acknowledging the challenge of victory without allies' assistance.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the Sultan and religious figures attempting negotiations with the aggressors, and the supporters of Enver in the parliament are also positioned as Atatürk's adversaries.¹⁵² As the *Nutuk*'s narrative outlines, the Anatolian resistance movement is framed as one driven by

¹⁴⁷ Dinç, Atatürk on Screen, 209.

¹⁴⁸ Sercan Köken, 'Kurtuluş (1994)', *Akademik Tarih* (blog), 17 May 2019, <https://www.akademiktarihtr.com/kurtulus1994/>.

¹⁴⁹ Sercan Köken, 'Kurtuluş (1994)', *Akademik Tarih* (blog), 17 May 2019, <https://www.akademiktarihtr.com/kurtulus1994/>.

¹⁵⁰ "Sevr Antlaşması'nı kabul etmeyen Mustafa Kemal'i ve yandaşlarını.....mutlaka dize getirmeliyiz." *Liberation*. 1994, episode 1. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:12:43.

¹⁵¹ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 1. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:13:31.

¹⁵² "İşler böyle karışmadan önce İngilizlerle sağlam bir anlaşma yapacaktınız." *Liberation*. 1994, episode 1. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:18:2."

Turkish national consciousness with the goal of establishing an independent state.¹⁵³ In the series, those who prevent the creation of an independent Turkish state or dissent with Atatürk himself are labeled as enemies. The "us" is therefore defined as the Turkish nation and Atatürk's supporters through the language of the enemies in the film. Although there are scenes depicting Muslims from other nations praising Atatürk as a role model in the Muslim world when Turkey defeats Greece, it is noteworthy that the emphasis on religious identity is not significant in the series.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, *Liberation* (1994), in addition to trying to show how the army achieves victory, also tried to define national resistance as a popular movement. The Anatolian support for the nationalists are emphasized in several scenes, such as villagers donating their jewelry and money to the resistance movement, women spontaneously digging trenches for soldiers, and crowds walking to the streets to welcome Atatürk and the army when they enter Izmir.¹⁵⁵ Nonetheless, when Atatürk learn that in a certain battle, half of the army have become deserters, he remarks, "Well, if you only remember Anatolia when you need it, for hundreds of years... if you otherwise abandon it to fate and surrender it to ignorance, this is the result. We haven't imbued our people's minds and hearts with a national upbringing."¹⁵⁶ From this perspective, although the Anatolian population express support for Atatürk, they are occasionally seen as being ignorant, thus underscoring the Kemalist nationalist narrative that emphasizes the populace's need for guidance from national elites.

3.2 Narration and dramaturgy

Although the ending of this TV series about the War of Independence is not suspenseful, the progression of the plot emphasizing challenging material conditions, opposition criticism, and the twists and turns of the war process make the final victory appear more exhilarating. Despite the initial success in the Second İnönü Battle at the start of the series, the subsequent course of the war is not smooth. The Ankara government even discuss the possibility of relocating to Kayseri. However, the

¹⁵³ Toni Alaranta, "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Six-Day Speech of 1927: Defining the Official Historical View of the Foundation of the Turkish Republic", *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (1 March 2008), 119.

¹⁵⁴ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan, 0:48:07.

¹⁵⁵ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan, TRT, 0:27:15-0:28:13; *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan, TRT, 0:16:04; *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan, TRT, 0:49:11..

¹⁵⁶ "Eee, Anadolu'yu yüzlerce yıl, yalnız canına malına ihtiyacın olduğu zaman hatırlarsan, onun dışında kaderine terk ve cehalete teslim edersen sonuç böyle olur. İnsanlarımızın kafasını, yüreğini milli bir terbiyeden geçirmemiş ki." *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan, TRT, 0:27:31.

members of the assembly decided that they would rather die than flee.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Atatürk proceeds to the command center of the western front and relocated various units to Sakarya. Throughout this process, despite falling off his horse and getting seriously injured, he persists in overseeing the operations as a responsible leader.¹⁵⁸ When the Greek army attacked Mangal Mountain, his forces employ effective defensive measures, ultimately leading to the Greek army's retreat westward to the Sakarya River.

Atatürk and his followers engage in substantial diplomatic activity following the Battle of Sakarya, rejecting an Allied proposal for a treaty resembling the Sevres Treaty. The Ankara government was approved by the Soviet Union. The British are hoping that Atatürk's tenure as commander-in-chief wouldn't be prolonged, but he ultimately is successful in winning reelection. In order to recapture Kocatepe in 1922, Atatürk assembles the Turkish army and claims that he will take the responsibility for this action. Even though the Greek forces at Afyon had received intelligence beforehand, they ignored it and went forward with their advance.¹⁵⁹ The Turkish forces finally take back Afyon with triumph. The signing of the Mudanya Agreement marks the end of the series. The Turkish army enters Izmir on September 9, 1922, and is welcomed with open arms. At the same time that a revolution against the monarch starts in Greece, the Britain attempts to escalate its conflict with Turkey but gained no support from other nations. Atatürk speaks to teachers in the final scene, he says, "Teachers, the success of our military has just prepared the way for the success of the army of education. By overcoming ignorance, you will succeed truly."¹⁶⁰ The Kemalist reforms in education and cultural sphere that are about to happen following the end of this story are hinted to in this scene. Overall, this TV show celebrates the nationalists' resilient will while retelling the myth of a nation's rebirth.

3.3 Characters and Actors

The series presents his perfect personality and stresses his undisputable leadership. It can be said that he defeated his enemies both materially and spiritually. For instance,

¹⁵⁷ "Biz buraya niye geldik? Kaçmaya mı, kavga ederek ölmeye mi?" *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:26:48.

¹⁵⁸ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 3. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:30:30-0:30:58.

¹⁵⁹ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 5. Directed by Ziya Öztan.

¹⁶⁰ "Öğretmenler! Ordularımızın kazandığı zafer, sadece eğitim ordusunun zaferi için bir zemin hazırlamıştır. Hakiki zaferi, cehaleti yenerek siz kazanacaksınız!" *Liberation*. 1994, episode 6. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 1:01:01.

in the second episode, following the unsuccessful battle of Kütahya-Eskişehir, certain of his followers express discontent with the National Assembly, as they believe that supporters of the Sultan and Enver would hinder the government's decision-making.¹⁶¹ Atatürk criticizes this statement and claims, "What are we without the Assembly? We will endure its anger, its rebellion, and everything."¹⁶² In the next day's assembly meeting, when others suggest him to be the Commander-in-Chief, he accepted this position to make decisions on behalf of the Assembly for three months.¹⁶³ He calmly expresses understanding towards those opposing him, stating, "Those who object to the authority I desire fear that I will be resolute. I respect their reaction." However, after the vote on the following day, he is successfully elected. In the fifth episode, two officers express that they will resign if the order for Mustafa Kemal to serve as Commander-in-Chief was not renewed.¹⁶⁴ These plot points depict him as a leader who is tolerant towards opponents, challenged but never fail.

Besides, the producers also present him as a man who is not only brave but also makes the right decisions on every aspect, including military operations, finance, taxation, and diplomacy. Despite being depicted as a capable and well-supported leader, his opponents are portrayed as incompetent. For example, when his rival Enver seeks for supports in Moscow, Atatürk receives his letter writes: "We will return to our homeland as soon as we sense that remaining outside, especially for Turkey and the Islamic world we are trying to rescue, is not beneficial and perhaps even dangerous." Other military officers describe Enver as "having lived in pursuit of extravagant and incalculable dreams."¹⁶⁵

Besides, he is also portrayed as a civilized and progressive leader, aligns with the general image of Kemalist elite. In the series, his care for education and respect for women are referred to several times. For example, in the first episode, he is invited to attend a meeting of the Teachers Association, and despite the tense situation of the war, he emphasizes that "the war against ignorance is no less important than the war

¹⁶¹ "Paşam, bana öyle geliyor ki, bu badireyi bu meclis ile atlatamayız." *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:20:38.

¹⁶² *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:20:41.

¹⁶³ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:42:11

¹⁶⁴ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 5. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 0:23:58

¹⁶⁵ "Dışarıda kalmanın başta Türkiye olmak üzere kurtarmaya çalıştığımız...İslam alemi için yararsız ve belki de tehlikeli olduğunu sezdiğimiz anda memlekete geleceğiz..." "Hep böyle ölçüsüz hesapsız Hayaller peşinde yaşadı." *Liberation*. 1994, episode 3. Directed by Ziya Öztan, TRT , 0:22:03.

against the enemy".¹⁶⁶ This statement is also echoed in the end of the series when he is giving a speech to teachers, saying "Teachers! The victory of the army has only prepared the ground for the victory of the army of education. You will win the real victory by defeating ignorance!"¹⁶⁷

3.4 Aesthetics and configuration

In this series, the mise-en-scenes creates many vivid impressions of Atatürk, and lighting has the most essential influence. The costumes are also often used to separate him from other characters by colors. For instance, while other characters are dressed in military uniforms, he always wears light-colored suits, and when other characters wear hats, he does not wear one.¹⁶⁸ Elements of mise-en-scene also contributed to portray his personality and abilities. For example, the lighting in *Liberation* is often central to the shot composition, especially in terms of Atatürk's spatial interactions with other characters. For example, in this shot from the third episode, Atatürk and the table in front of him appear to be brighter than the other figures who are closer to the light. Although his body only occupies a small portion of the frame, he is still the center of the audience's attention (Figure 1). Even when he is sitting with a group of deputies who are against him being the leader of the assembly, he is still the one sitting in the light, and the camera tilts towards him (Figure. 2). Thus, his vital role and significance within the story are highlighted by this particular lighting style, which successfully draws the audience's attention.

Additionally, the series' subtle use of lighting extends to portray Atatürk's emotions in accordance with the narrative situation. It is clear that the lighting has changed, adjusting to the changing circumstances. When the battlefield conditions are unpredictable, low-key lighting, which is characterized by higher contrast and more significant shadows, is used more frequently. In one close-up shot when Atatürk's face is partially hidden by shadow provides an instructive example (Figure 3). Even though every detail of the military operation has been carefully planned, the urgency of the situation creates a noticeable anxiety in this scene before Kocatepe is seized. This is accomplished through the interaction of light and shadow, which successfully conveys the sense of tension and urgency. In contrast, after their triumph in combat and Atatürk's confidence in the eventual signing of a peace treaty with the British,

¹⁶⁶ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 1. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, 1:06:14.

¹⁶⁷ *Liberation*. 1994, episode 6. Directed by Ziya Öztan , TRT, on TRTIZLE, 1:01:01.

¹⁶⁸ See Figure 1-4.

high-key lighting, which results in very transparent shadows, is purposefully used (Figure 4). This lighting choice supports the successful ending, highlighting Atatürk's confident manner and the hopeful possibility of securing a peace agreement. By portraying both the emotional nuance of the narrative and changes in the trajectory of the storyline, a combination of lighting types deepens the visual storytelling.

3.5 Contexts

It used to be extremely challenging to produce films featuring Atatürk's image before the 1980s, as such projects were often canceled due to censorship and regulations. However, with the introduction of the liberal political economy after 1983, these restrictions were partially lifted. Turgut Özal effectively paved the ground for the dissolution of the broadcasting monopoly in the 1990s when, during a visit to the United States in 1990, he declared that people renting channels from abroad could broadcast to Turkey.¹⁶⁹ Thus, Turkish television was no longer a state monopoly in the early 1990s, and the various networks started to compete for better content and a bigger audience.¹⁷⁰ While TRT initially did not perceive private broadcasting institutions as competitors, it began to foster closer ties with the advertising industry as its share of the advertising market started to decline.¹⁷¹

The TV series *Liberation*, which aired in 1994, is regarded as a significant milestone in TRT's broadcasting history, exemplifying the expectations of a public institution by demonstrating a consciousness for preserving its historical legacy.¹⁷² While making this series, TRT aimed to approach historical events objectively as a state institution and faithfully portray the years of the War of Independence.¹⁷³ When this TV series went into production in 1991, although concerned with the high cost of this production, the producers expressed confidence in the profitability of creating a TV series about Atatürk.¹⁷⁴ For the international distribution of the show, TRT established collaborations with leading global film distribution and production companies.¹⁷⁵ From this perspective, the narrative of the Turkish War of Independence depicted in the series, remaining loyal to the official historical account, may have resulted not

¹⁶⁹ Özden Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi: TRT, 1927-2000*, vol. 127 (YKY, 2003), 273-4.

¹⁷⁰ Özlem Arda, Pınar Aslan, and Constanza Mujica, *Transnationalization Of Turkish Television Series* (Istanbul University Press, 2021), 277-8.

¹⁷¹ Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi*, 261

¹⁷² Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi*, 273.

¹⁷³ Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi*, 274.

¹⁷⁴ İpek Seyhan, "Tarihsel Olayların Televizyona Yansıtılması ve Bir Örnek: "Kurtuluş"" (Master's, 1998), 70.

¹⁷⁵ Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi*, 274.

only from TRT's commitment to the principles of the Republic but also from the producers' belief that the content would resonate with the audience of that time. As mentioned by Goldman and Türkölmez, the portrayal of Atatürk's image expanded across various media platforms in the 1990s, and his image was incorporated into popular culture.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the popularity of this television series related to Atatürk is not an unexpected outcome.

In general, the *Liberation* series reiterates the official narrative which centers Atatürk's own achievements. In this story, he secured the sovereignty of the Turkish nation, with his opponents piling in comparison. In the story, the Sultan betrays national interests, and Enver's concern for the Islamic world is impractical, Atatürk is the only one who foresees the future and walks on the right path. Even though in reality, during the early stages of the liberation movement, many did not oppose the caliphate directly, but the series does not aim to mention this. In addition, he is depicted as remarkably tolerant of dissenting voices and his desire for power is entirely in the service of the resistance movement. The phrase "war against ignorance" is mentioned multiple times in the series, foreshadowing subsequent modernization reforms, and the Kemalist elite is further highlighted as the source of civilization brought to the Turkish people, reinforcing the official narrative. Overall, this television series narrates the myth of national rebirth, lauding the will of both soldiers and civilians involved in the resistance movement and reflects Kemalist nationalism.

¹⁷⁶ Zürcher, "In the Name of the Father"; Onur Türkölmez, "Hegemonik İdeoloji Dönüşürken: Popüler İdeoloji Olarak Türk Milliyetçiliği ve Kemalizm", *PESA Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2020): 22–31; Anat Goldman, "Privatized Commemoration, Political Polarization, and the Cult of Atatürk since the Mid-1990s", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 2 (3 April 2018), 146.

Chapter 4. The Portrayal of Atatürk in *Crossroad* (2012)

Crossroad (2012) tells a story around the SCF and the power struggles in the transition to the multi-party era in the 1930s. It is adapted from Kemal Tahir's novel and directed by Yasin Uslu.¹⁷⁷ In the original novel, discussions about the formation and dissolution of the SCF are more prevalent within character dialogues. However, the television version expands on this topic by delving more extensively into Atatürk and his associates, offering a more detailed portrayal of the inception and fate of the SCF.

The novel *Yol Ayrımı* (Crossroad) is the final installment in Kemal Tahir's *Esir Şehir Üçlemesi* (Captive City Trilogy) trilogy. It revolves around the reactions and experiences of characters within the social and political context of the SCF's establishment. Among these characters are Murat, a journalist who faces difficulties to report freely; Kadir, who works for a lawyer and reports his employer to gain power the SCF branch; Selim, who plans to publish an opposition magazine named *Kurtuluş* (Liberation) but tortured by the police and so on.¹⁷⁸ The inclusion of additional events related to the SCF in the TV version is likely a deliberate choice. Therefore, this chapter will primarily focus on the storyline involving Atatürk, members of the CHP, and SCF members. Using Mikos' film analysis method, this examination will delve into the societal dynamics, portrayal of Atatürk's character, and the impact of the production context that the television series aims to convey."

4.1 Content and Representation

In this series, Atatürk assigns the task of forming a liberal party to Fethi Okyar due to his lack of trust of İsmet İnönü. Unlike the previous Atatürk series, *Crossroad* focuses on the power struggles within the government and attempts to reflect the social reality of that time by depicting the lives of ordinary people, thus including many fictional characters. The economic issues prevalent in society at the time were also frequently discussed in the series. Surrounding the establishment of the opposition party, the main characters in the TV series are divided into several factions. Within the government, Atatürk consistently strives to maintain neutrality. On the other hand,

¹⁷⁷ "Yol Ayrımı İle Tarihe Yolculuk", 19 December 2012, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/kultur-sanat/yol-ayrimi-ile-tarihe-yolculuk-67702.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Kemal Tahir, *Yol Ayrımı*, vol. 265 (İthaki Publishing, 2010).

Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya often interfere with the activities of the SCF. Fethi Okyar, Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Nuri Conker, and others are the main figures of the SCF.

The competition between the two political parties in the economic realm is manifested through criticisms in newspapers and grievances expressed directly to Fethi in the series. For instance, the critique published in newspapers by the German economist Karl Müller, advocating that Turkey should not abandon its agricultural identity and should reduce expenditures on industry, defense, and railways, has been employed by the SCF to criticize the İnönü government.¹⁷⁹ However, the conservative groups in the series are also shown as devoted supporters of the SCF, despite the SCF and its supporters band together mainly because of opposition to the government's economic policies. The secularization policies are opposed by these pious groups. For instance, in the eleventh episode, a supporter of the SCF expresses his desire to Fethi for a mosque to be reopened in his son's high school, Galatasaray High School. Fethi is unsure how to respond, as his own son also attends the same school, yet he belongs to the secular elite. The opposition party is also expected to revive the ezan, or Arabic call to prayer, according to the Bursa delegation.¹⁸⁰ In the series, despite the fact that Fethi and Ağaoğlu do not oppose the Kemalist reforms and have no intention of speaking on behalf of the conservative groups, the representation of these diverse segments within society in the TV series also implies the societal divisions prevalent at that time.

4.2 Narration and dramaturgy

Although the ending of the story holds little suspense, the TV series still attempts to revolve around the historical event of the founding of SCF. It generates dramatic conflicts by presenting the obstacles faced by the party members, building anticipation among the audience about how close it is to success and why it fails.

In history, Fethi was chosen as the leader of the opposition with reasons related to his different economic views from İnönü, as well as their disagreements over the payment method of the Ottoman Empire's debts.¹⁸¹ Such personal disagreements between the

¹⁷⁹ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 8. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:47:36.

¹⁸⁰ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 8. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:51:18.

¹⁸¹ Mustafa Kılıç, "Kemal Tahir'in Yol Ayrımı Romanında Dönemin Toplumsal Yapısına Sosyolojik Bir Bakış", *Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 56 (n.d.), 118.

two indeed existed in history, but in the TV series, there's another important aspect to the reason for creating the opposition party. In the TV series, Atatürk aims to demonstrate that Turkey has successfully completed modernization reforms and is to be seen as equal to Western nations. Hence, he persuades the opposition party members who are ready to give up by saying, "Returning from here would lead to the assertion that the political cultures of the Turks have not matured."¹⁸² In history, his insistence on having Fethi establish an opposition party was also partly due to a German historian named Emil Ludwig having described him as a dictator which made him upset.¹⁸³ At the beginning, Atatürk promises to remain neutral and support both SCF and CHP. However, when Fethi proposes that he should withdraw from the CHP and become lifelong president, he states that never to bring up this matter again. To a certain extent, this reflects his unwillingness to be seen as a dictator, however this also means Fethi will finally need compete with him directly.¹⁸⁴

In the series, the establishment of the opposition party receives a positive response from the beginning. Atatürk personally selects the initial members to express his sincerity. Many newspapers openly express their support to SCF, and criticism of the İnönü government increases. Worker strikes occur in some places. In the TV series, Sükrü Kaya receives instructions from İnönü and issues orders to the Mayor of Izmir to prevent Fethi from visiting Izmir, even though in history, İnönü helped convey Atatürk's command to the Mayor of Izmir to ensure Fethi's safety. Fethi eventually succeeds in visiting Izmir and while delivering his speech the crowd complains to him about high taxes and expresses dissent against the CHP government, comparing the CHP to the Greeks during the War of Independence.¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the conflict between the citizens and the government escalates. The 14-year-old boy's death during the protests against the Anadolu newspaper shocks the members of the Freedom Party.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, rumors in society also seem to have increased and speculations that Atatürk will leave CHP or even join SCF appear. In response to these rumors, Atatürk

¹⁸² "Buradan geri dönüş Her yerde Türklerin siyasi kültürleri kemale ermemiş denilmesine yol açacaktı." *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 8. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:54:26.

¹⁸³ Mango, *Atatürk*, 471-2.

¹⁸⁴ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 8. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 1:16:11.

¹⁸⁵ "100'de 150 vergi veriyoruz!" "Yunanlıları denize döktük, sıra Halk Fırkasında" *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 21. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:04:17.

¹⁸⁶ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 21. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 1:20:39.

addresses an open letter in the newspapers, the same one mentioned in Chapter 2, stating that he won't leave CHP thus implying that he would no longer maintain neutrality.¹⁸⁷ Fethi does not want to directly confront Atatürk, so he decides to dissolve the party. Even before the SCF is officially dissolved, its members are eager to return to CHP. As the story concludes, Atatürk and Şükrü Kaya are already discussing how to modify the slogans and principles of CHP, rendering the experiment with the SCF seemingly irrelevant.¹⁸⁸

4.3 Characters and Actors

In *Crossroad*, Atatürk's achievements in modernization reforms and his Turkish nationalism are repeatedly mentioned and praised. He actively promotes the recruitment of female members in the CHP and shows concern for modernization projects such as bridge and railway construction.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, his cultural reforms are also depicted. For instance, in the series he invites people to listen to the call to prayer (ezan) in Turkish language a few times.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, he also consults a linguist on how to purify the Turkish language from foreign words, he inquires about whether there is a Turkish equivalent for the word "ideal," to which the linguist responded, "If we adjust the word to sound harmony, it is Ülkü."¹⁹¹ In addition, he once gathered poets and writers at a dinner party and asked them how Turkish national literature should develop.¹⁹² These examples reflect his concern for promoting the Turkish language and culture, emphasizing the Turkishness within the Turkish national identity. Furthermore, when discussing the dispute arising from the Kurdish rebellion on Mount Ararat and territorial disputes with Iran with his subordinates, he recognizes the strength of Iran's army, but emphasizes, "I am not alone, I have my people behind me."¹⁹³ Thus in these scenes, Atatürk is portrayed as a beloved leader and embodiment of national will.

However, despite portraying him as a Turkish nationalist and a respected leader, the series also depicts an unpredictable side in his personality during the creation of the opposition party. In the fifteenth episode, during a debate about whether Atatürk

¹⁸⁷ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 22. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 1:05:12.

¹⁸⁸ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 28. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:59:52.

¹⁸⁹ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 3. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:06:08.

¹⁹⁰ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 3. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:59:04.

¹⁹¹ *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 12. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 1:02:48.

¹⁹² *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 18. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:21:15.

¹⁹³ "Lakin ben yalnız değilim Benim arkamda milletim var." *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 7. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:16:19; *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 9. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:14:49.9

genuinely supports the establishment of the opposition party, one of the journalists states, "Gazi is a strange and enigmatic person. He may appear not to want something when he actually does, and seem like want something when he does not."¹⁹⁴ The complexity of Atatürk's character, which is what the television series seeks to portray, seems to be nicely captured in this discussion. His stubbornness, inability to adhere to neutral commitments, becomes a significant source of conflict in the storyline. When discussing whether to participate in the elections with SCF, he initially expresses disagreement to a member, implying their party will fail, but soon after, he agrees with Fethi, testing the determination of the SCF members¹⁹⁵ Besides, due to the portrayal of numerous conflicts in the series, Atatürk is depicted as more argumentative and assertive. In the series, he is shown to forcefully demand others to join the new political party and ask for their opinions in meetings, but immediately criticizes them when his decisions are questioned.¹⁹⁶

The series nonetheless tries to portray him as someone who truly hope to establish competitive politics, even though his attempts to convince others around him appear assertive. It's interesting to note that a conversation he had with a secretary about government election meddling historically has been transferred in the TV series to take place between him and İnönü. When Atatürk asks who won the elections, İnönü responds, "Our party, of course." Atatürk then retorts, "I'll give you the name of the winning party: it's the party of the administration. In other words, the gendarmes, the police, the district officers, and the governors."¹⁹⁷

In order to emphasize Atatürk's image as a leader who is strict yet enlightened, İnönü could be seen as depicted as an villain in the series. Not only did his subordinates instruct the Mayor of Izmir to prevent Fethi's speech, but they also ordered the police to prevent the opponents from voting in the election. From the very beginning, he remains skeptical of the opposition and views Atatürk's establishment of the opposition party as merely a political game. After the closure of the opposition party,

¹⁹⁴ "Gazi garip ve anlaşılması çok müşkül bir insandır. O bir şey isterken istemez görünür istemezken ister görülebilir." *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 15. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:53:59.

¹⁹⁵ "Yeni teşebbüs vaziyetinde iken böyle bir seçimi kaybetmeniz aleyhinize olur" *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 15. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:32:08.

¹⁹⁶ *Crossroad*. 2012, episode 6. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 1:16:11.

¹⁹⁷ "İkazanan idare firkaşdır çocuk! Yani Jandarma,polis,nahiye müdürü,kaymakam ve valiler... Bunu bilisin!" *Crossroad*, 2012, episode 25. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:49:56; Hasan Rıza Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar II, Yapı Kredi Yayınları: Ankara, 1973, 405.*Cited in Özgür Özben, "1930 Türkiye Yerel Seçimlerinin Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkasının Kapanmasına Etkisi", 9. Translation by Mango, *Atatürk*, 473.

when Şükrü Kaya asks him why the closure of the opposition party seemed so easy, İnönü states, "...When the time comes, the public naturally demands its own party. That's when opening or closing that party becomes difficult. If you close it, it will open up again. But just like the Free Party, a faction lives according to the recommender's loyalty, yet when his enthusiasm is gone, it fades as well."¹⁹⁸ From this perspective, he emerges as the ultimate victor in this opposition party experiment, foresees the eventual closure of the opposition party even earlier than Atatürk.

4.4 Aesthetics and Configuration

In general, Atatürk's image in *Crossroad* is more strict and argumentative than calm and tolerant, and this personality trait is also presented by cinematic techniques. For example, In *Crossroad*, when Atatürk attempts to convince Fethi Okyar and Ahmet Ağaoğlu to join the new party, he questions whether they have enough determination to contribute to the country instead of listening to their opinions (Figure 5).

Furthermore, he frequently finds himself engaged in arguments and conflicts with different Fethi and İnönü. For instance, when İnönü suggests that Fethi's speech in Izmir might pose a danger to the CHP, he insists that Fethi must go to Izmir. In this scene, despite the nighttime setting, the building behind Atatürk and his own frontal face remains illuminated. Although there's no or little shadow in the frame, İnönü's body casts a shadow that partially covers Atatürk's face. This is because the series makers intend for him to be the focal point in this conflict scene. While the audience can't see İnönü's full face, the lighting creates a sense of tension and emphasizing the power, emotional, or ideological struggle between the two (Figure 6).

In addition, when Fethi decides to close down the opposition party to avoid a direct confrontation with Atatürk in the elections, Atatürk reluctantly agrees. In this long shot, by placing Fethi in the mid-ground of the frame, occupying the right side of the composition, he is highlighted as the focal point of this scene. His pained and conflicted expression as he gazes at the ground reflects his helplessness in not being understood and supported by Atatürk. Meanwhile, Atatürk stands by the window,

¹⁹⁸ "...Olduğu vakit zaten halk kendi Fırkası'nı kendi talep eder, İşte o zaman o fikrayı açmak kapamak zor olur, Kapatsan gerisi açılır.....Ama Serbest fırka gibi Tavsiye bir fırka tavsiye edenin Fırkaya sadakati nispetinde yaşar ancak Heves bitti mi O da biter." *Crossroad*. 2012, episode 6. Directed by Yasin Uslu, TRT, 0:12:56.

facing away from the camera and looking out into the space out of the frame, refusing to look at the other character. Although the physical distance between them may not be great, this shot conveys the irreconcilable differences between the two (Figure 7).

Moreover, in this series, the actors' costumes remain significant elements to portray him, but not just for distinguishing him from other characters. For example, scenes of him dining at home in vibrant outerwear or wearing a bathrobe after swimming by the seaside portray informal clothing that reflects his rich personal life, making him appear more like an urban middle-class individual instead of a serious leader (Figure 8 & 9).

4.5 Contexts

In the 2000s, a few biographical films such as "Mustafa" (2008), "Dersimiz: Atatürk" (2010), and "Veda" (2010) were produced by private companies, portraying Atatürk in a more humanized way. These films may have inspired TRT, as they showed that audiences were eager to see quality films or series related to him.¹⁹⁹ In the films mentioned above, he is no longer depicted as a flawless leader, however, this series seems to prove that the portrayal of him in fictional works has gained more freedom.

A possible explanation might be the AKP's utilization of cultural products as a tool to reshape Turkish identity and promote his own role as the new heroic leader. The production of *Crossroad* may have connections with other historical series made during the same period, which aimed to establish cultural prominence for the government. For example, in 2012, TRT aired the series *Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı: Kiyam* (Times of the Ottomans: Uprising, 2012) as a competitor to the popular series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (Magnificent Century). Additionally, in the same year, the series *Yol Ayrımı* and *Kurt Kanunu* (advertised as an "alternative history") were also broadcasted. Although the *Times of the Ottomans: Uprising* did not gain popularity in 2012, two years later, another Ottoman historical series *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: Ertuğrul) achieved significant success and ran for a long period of five seasons.²⁰⁰ Carney notes that *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* celebrates a mythical past,

¹⁹⁹ Akter and Incirli, 'The Reciprocal Relationship between Turkish Cinema and Politics'.

²⁰⁰ Okumuş, "TRT Historical Tv Series from 1974 to 2020", 49.

implying the noble lineage of the Ottoman Empire, and represents a new assertion of religious, ethnic, and national identity.²⁰¹

In fact, similar intentions also exist in *Crossroad*, even though it doesn't celebrate the Kemalist past but questions it. In this series, Atatürk, used to be portrayed as the flawless leader, exhibits capricious behavior in the process of establishing the opposition party, while the societal opposition to religious and economic policies remains unresolved. However, the characters in the series suggest that the end of the SCF is not the end of the opposition. If there ever comes a day when a party formed by the people themselves emerges, it will last longer. For the characters in the series, such a party which represents the people will only appear in an unpredictable future. However, when considering the populist rhetoric of the AKP claiming it represents the national will after 2007, the TV series seems to imply that the AKP will dominate the future the characters mention in the series.

Overall, in comparison to the original novel, the *Crossroad* series introduces a significant number of discussions among leaders about the opposition party. It also intentionally rewrote the history to attract the audience's attention to themes that the producers intent to emphasize, for example democracy. Some of these dialogues seem to mirror the reality or carrying implicit political messages. For instance, İnönü's statement that the failure of the opposition party stems from not being a party of the people, but rather an establishment by rulers in a temporary surge. The character implies only parties that are really formed by the masses will last, hinting at the unsuccessful attempt to close down the AKP in 2007. By depicting a plot that deviates from historical facts, in which Atatürk criticizes the İnönü government for winning the election with the support of gendarmes and the police, the creators appear to intentionally evoke memories in the audience of the instances in the history of the republic when the military intervened in civilian governments. Additionally, the recurring pious citizens in the series, despite their Islamic values not being accepted by the SCF characters, emphasize that apart from Turkishness, there is another element in Turkish national identity. This aligns with Erdoğan's discourse of conservative nationalism. During his debates with Fethi Okyar and İsmet İnönü, Atatürk is depicted as a respected but imperfect leader. From this perspective, it

²⁰¹ Josh Carney, 'ResurReaction: Competing Visions of Turkey's (Proto) Ottoman Past in Magnificent Century and Resurrection Ertuğrul', *Middle East Critique* 28, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 101–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2019.1599534>.

seems that the producers intend to prompt the audience to rethink about what a party formed by the people really is, resonating with Erdoğan's populist rhetoric.

Chapter 5. A Comparison Between the Two Series

By examining the content, themes, character identities, plot arrangements, stylistic techniques, and production contexts in the preceding two chapters, we can arrive at the conclusion that the portrayal of Atatürk in the two works is significantly distinct and closely linked to the prevailing societal ideologies of the time. First of all, in *Liberation*, Atatürk and his supporters are defined as the Turkish people yearning for independence and sovereignty, while the Anatolian people are also depicted as needing the education of the elite. His opponents can be categorized as the nation's enemy too. In this sense, this representation echoes the traditional Kemalist nationalist narrative where he is the only hero figure. However, in *Crossroad*, despite the Kemalist elite remaining prominent, the divergence between the state and pious, conservative Muslim groups are also highlighted. The criticism of the government's economic policies in society has far exceeded the CHP's expectations, thus making the SCF highly popular and leading to a confrontation between the two parties.

Regarding the narrative, the *Liberation* primarily employs depictions of material and spiritual challenges faced during the War of Independence, demonstrating the tenacious will of the nationalists, while building anticipation for the story and makes the triumph in war more exiting to the audience. In *Crossroad*, the story centers a series of power struggles among factions established under the multi-party experiment of 1930, highlighting mutual attacks between different factions. Especially the hostile situation between CHP and SCF. İnönü and his government's repeated filibusters against the opposition and Atatürk's uncertain support between the two create a dramatic conflict.

In terms of character portrayal, there are substantial differences in the portrayal of Atatürk between the two series. Atatürk is presented as being quite calm, accepting of disagreement, responsible, competent, and forward-thinking in *Liberation*. However, in *Crossroad*, while he is still firmly committed to guiding Turkey towards Western world and democracy, his methods have become more aggressive, leaving few options. From this perspective, Atatürk in *Crossroad* emerges as an imperfect leader. In addition, his enthusiasm for the Turkish language and literature is also emphasized, this is because the Kemalist national identity promotes Turkishness. In general, the Kemalist national identity and conservative identity are showed as opposing each other in the series, although denied by the elite.

Lastly, in terms of aesthetics, in *Liberation*, Atatürk is the absolute focal point of the story. Thus, lighting and composition are frequently employed to highlight his leadership and to track his changing emotions. The area around him might be often illuminated and when he does not feel confident the shadows in the close-up shots increase. In the *Crossroad*, however, camera distance, character positioning within the frame, and lighting are more often used to emphasize conflicts between characters. The characters might share the same space but have no communication due to the arrangement of characters' positions in the frame by the creators. Additionally, while the clothing worn by characters in *Liberation* serves primarily to differentiate Atatürk from other characters, in the second part, such distinctions are less pronounced, and clothing choices align more closely with the respective scenes, reflecting personal interests.

Regarding the production context, the first part of the television series was filmed during the 1990s, a period predominantly influenced by the right-wing. Despite societal tolerance towards Islamic culture, TRT, when producing this series, still saw itself as the propagator of official history and deemed it their responsibility to disseminate the "true national history." The nation they represented remained secular. Thus, this series can be regarded as a recapitulation of official history. On the other hand, the backdrop of the production of the second part, around 2012, coincided with a period when some scholars began exposing Erdoğan's transformation from an initial democrat into a leader with more authoritarian Islamic tendencies. After 2013, Erdoğan even employed Ottoman history dramas to shape his image as a new father and leader of the nation. Although this series doesn't explicitly mention Ottoman history and rarely delves into religion, it seeks to prompt viewers to question whether a Kemalist state is genuinely democratic, encouraging them to ponder who can truly represent the people. Through this use of a democratic interpretation of Kemalism, it subtly implies the necessity of a political party that genuinely represents the people and suggests that such a party cannot be suppressed.

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the Republic, Kemalist nationalism, which combines territorial, civic, and ethnic elements while advocating secularization to modernize the state, became the official nationalism. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself is central to this national identity, considered a symbol of Modernization and Westernization. The veneration of him continued with succeeding governments since he became a source of legitimacy. Due to the Islamic discourses driven by multi-party politics during the Cold War, the adoption of the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis," and liberal economic policies in the 1990s, society, and even the military became more tolerant towards cultural expressions with religious rhetoric.

In the 1990s, secularists perceived increasing Islamic influence as a threat to society and thus embraced products featuring Atatürk's image, symbolizing secularism. During the 2000s, an increasing number of films about Atatürk's life emerged, further embedding his image into popular culture. Simultaneously, AKP leaders' discourse shifted from democratic to populist and religious. While Erdoğan occasionally references Atatürk, his vision of a New Turkey seeks complete separation from Kemalism. Prior studies extensively delved into the construction of the Atatürk myth, highlighting the role of media that showcase his image in this process. Some studies also analyzed his depiction in cinematic works. However, the realm of television remains understudied in terms of its portrayal of Atatürk's image, especially its transformation over time.

This thesis analyzes the portrayal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in two TV series, *Liberation* and *Crossroad*, using Mikos' film analysis method to examine the film text on different levels, including Content and Representation, Narration and Dramaturgy, Characters and Actors, Aesthetics and Configuration, and Contexts. The conclusion is that the portrayals of Atatürk attempted by the two TV series are distinct. In "Liberation" (1994), the attempt is to depict a flawless leader. He is portrayed as possessing exceptional military skills, a strong educational background, and a desire to rescue the people from ignorance. Contrasted with the treacherous Sultan and the unrealistic Enver, he is a pragmatic and parliament-tested leader with significant support. However, in *Crossroad*, he is depicted as a fervent promoter of Turkish language and culture, a staunch secularist, and despite his resolute pursuit of democratization, his methods are coercive. It can be said that in "Crossroad," he

conflicts with many around him, and various segments of society are discontent with the CHP government, particularly conservative individuals who do not endorse his reforms.

In *Liberation*, Atatürk and his supporters symbolize the Turkish people's will, enemies are defined in a similar way to Nutuk, and he is presented as the only hero. Conversely, "Crossroad" delves into the multi-party experiment of the 1930s, highlighting the discord between the Kemalist elite and conservative Muslims. Cinematic skills play a crucial role in portraying Atatürk's image in these two TV series. Aesthetically, *Liberation* places Atatürk at the center, utilizing lighting and composition to underscore his leadership. Different costumes were used to separate him from other people in the frame, and lighting choices were made to show his emotions. In *Crossroad*, lighting, character placement, and camera distance are arranged to emphasize character conflicts. Additionally, costume transitions from merely distinguishing Atatürk to reflecting his personal life and hobbies.

In terms of production context, *Liberation* was filmed during the 1990s under right-wing's neo-liberal policies. Due to the end of TRT's monopoly, competition between TV channels increased. TRT also needed to find a way to profit. TRT considered Atatürk series to be profitable and positioned itself as the propagator of official history. Thus, the flawless leader image in *Liberation* echoes the official history. *Crossroad*, produced around 2012, coincides with a period of Erdoğan's shifting political stance. He started to define himself as a devout Muslim and succeeded in challenging the most powerful secular institutions. Though not explicitly promoting conservative identity, the series depict the CHP elite as unable to understand the conservative community's demands. The series prompts reflection on Kemalism's democratic interpretation, implying a party that represents the people cannot be closed by the government. It seems to offer an intersexuality between the failed 2007 military intervention. In addition, this series can also be considered the early efforts of the AKP's plan to use historical series such as *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* to establish cultural prominence for the government. While *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* glorifies the Ottoman past, *Crossroad* questions the Kemalist past and challenges the Atatürk's role as a national symbol in a democratic discourse.

In general, *Crossroad* challenges the homogeneous national identity represented by *Liberation*, in which the mass are depicted as having a unified demand for

independence. However, not all citizens in *Crossroad* are loyal followers of Atatürk's secular or modernization reforms, and those who look to the opposition party for a voice on their behalf end up being ignored by Atatürk and his government. While not criticizing the Kemalist secular system itself, *Crossroad* adopts a democratic interpretation of Kemalism, criticizing the hegemony of Kemalism in an implicit way. Thus, it can be said that *Crossroad* is a relatively more innovative than *Liberation* in the way it portrays Atatürk.

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Appendix



Figure 1
Liberation. 1994, episode 3. Directed by Ziya Öztan ,
TRT, on TRTIZLE, 0:40:39.



Figure 2
Liberation. 1994, episode 2. Directed by Ziya Öztan ,
TRT, on TRTIZLE, 0:45:05.



Figure 3
Liberation. 1994, episode 6. Directed by Ziya Öztan ,
TRT, on TRTIZLE, 0:28:33.



Figure 4
Liberation. 1994, episode 6. Directed by Ziya Öztan ,
TRT, on TRTIZLE, 0:56:18.



Figure 5.

Crossroad, 2012, episode 2. Directed by Yasin Uslu ,

TRT, <https://www.trtizle.com/diziler/yol-ayrimi/yol-ayrimi-2-bolum-5774910>, 0:27:58.



Figure 6.

Crossroad, 2012, episode 21. Directed by Yasin Uslu ,

TRT, <https://www.trtizle.com/diziler/yol-ayrimi/yol-ayrimi-21-bolum-5782427>, 0:46:03.



Figure 7.
Crossroad, 2012, episode 26. Directed by Yasin Uslu ,
TRT, <https://www.trtizle.com/diziler/yol-ayrimi/yol-ayrimi-26-bolum-5781725>, 0:45:15.



Figure 8.
Crossroad, 2012, episode 8. Directed by Yasin Uslu ,
TRT, <https://www.trtizle.com/diziler/yol-ayrimi/yol-ayrimi-8-bolum-5775219>, 1:10:32.



Figure 9.

Crossroad, 2012, episode 26. Directed by Yasin Uslu ,

TRT, <https://www.trtizle.com/diziler/yol-ayrimi/yol-ayrimi-26-bolum-5781725>, 0:29:32.