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Summary

Performing Modernity: Atatürk on Film (1919-1938)

This study explores Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's relationship to cinema during his time in power (1919-1938). It has three main goals. Firstly, unlike the mainstream view, which tends to regard Atatürk as a man whose ideas anticipated cinema's future success, this study aims to place him in his historical context. In doing so, it tries to understand the social, cultural and political forces that shaped his approach to cinema. Secondly, it analyzes the role of cinema in the Turkish-Ottoman modernization process. Rather than seeing cinema as a medium that merely recounts the events of the past, this study views cinema as an agent of change that makes history. Finally, it explores how the public image of Atatürk was constructed by the leader himself and his followers and communicated in cinema. By analyzing the leader's public image in film, this dissertation aims to understand the role this image and the medium played in the making of the myth of Atatürk and the Turkish nation-state. In this way, it hopes to offer a new cultural approach to the politics of nationalism.

Atatürk's political success in establishing himself as a leader of the national resistance movement and the founder of the Turkish Republic has been the subject of a number of biographies and scholarly works. Inspired by the "great man" theory, some of these works have claimed that Atatürk almost single-handedly organized the national resistance movement, saved the Turkish nation from extinction and built the Turkish nation-state out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Others have explained Atatürk's success with reference to the Weberian notion of charismatic authority. According to this view, in a time of great need and desperation, Atatürk emerged as a charismatic leader who, due to his extraordinary skills and qualities, inspired obedience and loyalty from his followers, and thus was able to produce radical changes in the Turkish state and society.

Neither of these arguments, however, can adequately explain how Atatürk could realize such radical changes during his lifetime and continue to have such a strong impact long after his death. Consequently, this study suggests that Atatürk's success cannot be explained by political theory alone, but needs to be approached from the perspective of the culture of nationalism. To understand his success more deeply, it is necessary to look at Atatürk's place in the collective imagination.

This dissertation argues that Atatürk constructed the modern Turkish Republic and nation in part by communicating his public image in various media. When Atatürk came to power, he was not a well-known man among the public; however, the effort and attention given by himself and the Turkish government to the creation of his public image increasingly turned him into a superhuman hero in the eyes of many. Presenting the leader as a virtually omnipotent and omnipresent figure, the mass media played a crucial role in the creation of the myth of Atatürk and helped him to advance his project of building the new "imagined community" of the Turkish nation.

This study concentrates on the contribution made by a single medium, that of film. Film was chosen for several reasons: 1) it has not been analyzed in detail before; 2) it was deemed particularly suitable for Atatürk's project of creating his own and the new Turkey's image as "modern" because film, as a medium, was strongly associated with modernity; 3) by facilitating the presentation of Atatürk and Turkey's new image to both domestic and foreign audiences, the medium of film functioned as a catalyst for the nation-building process. Analyzing Atatürk's evolving public image in film, this analysis aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the relations between media and power, and of the role these relations played in the making of a "great man" and the modern nation state in the early twentieth century.

To meet the objectives identified above, the dissertation analyzes film footage featuring Atatürk found in both Turkish and foreign archives. Most of this material has not been identified or analyzed before. In addition, it makes use of letters, memoirs and newspaper articles, as well as of reports, newsletters and

production files that reveal additional information about the analyzed footage and the context in which it was produced.

In Turkey, two archives are central to this project: the Turkish Film &TV Institute at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (a.k.a. the Turkish Film Archives) in Istanbul and the archives of the Turkish Armed Forces Photo Film Center in Ankara. Two films provided by the Turkish Film Archives are discussed: *Lozan Sulh Heyetinin Karşılansası* (The Reception of the Lausanne Peace Committee, 1923), which is analyzed in Chapter 2, and *Atatürk'ün Amerikan Büyükelçisi Joseph C. Grew'u Orman Çiftliğinde Kabulü* (The Reception of the American Ambassador Joseph C. Grew by Atatürk on the Forest Farm, 1930), which is the focus of Chapter 3. Parts of films on Atatürk and documents provided by the Turkish Armed Forces Photo Film Center are examined in Chapters 1, 2 and 4.

To understand the full scope of Atatürk's use of film, the dissertation also consults films and documents related to Atatürk in archives outside Turkey. Chapter 2 analyzes two films featuring Atatürk from British Pathé. The first one is a piece of silent footage titled *Mustapha Kemel* (1920-1929) and the second one a silent newsreel called *Mustapha Kemal* (1923). In addition to the major European film archives, the dissertation draws mainly on the three US archives holding significant film material on Atatürk: the Moving Image Research Collections (MIRC) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina; the National Archives in Washington, D.C.; and the private archives in New York of Sam Bryan, the son of the film maker Julien Bryan who shot footage of Atatürk in Turkey.

In Chapter 3, newly found footage titled *Ataturk Entertains Grew on His Private Estate* from the MIRC is analyzed by comparing it with footage held by the TFA titled *The Reception of the American Ambassador Joseph C. Grew by Atatürk in the Forest Farm, 1930* and a diplomatic letter written by the American Ambassador Joseph C. Grew to the Secretary of State concerning the filming of the footage. The comparison of the three versions uncovers a fascinating story regarding the making of the film and its fortunes.

In Chapter 4, an episode of *The March of Time* newsreels featuring Atatürk and titled “Father of All Turks” is analyzed. This newsreel, held in the National Archives, was released in the US on 19 February 1937. Published by Time-Life Incorporated, the newsreel was not only screened nationwide in the US but also in Europe when Atatürk was still alive. Sam Bryan’s private archives in New York provide further information on the footage used in the newsreel, showing that Julien Bryan’s footage of Atatürk was also used for an illustrated lecture called *Turkey Reborn*, which Bryan delivered throughout the US from 1937 onwards. Although the footage used in the lecture has not survived in its original form, Chapter 4 reconstructs the story of the footage’s journey onto American screens by bringing together various source materials from the period, including letters, newspaper articles, publicity material and memoirs, as well as photographs, films, reports, a promotional newsletter and interviews with Sam Bryan.

By combining foreign and Turkish sources, as well as textual and contextual analysis, this dissertation provides a more comprehensive picture of the films made of Atatürk during his lifetime at his instigation or with his support. What emerges is a picture of how Atatürk used film to create and project a modern, civilized image of himself and his country not just inside Turkey, but also internationally.

To analyze the relationship of Atatürk to film as well as the particular social practices or events shown within the films in which he appears, this work uses the approach called “thick description” developed by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz to interpret foreign cultures distant in space. Geertz’s interpretative approach was further developed by American historian Robert Darnton to analyze social practices and events distant in time. Combining their approaches, this dissertation studies how the public image of Atatürk was constructed and communicated in film.

By placing the films as well as the cultural symbols and expressions that appear in the films in a number of contexts, from Atatürk’s supposed view on cinema to his performance on film, and from the cultural significance of films to the politics

of modernization in the new Turkish Republic, this dissertation not only shows why Atatürk and his followers used film in the way they did but also treats the films as entry points into their past culture. In this way, it tries to overcome temporal and cultural distance and to make the ways in which they made sense of the world they lived in intelligible to present-day readers.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 transports us back in time to the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and more specifically to the social and cultural environment in which Mustafa Kemal was born and raised. By comparing the history of cinema in the Ottoman Empire with the history of cinema in the Western world, this chapter reveals the specific cultural meanings of cinema in the Turkish-Ottoman context. Moreover, it shows that Mustafa Kemal's attitudes towards cinema, as well as his later use of the medium, owed a great deal to the period and the milieu in which he lived.

Chapter 2 concentrates on Mustafa Kemal and his followers' use of cinema during the Turkish War of Independence and its aftermath. It shows how they deliberately mobilized cinema to create a national consciousness and to win public support for Turkey's independence. The chapter further demonstrates that their efforts to film the war not only served propaganda purposes during the war, but also shaped the depiction of the war in its wake by building an "archive" of cinematic images for the future (in the sense of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault). Moreover, through close readings of three films from this period, *Mustapha Kemal* (1920-1929), *Mustapha Kemal* (1923) and *Lozan Sulh Heyetinin Karşılansası* (The Reception of the Lausanne Peace Committee, 1923), the chapter reveals the cultural and political messages Mustafa Kemal sought to convey to the Western world after his rise to power.

Chapter 3 compares the account of the making of a film about Atatürk on his Forest Farm by Fox Film Inc. in 1930 provided by the American ambassador to Turkey Joseph C. Grew in a letter with two surviving versions of the film. The chapter demonstrates how Mustafa Kemal used film to project an image of himself and of the new Turkey as modern, civilized and democratic to the world.

This image was carefully designed to challenge established ideas about Turks and Turkey in Western Orientalist discourses. In addition, the chapter analyzes Mustafa Kemal's performance in the film and explains why film was both an alluring and a risky medium through which to present the young Turkey's new identity to foreign audiences.

Chapter 4 traces the journey of the American filmmaker Julien Bryan, who shot exclusive pictures of Atatürk in Turkey in 1936, including of his private life. It shows how, in the interwar period, Atatürk managed to impress many Americans, including President Roosevelt, through this film footage. Two films emerged from Bryan's visit to Turkey: *Turkey Reborn* (1937) and "Father of All Turks" (1937). The first was produced by Bryan as an illustrated lecture and was screened nationwide in the US, and the second, part of the *March of Time* newsreel series of Time-Life Inc., was screened in the US and Europe. Both films bear witness to Atatürk's modernization efforts and his claim to a status for his country among the "civilized nations" of the world. The chapter further explores the construction and representation of Atatürk's myth in the media during the making of modern Turkey by focusing on his role in shaping these depictions. It illustrates Atatürk's awareness of the power of film to influence American public opinion at a critical time in global politics. At the same time, a close look at the depiction of Atatürk in these two films and their reception by American audiences during the 1930s suggests that Atatürk could not fully control the meanings ascribed to his cinematic image outside of Turkey.

In sum, this dissertation makes clear that film played an important, if sometimes paradoxical role in making Atatürk and Turkey's new "modern" image visible to both the national and the international community. Cinema not only recorded the building of the Turkish nation-state, but assisted Atatürk in its making. More significantly, even today, his cinematic images shape how many young generations continue to imagine Atatürk: as a hero, teacher, father and modern statesman.