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Representations of M. K. Atatürk in the Arabic Discourse and the Formation of the Collective Memory of the Arabs

Abstract:

A review of the Arab publications on modern Turkey that have appeared since the 1970s and their examination with regard to the image of the founder of the Turkish republic, M. K. Atatürk (1881–1938), reveals a rather negative image and leads one to assume that this is the one and only image of Atatürk in Arab perception. The fact is, however, that it is by no means a static image of Atatürk. If the perceptions of Arab authors regarding Atatürk are embedded in the respective historical and political context, it becomes evident that these perceptions can be seen as the result of a process. Moreover, the content of the respective "perceptions" is obviously influenced by socio-political changes. My aim in this paper is to investigate the aspects of these perceptions as they appear in Arabic discourse. I would also like to highlight the various ways that they have been employed in the construction of the collective memory of the Arabs.

Key words: Atatürk, Arabic discourse, collective memory of the Arabs

1. Introduction

In two books,[1] written in 1925 and 1939, the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) developed the concept of "collective memory". A key assumption underlying this concept is that, contrary to what was believed by sociologists, philosophers and psychologists of the early twentieth century, memory is not merely a biological function pertaining to individual people. Rather, societies themselves are possessed of a collective memory. This serves as the repository for a set of experiences that are constructed and transformed by the perceptions of the society in which they occur, and then stored in its memory. The past as it is remembered is thus the result of a continual process of collective reconstruction, leading to a specific view of the past taking root in the collective memory and forming an essential component of its identity. Halbwachs considers collective and individual memory to be closely linked, with collective memory being constituted of a multiplicity of individual memories.

Initially, Halbwachs' views were not well received by sociologists, and his books were not published until many years after his death. The credit for uncovering and making use of his views goes to the contemporary French historian Pierre Nora (1931–), who used Halbwachs' notion of collective memory as the basis for his own concept of "sites of memory". The concept of "site" here is not geographical in the conventional sense,

1 Halbwachs 1950; 1952.

but rather encompasses any locus of collective memory, having acquired a figurative dimension as part of the construction of a society's identity. Examples of such sites therefore include customs, traditions, national or religious festivals, museums, archives, historic monuments, or particular characters. Nora emphasises that sites of memory do not preserve the past as is, but instead represent it as it is imagined in the present, having been shaped and remodelled by society's perceptions.

Building on Halbwachs' work on how the past is constructed and represented in the collective memory, the German historian Jörn Rüsen worked intensively on different aspects of how the past is involved and made use of in the present, this work giving considerable impetus to the field known as memory studies. Rüsen's focus was on the realities of everyday engagement with the past and the practical involvement of the past in the present of a society, as well as its political, cultural, and religious life; that is, everything which is investigated as part of the work of historical culture (German *Geschichtskultur*). Rüsen also emphasises that a key function of the way history is told is to create linkages between past, present, and future. In this perspective, when we narrate a given historical topic, we imbue that topic with a particular significance and symbolic value, commensurate with the need to construct a society's identity, to situate the (individual or collective) self in space, and in relation to the other. In this way, the past as stored in the collective memory acquires a normative dimension, as argued by cultural theorist Jan Assmann (1938–).[2]

While memory studies has become a fruitful field of research within sociology and the humanities in general, in the study of Islamic history, culture and civilisation in particular, attempts to embed or employ the methodological tools of memory studies are notable by their almost total absence.[3] This is despite the fact that Islamic history – through all eras from the beginning up until the fall of the Ottoman Empire fifteen centuries later, and with a vast geographical span over three continents – presents an especially rich source of sites of memory, upon which the collective memory of the Arabs and of Muslim societies in general draws deeply. The Islamic past, both distant and recent, has also made its presence strongly felt in the process of building these collective memories, taking on, in fact, a somewhat delusional quality in the construction of Arab identity specifically.[4] For example, in connection with the idea of pan-Islamic political unity, as advocated by al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida, among others, in response to colonialist movements in the nineteenth century, much ink was spilt in

2 See Assmann 2000, 115.

3 Zuhayr Sūkāḥ notes this absence in the work of Arab academic institutions in his article 2020. On the other hand, this shortcoming is characteristic also of Western studies of Islamic civilisation, apart from one valuable contribution by Angelika Hartmann, 2004. Note in this connection that the journal *Tabyyun* devoted a special issue (33/9, 2020) to this topic, under the heading '*Min 'aḍ-ḍākira' ilā 'dirāsāt aḍ-ḍakira': Muqārabāt 'Arabiyya bayntaḥaṣṣuṣiyya*' ('From memory to memory studies: Interdisciplinary Arabic approaches'). See also several of the articles in Berg 2018.

4 The Lebanese writer Samir Kassir describes this relationship of longing between the Arabs and the bygone golden age of Islam as "the Arab tragedy". See Kassir 2004.

Arab discourse on searching the depths of the past for the essential components of Islamic identity. By means of a consciously selective memory of the earliest period of Islam, this discourse worked to create a normative past, based on the image of a bygone golden age. Thus, as nationalistic currents began to develop, Arab discourse felt the need to search for the essential components of an Arab national identity, and the history of the Umayyads became a site of memory par excellence, as the collective memory of the Arabs was wedded to that of the Umayyads, who had founded the first state in Islam's history, with Arab ethnicity at its heart.[5]

In recent decades we have witnessed an increasingly strong presence of Ottoman Turkish history in the Arab cultural and intellectual arena, moving beyond the history books into both print and visual media and thus acquiring a popular dimension.[6] This presence draws on the memory of centuries of Ottoman rule in the majority of Arabic-speaking regions, this phase for its part too offering a wealth of sites of memory.

In fact, there is now an urgent need for a study of sites of memory and the construction of collective memory that on a similar scale to Pierre Nora's work in the French context. This study should explore representations in the collective memory of the Arabs[7] of all phases of the Islamic past, as well as the practical intrusion of this history into Arab society and political, cultural, and religious life today. For my own part, my focus in a number of works has been on representations of the Ottoman Turkish past in the Arab present, how these are formed, and the sites of memory associated with this past are instrumentalised in the process of constructing the collective memory of the Arabs – whether with nationalist or Islamist aims in mind, for example. Thus, in previous work I have addressed how the Ottoman Turkish past, personified by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, is employed in the construction of a new Islamic identity in Arabic-speaking countries;[8] and let us note here that Abdul Hamid is in fact one of the most significant Ottoman Turkish figures with a strong presence in Arabic writing and media of recent decades. In the present study, my focus is on Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), to whom numerous works have been devoted from the early part of the previous century onwards, while, as we will see in the course of the present article, he also features prominently in other works dealing with the last of the Ottoman sultans, for example. My aim here is thus to illuminate the features of this aspect of Ottoman Turkish history, embodied by Atatürk, as they

5 See Ende 1977.

6 This is especially apparent in television series and films, of which the best known is perhaps the Egyptian series (in Arabic), *Suqūṭ al-ḫilāfa*. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLemZK8Qi_I; URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBP-2PNxrmw; URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFqDKcSyGE0 (all 7 August 2022).

7 When I speak here of the collective memory of the Arabs, it is in the context of a unitary Arabic-speaking cultural entity. But we should note that Arab countries do of course differ from one another to varying extents in their representations of the various phases of the Islamic past and in how they make use of this past in the construction of collective memory and their own unique identities. For example, on the different manifestations of the influence of Kemalism in Iraq, see Al-Jumaily and Öztoparak 1999; Temimi 1999.

8 See Louhichi 2018.

appear in works written in Arabic, as well as the practical presence of Atatürk in present-day Arab society and political, cultural and religious life.[9]

2. Methodological Observations

Careful examination of what has been published about Atatürk leads us to works dating from various periods, from the early twentieth century, during the war of liberation led by Mustafa Kemal in Anatolia, up to the present a full century later, during which time global as well as local political developments have constituted moments of qualitative transformation in the history of the Arabic-speaking regions as a whole. These include the two world wars, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of nascent Arab and Turkish nationalism in the region, while the various intellectual currents of the period, including nationalism, Marxism and Islamism, waxed and waned and all played their part in forming the image of Atatürk in the collective memory of the Arabs.

Initial study of the totality of what has appeared over the course of this period of about a hundred years reveals titles that differ widely in the language used and the allusions made, as well as qualitative differences in the contents of these works.[10] What becomes clear through the examples that we will analyse in the course of this article, is that the image of "Atatürk" in Arabic discourse is by no means fixed or static, as one might imagine if one considered only some of the relevant publications. Rather, what we find is that this site of memory (to use Nora's term) constitutes a distinct representation each time, depending on the precise need that the construction of collective memory serves in a particular political and intellectual context. Investigation of how the Atatürkian past is represented in Arabic-language works and makes its presence felt in the contemporary Arab sphere in politics, culture, and religion, is, however, necessarily subject to a methodological condition, namely the proper contextualisation of the texts in question. For a text is, in essence, the result of a dynamic interaction with the political, intellectual, and social variables that structure the context in which it arises.

Through this methodology we are able to investigate three key representations (and secondary applications of those representations) of Atatürk in Arabic discourse,[11] each

9 The present study makes use of Halbwachs' and Nora's models of collective and cultural memory and their political implementation and extends these models to the specific context of Arab nationalism. The methodology chosen for this research intentionally goes no further than this. In particular, it makes no attempt at pluralism regarding views on Atatürk from different times and places or to investigate interlocking "knots" of memory. The application of the idea of knots of memory to the image of Atatürk thus remains a desideratum for future research. See Rothberg 2010.

10 The present work restricts its purview to written publications, while fully acknowledging the crucial role of political and media discourse in memory formation. On the Arab portrayal of Atatürk and the role of political and media discourse in its formation, see ad-Dāqūqī 2001.

11 We should note here two significant works on the representation of Atatürk in other contexts. Dressler 1999 considers the case of Anatolian Alawites in Turkey, who portrayed

of them arising in a distinct historical context, and each being impacted by distinct political, social, and intellectual variables. It is important to note, however, that this division into different historical contexts takes into account the general sociological features of the region, though we must also be aware of the existence of differences in the details of these changes from one region to another. Similarly, the delimitation in time of the different historical contexts does not mean that these periods are isolated from one another. Rather, the different sociological contexts typically exist side by side for a while. In the following we will consider the details of the representation of Atatürk in Arabic discourse, and investigate the ways in which this representation has been put to use in the three temporal contexts alluded to above, covering these in reverse chronological order and beginning with the present day.[12]

2. The Representation of the Atatürkian Past in Arabic Discourse from the 1970s to the Present

In recent times, there has been a significant spike in interest in biographies of Atatürk, with some academic works, and many other works intended for the popular market. The titles listed in the following footnote represent those of these biographies which proven to be especially popular with the Arabic-speaking readership, as evidenced by their having been reprinted numerous times.[13] Many more such references (without

Atatürk as Bektash Veli and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, despite the strained relationship between the Kemalist regime and this religious minority. Ihrig 2014, on the other hand, in a study whose findings came as a surprise to specialists in the area, outlines the heroic characterisation of Atatürk in Nazi Germany.

12 The presentation of discourses in section 2 is quite extensive in comparison to that of the following sections. This is partly because of the relatively large number of publications from the most recent period in comparison to earlier periods, and partly because the intention is to verify whether and when specific events took place during this period, so as to make a clear distinction between what is remembered and what actually happened. This fact-checking operation of course applies also to the other time periods. What this article does not do, and does not claim to do, is to take apart and reassemble the image of Atatürk. Rather, it simply offers a chronological outline of the changes which this image has undergone over time.

13 See Ḥiḍr 2009; ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm 2010; 2013.
Note that ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm is a graduate of the law faculty of Ain Shams University in Cairo who works as a lawyer and writes as a hobby. He has published a large number of novels and short stories, with many of the novels having themes of freemasonry and conspiracy theories. Seventeen such novels have been published in a series entitled *Silsilat ḥukūmat al-ʿālam al-ḫafiyya* (The Secret World Government). These novels have been bestsellers and made into films by several different Arabic-language broadcasters.
See also Anon. 1977. According to the blurb of the latter work, its author is a Turkish former officer who was a contemporary of Atatürk. The translator, ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān, states that the reason the book was published anonymously was so that its author would not be punished under the Turkish law which forbids any attack on the character of Atatürk.

any claim that the list is exhaustive) are provided in the next few footnotes.[14] It is important to note here that while the works cited certainly vary considerably in their quality, this does not detract from their role in constructing the collective memory of the Arabs.

When we consider the depiction of Atatürk in contemporary texts written in Arabic, it is apparent that on the whole this is strikingly negative, with the two main features of this negative depiction being first that it was Atatürk put an end to the caliphate, and second that he was Jewish.[15]

The narrative that Atatürk was responsible for the downfall of the caliphate is based on two central ideas. The first is that there is a link between the abolition of the caliphate – which came into force by an official decree on 3rd March 1924 – and the removal of Sultan Abdul Hamid on 27th April 1909: the former event being portrayed as

The Arabic translation of this work was published in 1977, and there is much doubt about the integrity of this work. The Arabic edition provides no further information. However, in its edition of 23rd May 2016, the Turkish newspaper *Timeturk* published an interview with the Iraqi politician and intellectual, Muḥsin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (b. 1937), who explained that the author of the book was the Turkish poet and writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905–1983), and that the latter had requested of the Iraqi Turkmen author Ōrḫān Muḥammad ʿAlī (1937–2010) that he translate the book into Arabic without revealing his name, instead just writing that it was authored by a Turkish former officer. Muḥsin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd further states in this interview that neither Kısakürek nor the translator Ōrḫān Muḥammad ʿAlī wanted their names made public, which was why the book was published anonymously and with an assumed name – ʿAbd Aḷḷāh ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān – for the translator. Note that the original Turkish version of the book has never been published. However, excerpts of the Arabic version have been translated back into Turkish and published by Muhammed Metin Müftüoğlu. Note that this translator is not merely an author like any other – he is the individual known as Kaplan, who claimed the title of Caliph in Cologne, Germany. See Müftüoğlu, 1992. The debate over the truth of the original work's authorship remains far from settled, and there are also significant doubt concerning its historical value, Kısakürek being after all a poet and a writer, and not a historian. Despite these issues, many quotations from the book have made their way into various Arabic texts without due scrutiny of their scholarly worth. To take one example, see Mūsā Ǧabalī 2013, 130, fn. 62.

14 See al-Aḥmad 2007; Šitā 1986; Ḥilmī 2004; Riḍā 1999; aš-Šāḏilī 1989. Note that even the leadership of al-Qaeda have contributed to this literature; see al-Aṭarī, 2013, and the work by the spiritual father of this organisation, in which he mocks Atatürk: ʿAzzām 1989. There have also been a number of university dissertations on the topic, most of them unpublished, including: al-Balʿāwī 2008; ʿAllūš 2015. Additionally, although there are relatively few voices speaking out in praise of Atatürk, and the influence of these has waned in comparison to earlier decades – as will be made clear later on this article – these voices have not disappeared entirely: we find several books of this kind, especially those written by Arab ambassadors in Turkey, such as those of the Lebanese ambassador to Turkey: az-Zayn 1982; 1991; as well as the Egyptian ambassador ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ʿAbd al-Ġaniyy, writing under a *nom de plume*: al-Kātib, 1993. See also Qadrī 1983.

15 See e.g. ad-Dawsarī 1994, 70–5, and esp. 73; al-Ḥasan 2009, 351; al-Hāšimī 2004; at-Tall 1971, esp. 74–97.

a direct consequence of the latter, despite the nearly fifteen years separating the two.[16] The second concerns the emphasis this narrative places on Atatürk's role in the Action Army (Turkish *Hareket Ordusu*), which intervened to put a stop to what was known as the 31st March Incident[17] and opened the door to the removal of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The narrative thus manufactures a direct link between Atatürk's role in the Action Army and his role in the abolition of the caliphate a number of years later.[18]

These contemporary Arabic texts are stretching the historical facts to breaking point when they assign to Atatürk a leading role in the Action Army and thus also in the removal of Sultan Abdul Hamid. For, while many details are lacking concerning the Incident and Atatürk's role in it, it is certain that he was not highly ranked, nor did he hold a position in the leadership of this group. Rather, he participated as an officer first under the command of the initial leader of the campaign, Hüseyin Hilmî Paşa (1855–1923), and then under Mahmud Şevket Paşa (1856–1913), who took his place. Personally, I take the view that the official Kemalist historical narrative itself – with all its attempts to glorify and sanctify Atatürk and to attribute to him the leading role in everything – has contributed to inflating his role in the Action Army, since it is Turkish historical texts that lay the foundation for a narrative concerning Atatürk to the effect that it was he who proposed the name Action Army in preference to some other previously suggested name, and his proposal was then put into effect. Likewise, Yusuf Hikmet (Bayur; 1891–1980) mentions that it was Atatürk who composed the text of the communique that was read to the people of Istanbul after it had been signed by Hüseyin Hilmî Paşa, since he knew of Atatürk's ability to write in an upbeat political rhetorical style.[19]

Regarding the link between the removal of the caliph Abdul Hamid in 1909 and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, it is important to point out here that idea of abolishing of the caliphate was not mooted at the time of Abdul Hamid's removal, and to treat the two as linked constitutes an (intentional?) departure from the framework of historical fact. During this period, the Young Turks, despite the influence of the French revolution as well as their vehement opposition to Sultan Abdul Hamid, were well aware of the role of religion and of the caliphate as an institution in maintaining the existence of the Ottoman Empire. They also believed it necessary that the caliphate remained in the hands of the ruling Ottoman dynasty. For example, Ahmet Rıza, one of the leaders of the Unionists, made clear that removing the Ottomans would be a fatal error, since it would leave the Turks open to destruction by the Bulgarians, Greeks

16 al-Ǧundī 1986, 77.

17 In Ottoman Turkish: *Otuz bir mart vak'ası*. This took place on 31st March 1325 in the Rumi calendar followed by the Ottoman Empire at that time. This is equivalent to 22nd Rabīᶜ al-Awwal 1327 in the Hijri calendar and 13th April 1909 in the Gregorian calendar. The 31st March Incident was the counter revolution that followed the Unionist revolution of 1908. It was led by the Bektashi Sheikh Vahdeti, founder of the Muhammadan Union. See Feroz 1978.

18 See Ḥallāq 1988, 59 onwards; an-Naᶜīmī 1997, 157 onwards.

19 See Kreiser 2008, 59.

and Armenians. And although it is true that Abdullah Cevdet demanded the removal of the Ottomans and the declaration of a republic, he remained the exception – a loan radical voice who found no support among his Unionist friends for these ideas of his. The efforts of the other Young Turks at that time were focused specifically on removing the autocratic ruler Abdul Hamid, and re-establishing the constitution.[20]

Moreover, it is especially noticeable that in current discourse Atatürk tends to be held solely responsible for the abolition of the caliphate in 1924.[21] But this is a superficial, simplistic view of the matter. The issue of the abolition of the caliphate can only properly be studied with reference to the intellectual discourse that was ongoing over the course of several decades prior to the decision to abolish it being taken. In this discourse, Turkish, Arab and other Muslims discussed the future of the institution and proposed various theories concerning the concept of the caliphate. Thus, there were those who saw the caliphate as a merely political institution – even prior to Ali Abdel Raziq (1877–1966) and his well-known book, *Islam and the foundations of political power* (Arabic: *al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm*) – as well as those who developed the idea of a purely spiritual caliphate. In the Arabic-speaking context, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1854–1902) called for a spiritual caliphate that would 'establish a religious connection between all the Islamic sultanates and emirates'[22] in his book *Umm al-qurā*, which was published approximately 25 years before Atatürk's decision to abolish the caliphate. In the second clause of his manifesto consisting of 18 clauses in total, al-Kawakibi proposed that the political powers of the caliphate to the geographical area of the Hijaz, and no further. And in total contradiction to the traditional conception of the caliphate and the stipulations of the Ottoman constitution, al-Kawakibi proposes in the twelfth clause of his manifesto that the caliph be banned from interfering in any internal political or administrative matters in Muslim countries, while in the fourteenth clause he proposes a ban on minting currency in the name of the caliph as well as a ban on the caliph being permitted to have any military force at his disposal.[23] Similarly, in a key letter sent to Muhammad Rashid Rida from Mersin (in today's Turkey) and dated 12th May 1924, Prince Shakib Arslan (1869–1946) theorised a regime in which an old concept was revived for the modern context, in the form of two separate institutions: the caliphate and the sultanate. Thus, he was prepared to accept – if only through necessity – spiritual authority for the caliph, with earthly (i.e. political and military) matters entrusted to the sultan, whom he would select, and who would act in his name. He proposed that Abdulmejid be accepted as a spiritual caliph, with the stipulation that he rule from an official seat in Yemen, and that he appoint Imam Yahya (a Zaydi Shia) as his sultan.[24] Concerning Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hamid Enayat

20 Hanioğlu 2001, 38.
21 See, among many other examples, Ḥiḍr 2009, 229–35, 236–44.
22 al-Kawākibī 1899, 143.
23 al-Kawākibī 1899, 140–3.
24 The letter was published in full by Aḥmad al-Šarabāṣī in Arslān 1963, part 2, 647–60. See here especially 558–660.

suggests that the caliphate as 'spiritual link'[25] is a key concept in Rida's vision of the future of the office, and that the project which he outlined in this regard was not essentially different to the institution of the spiritual caliphate that the Ankara government actually sought to create when it abolished the sultanate on 1st November 1923 and established a spiritual caliphate which was to be a symbolic link between all Muslims worldwide.[26] In the Turkish context, at the heart of the Ottoman state, a number of prominent intellectuals, politicians and theologians left their mark on the intellectual discourse on the question of the caliphate, including the journalist and writer Celal Nuri (1881–1938), well known intellectual and member of the Committee of Union and Progress Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), as well as members of the council of religious scholars: Hoca Halil Hulki (1869–1940), Hoca Ilyas Sami (1881–?), Hoca Rasih (1883–1952), and Mehmed Seyyid Bey (1873–1931).[27] In the context of India, it would appear that Mohammad Barakatullah (1854–1927) was the first to establish the concept of a spiritual caliphate in a pamphlet he published with the title *The Khilafet*. In the same vein, Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938) adopted an idea which certain Turkish intellectuals had been calling for, namely that the high national council in Ankara should represent the institution of the caliphate,[28] while the first to put forward this idea at the heart of the Ottoman sultanate was Khalid Bey (1884–1953), a member of the high national council.[29]

What emerges clearly from the foregoing is that the decision to abolish the caliphate was in no way the product of Atatürk's own thinking as is typically claimed in contemporary Arabic texts, though in his capacity as the head of the National Assembly it was he who announced the measure. In reality, the abolition of the caliphate was the product of decades of intellectual and political discourse. Atatürk's announcement merely put into political practice a discourse which had emerged as part of a wider trend, whereby nationalist discourse in particular had begun to eclipse the discourse of pan-Islamism, based on the idea of the caliphate.[30]

Arabic discourse also misrepresents the decision by portraying it as the action of a single individual, as if it had not previously been discussed in the high national council. In fact, it was discussed extensively there, and faced no significant opposition. It is true that in 1923, when the decree to abolish the sultanate was discussed, just a single member of the council voted against, namely Ziya Hurşid (1890–1926), would later become a vociferous opponent of Atatürk.[31] Regarding the abolition of the caliphate on the

25 Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā 1923, 78.
26 Enayat 1982, esp. 75–6.
27 See Ardiç 2012 esp. 143–5.
28 See Iqbal 1930, 220, who wrote that 'Turkey's Ijtihad is that according to the spirit of Islam the Caliphate or Imamate can be vested in a body of persons, or an elected Assembly'.
29 On this topic and on the intellectual discourse surrounding the issue of the caliphate generally, see Hassan 2018, especially 160. See also Ardiç 2012.
30 On this point, see Aydin 2007.
31 He also participated in a group which attempted to assassinate Atatürk in Izmir on 15th June 1926. See Kreiser 2008, 174, 212.

other hand, here the aforementioned Mehmed Seyyid Bey, who was a member of the council and a minister in the department of justice from 1923 to 1924, played a key role along with fellow council member Şeyh Safvet Efendi in providing religious arguments to justify the abolition. Safvet Efendi even drew up a template for the text of the abolition decree in 1924.[32] Note also that sources contemporary with these events – especially Muhammad Rashid Rida – attributed the abolition to the Unionist government[33] in general: an inflated role for Atatürk and his depiction as the sole agent in the affair had not yet emerged. Indeed, these sources were rather hesitant to take any definite position on Atatürk, since the image of the hero of the Turkish War of Independence, lionised by the Arab poets, was still firmly established in the collective memory of the Arabs at that time.[34]

As for the notion that Atatürk was Jewish or belonged to the Dönme,[35] and was an agent of Zionism, this is treated by our contemporary Arab discourse as an established fact, based on the fact that he was part of both the Action Army and the Committee of Union and Progress,[36] which this discourse views as having worked hand in hand with the enemies of the Ottoman Empire, both internal (the Dönme / Jews) and external (principally the British), to bring about the downfall of the Ottoman Empire as well as Islam itself. Against this background, this discourse analyses the events of 31st March and the interventions of the Action Army from the perspective of a global Jewish conspiracy, which led to the removal of Sultan Abdulhamid and the taking of power by the Unionists.[37]

It has in fact been reliably established that some of those participating in the Action Army were Jewish, while other represented a heterogenous mix of dissidents from Rumelia Eyalet. Even the Bulgarian gang leader Yane Sandanski joined the Action Army, leading some later historians to view the group a mere band of rebels. These facts fanned the flames of the Jewish conspiracy theory, especially given that the spiritual leader of the Jewish minority in Istanbul, Naum, later participated in the second round of negotiations at the Lausanne Conference in July 1923. It was also widely believe that

32 See Ardiç 2012, 241–2.

33 Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā 1923, 124–7, 141.

34 See e.g. Muḥarram n.d., 627.

35 See e.g. Mūsā Ǧabalī 2013, 224. Note that the terms Judaism and Dönme are very often used interchangeably in this discourse, with the Dönme being seen as Jews who merely claim to have converted to Islam. In a relatively recent study, however, Marc David Baer presents a great deal of evidence that the Dönme cannot be considered either Jews or Muslims, but instead follow a distinct religion unique to them, given the extensive historical changes that the thought of this denomination has undergone. See Baer 2010.

36 This was a political movement that played a pivotal role in the history of the Ottoman Empire from the outbreak of revolution in 1908 until its dissolution in 1918. It grew out of a movement called the Ottoman Freedom Committee, which was founded in Thessaloniki in August and September 1906. Its intellectual roots derived from the ideas of the Young Turks and their followers both within and beyond the Ottoman Empire. For more on this topic see Feroz 1969.

37 See e.g. al-Ǧundī 1986, 89, 108; Ḫiḍr 2009, 75.

İsmet İnönü had promised Lord Curzon – relying on advice from Naum – to do away with Islamic institutions in the new state, obtaining in return significant territorial concessions.[38]

However, by reducing the motives underlying the events of 1908–9 to a conspiracy organised by Jews and their accomplices, this discourse overlooks the fact that the reason for this uprising was in fact the emergence of strongly felt opposition to the policies of Abdul Hamid. It also ignores the ethnic diversity of the opposition and the Committee of Union and Progress itself, as has been shown by the Turkish historian Hasan Kayalı. Kayalı stresses that the designation "Young Turks" is in fact a misnomer which has misled scholars into viewing the opposition as composed exclusively of Turks, whereas the reality, as Kayalı explains, is that movement contained Arabs, Jews, Armenians, and Greeks alongside Turks. Among these, the Arabs playing an especially important role,[39] given that a number of Arabs of considerable political and intellectual standing belonged to the Committee of Union and Progress, including the well-known author Prince Shakib Arslan, who had close connections with the trio of leading figures, Talaat Pasha (1874–1921), Djemal Pasha (1872–1922), and Enver Pasha (1881–1922). He accompanied them to Berlin at the end of 1917, where he assisted with their attempt to reinstate the Unionist government,[40] following which the British and French sentenced him to death *in absentia*. Of note also in this connection is Mahmud Şevket Pasha, whose family were ethnic Circassians with a long history of settlement in Iraq, and about whom Rashid Rida wrote: 'He held it [the Committee of Union and Progress] in his heart, and it placed its trust in him, giving him the position of highest authority and oversight of military operations.'[41]

The Committee of Union and Progress was thus a mix of ethnicities united primarily by their opposition to Abdul Hamid's autocratic rule and objectionable policies, starting with his surveillance of the press, and including: his submission to pressure from Europe and his withdrawal from Crete, leaving the Muslims there at the mercy of the Greeks; granting leases on state property such as the port of Haidar Pasha in 1898; and with his dissolution of parliament and abrogation of the constitution being the final straws.[42] Among the most prominent of these dissidents were the Balkan revolutionaries who triggered the revolution of 1908. This did not occur, as is widely claimed, as a result of influence on the Committee from the Jewish minority on Thessaloniki, but rather because the dire economic and security situation in the Balkans, coupled with the fall of Crimea and the annexation of Hungary, provoked widespread terror in the region, prompting several military leaders to meet in Resen (Manastir Vilayet) to discusses the risks facing the Balkans at that time. The primary drivers of dissent and reasons for the 1908 revolution were thus political, with the most significant role in the revolution being played by the Balkan revolutionaries, since these were directly

38 See Kreiser 2008, 59, 178.
39 Kayalı 1997; Kreiser and Neumann 2003, 351–5.
40 See Sajid 2015, 78.
41 See al-Ǧamīl 2013; Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā 1913.
42 Kieser 2005, 44–6.

affected by the aforementioned losses. This does not mean, however, that dissent was restricted to a particular ethnic group or region (such as Thessaloniki, often cited in the discourse under study here): the reaction of the Anatolian army, which refused to obey the Sultan's order to stand against the revolutionaries, is a clear sign that the revolution was restricted to a specific military unit or to the region of Thessaloniki, and cannot therefore have been solely due to the influence of the Jewish minority on the revolutionary movements in those regions.[43]

Contemporary Arabic discourse not only highlights the features of Atatürk that are associated with the removal of Sultan Abdul Hamid. It also seeks to represent Abdul Hamid as the ideal caliph, the result being an idealised image embodied in the person of the caliph, and its opposite embodied in the person of Atatürk. In these works, Atatürk is portrayed in a way that is antithetical in all aspects to the portrayal of Abdul Hamid, with the characteristics of Atatürk's portrayal being determined by those given to the person of the caliph. Just as the latter is elevated further and further and given an aura of holiness and perfection, so the former is continually demonised and portrayed as a foil to Abdul Hamid.[44]

It is worth noting here that the attitude to Abdul Hamid held by his Arab and Turkish contemporaries lacked this kind of idealisation, just as Atatürk was hardly seen in such a negative light, as we will see below. Many of the texts written in Arabic during Abdul Hamid's reign portray him as an oppressive and dictatorial ruler. These texts include *Umm al-Qurā* referred to earlier and initially published by al-Kawakibi under an assumed name (*as-Sayyid al-Furātī*), as well as *Mā hunālika* by Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī (1804–1906),[45] though the latter was rumoured to have been paid by the Khedive to carry out a propaganda campaign against Abdul Hamid so as to prepare the way for the Khedive to take over the caliphate. Even Muhammad Rashid Rida's attitude to Abdul Hamid was as far removed as can be from one of idealisation, seeing him instead as a theocratic tyrant.[46]

The decision to pit the two personalities of Abdul Hamid and Atatürk against one another was not taken at random. It is a conscious choice of profound significance. The symbolic value of the portrayal of these two personalities in contemporary Arabic texts becomes clear when we read them in the light of the events that shaped their historical context. Thus, from a point of view internal to the Arab world, we find that these texts emerge from a context in which Islamism is on the rise, while nationalism and pan-Arabism are on the wane. Indeed, the unsettled nature of the Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with authority – generally distant with a temporary rapprochement – has not only resulted in violent struggle, it has also led to ideological debates

43 See Georgeon 2003, 184–90, 398–400.

44 Some of the most significant works in this vein include: al-Ǧundī 1986; Ḥarb 1990.

45 This work was first published as an anonymous serialisation in the journal *al-Muqaṭṭam* in 1895–1896, and then in a full as a book in 1896 by the Egyptian publishing house *al-Muqaṭṭam*. It was translated into English in 2008 by Roger Allan. For my information on al-Muwayḥilī and the contents of his book, see Allen 2000.

46 See Louhichi 2018, 57–98.

between Islamists and nationalists in a number of Arab countries, most notably Egypt. In striving to depict Atatürk as a criminal, who did away with the caliphate at an institutional and personal level and damaged the esteem in which it was held, this discourse thus attempts to highlight the danger of nationalist thought and the attendant risks of disintegration and dependence on outside forces.

From an external point of view, this discourse is situated in a context marked both by the success of Islamism in gaining political power in Turkey, as well as by ever closer Arab–Turkish relations and Turkey manifesting a powerful diplomatic presence in the Arab regions. It is in light of these developments in Arab–Turkish relations that we should read the effort of Islamist discourse both to rehabilitate the character of Abdul Hamid as well as to demonise that of Atatürk, as a means to give grounding to the idea of Islamic unity, an idea which has 'not yet had its day'.[47]

On the other hand, the Arab-Israeli conflict weighs heavily on current Arab discourse, which has emerged directly in the wake of the three Arab–Israeli wars over the course of nearly three decades (in 1948, 1967, and 1976). There was also the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1979, which generated fierce opposition, leading to the assassination of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat on 6th October 1981, and with the Second Intifada in September 2000, the political scene was convulsed once again.

Against this background, the topic of the caliphate and Jewish / Zionist conspiracies are deliberately deployed as part of a tactical discourse aimed at ordinary people. In using these ideas, contemporary discourse has two principal goals. The first is to refute and undermine competing political ideologies – namely nationalism, socialism, and liberalism – which dominated the liberation movements against Western colonialism and then captured the political arena during the era of independence, but were incapable, according to this perspective, of preserving this freedom, and were feeble in the defence of Palestine to boot. The second goal is to forge a new identity with Islam at its heart, at a time of a growing sense of danger from the Jewish / Israeli enemy.

4. The Representation of the Atatürkian Past in Arabic Discourse from the Beginning of the Republic of Turkey until the 1970s

This was a pivotal phase in the history of the Middle East, full of developments and turning points of great significance, most notably the declaration of the Republic of Turkey on 29th October 1923, followed by the abolition of the caliphate on 3rd March 1924, and the succession of independent states that were declared in the region thereafter. In the following decades, some of the Arabic-speaking regions still suffered under the yoke of European colonialism, while for others it was a recent memory whose aftereffects still weighed heavily. Against this background, the region witnessed the rise of nationalism, an ideology which served as the vehicle for the fight against colonialism, which was embraced by the full range of different social groups in the region, and

47 al-Ğundī 1986, 91.

which succeeded in dominating the political scene until the end of the 1970s. Meanwhile, however, Egypt, the cradle of reformist Salafism, witnessed the founding in 1928 of an Islamist movement called the Muslim Brotherhood. In the lengthy period between the 1930s and 1960s, this group succeeded in making effective use of the sociopolitical factor, and slowly developed its identity. The group's relationship with authority has ebbed and flowed over many decades. Thus, after the Arab defeat in the 1948 war, for example, relations between the two parties experienced a crisis, culminating in the prime minister of the time (El Nokrashy; 1888–1948) issuing an order in December 1948 that the Muslim Brotherhood be disbanded. This led to a series of assassinations, whose victims included both Nokrashy and the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949). The group experienced a resurgence, however, and was active together with the Free Officers, being their most important supporters in the July 1952 revolution and the removal of the monarchist regime. In 1965 there was then a further escalation when the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt were accused of an attempted coup against president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), and many of their members were either arrested or executed in 1966. Among the latter was the Islamic thinker Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), writer of the famous book *Milestones* (Arabic *Maʿālim fī ṭ-ṭarīq*).[48] During this period, the Arab world experienced a series of setbacks most notably the defeat of a group of Arab states in the 1948 war with Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in turning the difficult nature of this period to its advantage, and gained considerable social standing in Egypt, while also expanding its reach well beyond Egypt, with growing popular support in Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. Thus, by the 1970s, there was a situation of intense competition in the Arabic-speaking regions between the opposing ideologies of Islamism and nationalism, with Islamism later becoming the more powerful of the two.

If we analyse the portrayal of Atatürk in the context of the aforementioned events and struggles between different ideological movements (in particular Islamism and nationalism), we find that it reflects the preferences, disputes, and subtleties which have shaped that context. Thus in the discourse emerging from this context, the portrayal that we observe is not unitary; rather we witness the co-existence of a multiplicity of different portrayals. One of these is that of the fighter and national hero. In many cases Arab nationalists took Atatürk and his struggle as a model in their own struggles against the French and British colonisers. One such was the Egyptian writer and politician Muḥammad Ṣubayḥ (1911–1983), who was a member of the Young Egypt party and editor-in-chief of a journal with the same name (note the influence here of the name of the Young Turks). He published a book in which he heaped praise on Atatürk's heroic deeds in the war of independence and his struggle to create a national homeland for the Turks.[49] Iraqis too were early adopters of Kemalism, an important voice in the Iraqi nationalist movement being that of Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī (1880–1968).[50] Al-Ḥuṣrī saw the

48 See Krämer 2010.

49 ʿAbd al-Qādir 1936.

50 Al-Ḥuṣrī was one of a group of prominent intellectuals and men of culture on the Ottoman scene in Istanbul, as well as a member of the Committee of Union and Progress and a

Turkish nationalist movement as part and parcel of the historical development whereby the nation-state becomes the fundamental system by which regimes are organised in the future. Accordingly, he viewed the abolition of the caliphate as the inevitable result of developments in the historical and political context. He also believed that the emergence of Arab nationalism had lagged behind its Turkish counterpart because of the outsized role of religious scholars and the widespread belief in the religious necessity of both the person of the caliph and the institution of the caliphate.[51] Lebanese researcher Wağīh Kawṯarānī further notes that the identification of the Arab nationalist movement with the Kemalist experience even extended to the names of the parties, in that, for example, the Syrian nationalist party was named the "People's Party" (Arabic *Ḥizb aš-Šaʿb*) – clearly influenced by the name of the Turkish nationalist party at that time.[52] Even the Palestinians themselves followed the model of Atatürk – whom the Islamic literature represents as a Jew – in their struggle against Jewish settlers and the British. For example, Akram Zuʿayter (1909–1996), one of the key pioneers of the resistance and the Palestinian nationalist movement, routinely sang the praises of Atatürk in his rousing speeches and held him up as an example for Palestinian fighters.[53] There is also a translation into Arabic of a work by the Turkish writer Bürhan Cahit (1892–1949), who was a close personal associate of Atatürk's and a key originator of the image of Atatürk as a nationalist hero. The translation was carried out by Rafʾat ad-Dağānī, who was born into a prominent Palestinian family around 1890. He studied in Jerusalem and then in Constantinople, and worked as a lawyer during the Ottoman era before supporting Faisal's government in Syria and then being appointed a member of senate in the nascent Kingdom of Jordan.[54] Ad-Dağānī explained that his goal in translating the book was to highlight the importance of a charismatic national leader in creating a united front against the danger of colonialism.

Alongside his image as a national hero, during this period Atatürk was also portrayed as a reformer and builder of a new state, with many of his reforms earning the praise of Arab authors,[55] most notably Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza, who lived in Turkey from 1941 to 1945 and published a key text on Atatürk's legal, administrative, and economic reforms in the country.[56] Also of note are the books *Turkiyā l-ḥadīṯa* (Modern Turkey) by the Lebanese author and historian Fuʾād Šimālī,[57] and *Turkiyā l-Kamāliyya* (Kemalist Turkey) by Saʿīd Sinnū. The final work that can be considered to belong to this period

contemporary of Atatürk's. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, al-Ḥuṣrī associated himself with Prince Faisal in Syria, whom he later followed to Baghdad, where he was given a role in Faisal's government. One of his most important works on nationalism is *Ārāʾ waaḥādīṯ*. On his life and legacy, see Cleveland 1982.

51 See al-Ḥuṣrī 1944, 143–4.

52 See Kawṯarānī 1996, 33.

53 See Zuʿayter 2021, part 1, 440. Here I would like to thank Professor Jamal Barut for making available to me copies of the various parts of this book. See also Bein 2017, 174.

54 See Cahit, 1932; and the translation, ad-Dağānī 1935.

55 On the reception of these reforms in the Egyptian press, see Hattemer 1997.

56 Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza, 1946.

57 See also Bein 2017, 172.

and context is that of Salīm as-Ṣuwayṣ,[58] published in 1970, in which the portrayal of Atatürk retains the lustre of earlier representations in nationalist works. Temimi sees this as an act of courage on the part of as-Ṣuwayṣ, since his book was published at a time of growing tension in Turkish–Arab relations, with the Arab media subjecting Kemalist Turkey to a series of attacks.[59]

Atatürk's educational reforms also found favour with a number of Arab intellectuals and politicians, most notably the aforementioned al-Ḥuṣrī, who was seen as a pioneer of pedagogy under the Unionist government in Istanbul, before then taking up senior ministerial positions in Damascus and Baghdad, where he carried out comprehensive reforms of the education system.[60] In the same vein, Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Ǧamālī (1903–1997), who was sent by the Iraqi ministry of education to conduct field research on education systems in Turkey, published his impression in a work entitled 'Education in modern Turkey'.[61]

Muḥammad Muḥammad Tawfiq begins his book on Atatürk with a rather obsequious dedication to the latter: 'To the creator of Turkey, who roused the East from its slumbers, and brought the West to heel, the politician and warrior, Kemal Atatürk. From an Egyptian who considers him to be the perfect role model, both as warrior and as statesman.'[62] Another supporter of Atatürk and his reforms was ʿAzīz Ḫānkī (1873–1956), who was a lawyer and historian who grew up in Egypt but with roots in Aleppo. Shortly before Atatürk's death, Ḫānkī published what was essentially a hagiography, featuring a desperate defence of the Turkish leader, as well as vicious rebuttals of his critics, including the former *Šayḫ al-Islam* Mustafa Sabri Effendi (1869–1954), who was living in exile in Egypt.[63] Reactions to this work in Egyptian cultural circles were positive and expressed by, for example, the Prime Minister Ismail Sidky Pasha, feminist pioneer Huda Sha'arawi, and the author ʿĀʾiša ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān, known by the name Bint aš-Šāṭiʾ. These views were published in the daily newspapers of the time, including *al-Ahrām*, which at the time had considerable reach and influence on public opinion.[64]

Also of note in this connection is the visit to Turkey made by the editor of the journal *al-Muqtaṭaf*, Fuʾād Ṣarrūf in in 1933, who then published a number of articles reviewing Atatürk's various reforms and achievements, writing for example that 'What Peter the Great achieved in Russia, and the changes brought about by the leaders of modern Japan, is but a pale shadow of the complete transformation that every aspect of public and private life in Turkey has undergone.'[65]

58 as-Ṣuwayṣ 1970.
59 See the introduction to Temimi 1999.
60 He summarised his views on a new form of education in al-Ḥuṣrī, *fī t-tarbiya wa-t-taʿlim*, 1944.
61 See al-Ǧamālī 1938. See also Bein 1917, 176.
62 See Tawfiq 1936. See also Bein 1917, 172.
63 See Seyhun 2014, 44–52.
64 See Ḫānkī Bek 1938. See also Bein 1917, 168.
65 See *al-Muqtaṭaf*, issue 83, October 1933, 336–7, cited by Kawṯarānī 1996, 34.

The ranks of those heaping praise on Atatürk were not limited to nationalists and reformists, however: Sheikh ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs (1889–1940), one of Algeria's most prominent religious scholars, offered a eulogy for Atatürk after his death in 1938. I reproduce here an extract of this important piece:

> On the 17th of Ramadan, the greatest man of the modern era known to humanity breathed his last. One of the great geniuses of the East, who survey the world across different ages, and alter the course of history then create it anew. That man is Mustafa Kemal, hero of Gallipoli in the Dardanelles and Sakarya in Anatolia, who rescued Turkey from the point of oblivion, to its current lofty position of wealth and power…
> We would not seek to defend his abrogation of the Ottoman legal code. We would, however, remind readers… that in Egypt, the land of the great al-Azhar, Islamic law remains unenforced (other than in civil matters), and the Napoleonic code remains the basis of their laws to this day. It is true that Mustafa Atatürk deprived the Turks of sharia law, but sole responsibility for this development does not lie with him, and it is with the Turks' power to restore it whenever and however they please. What Atatürk returned to them, however, is their freedom, their independence, their sovereignty, and their might among the peoples of this earth, which, once lost, cannot easily be got back. For this development he alone was the source, aided by his loyal followers. In comparison, those in Egypt who rejected sharia law in favour of the Napoleonic code, what have they given their people? And what have their religious scholars said on the matter?[66]

Arab women on the other hand, tended to see Atatürk as a defender of women's rights. The most significant names here are those of ʿĀʾiša ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān and Huda Sha'arawi. Sha'arawi took part in a suffragist conference held in Istanbul in 1935, and attended a reception in honour of Atatürk at the presidential palace in Çankaya, where she gave a speech in which she proposed for him the title *Atā Šarq* (father of the East) instead of Atatürk (father of the Turks), seeing him as a father figure for the whole of the East and not just the Turks.[67]

66 Ibn Bādis, "al-Ḫilāfa".

67 In her memoirs, Huda Sha'arawi writes:
> After the closing of the Istanbul conference, we received an invitation to attend the reception held by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, liberator of modern Turkey… In the reception room next to his office, the invited delegates stood gathered in a half circle. After a few moments, the door opened and Atatürk entered, emanating majesty and greatness. We were overcome by feelings of awe reverence… When my turn came I spoke to him directly, without an interpreter, and it was an unusual situation indeed that an Eastern Muslim woman, representing the international women's movement should stand and make a speech in Turkish, in which she expressed the thanks and delight of the women of Egypt for the liberation movement which he had led in Turkey. I said: "This shining example to Muslim countries from our great sister nation Turkey has encouraged every Eastern country to attempt to free itself and demand rights for women. The Turks consider you "Atatürk". I say that this does not suffice! For us, you are *Atā Šarq*." He was greatly moved by this speech, which was

However, this illustrious image among Arab nationalists was in some place overshadowed by the serious tensions which had affected Arab–Turkish relations on the occasion of the Unionists taking power for the period from 1913 to 1918, when their political outlook was chiefly governed by Turanism. This period also witnessed the Arab revolution of 1916, while the hanging by Cemal Pahsa of a group of dignitaries and intellectuals in Syria and Lebanon in the same year also rocked the political scene. The events of the following years were hardly more conducive to good relations, since the Arabs nationalists believed – and were not alone in this belief – that the Turks had abandoned them in their negotiations with the Western powers and in the context of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24th July 1923. For example, Munīr ar-Rayyis, one of the most prominent of the Syrian fighters, explains, while simultaneously showing his appreciation for Atatürk's heroism, that the latter's victory would never have come about had it not been for the settlement that he reached with France at the Treaty of Ankara on 20th October 1921, and for compromises at Syria's expense, which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in Syria being ceded by Turkey to France.[68]

Characterised as they are by a Turkism / Arabism opposition, memories of this past way heavily on depictions of Atatürk, especially because Kemalism is so often seen as being entirely a product of the Unionists, despite the fact that Atatürk himself was in fact particularly keen to distinguish his own politics from those of the Unionists, and despite the fact that he, unlike Enver Pasha, never embraced Turanist thought.[69]

If we turn now to consider the views expressed by Tawfiq Barrū,[70] together with his choice to translate a work by Mevlânzade Rifat in particular, who was one of Atatürk's most dogged opponents,[71] we find that the reasons for his stance on these matters can be explained by his life history, as well as by the changes that affected Arab–Turkish relations during the 1930s. Barrū came from İskenderun,[72] that is, a focal point for the struggle between Turks and Arabs, and his views reflect a position that was taken by virtually all supporters of the Arab nationalist movement in Syria and Iraq in particular. Towards the end of the 1930s, this group revolted against the policy of Turkish expansionism in the İskenderun region, and against the rapprochement between Turkey and

entirely original to me, and did not echo the speeches of any of the delegation leaders. He thanked me profusely, clearly touched deeply. Then I asked him to grant us a picture of his Excellency, for publication in L'Égyptienne magazine (Šaʿrāwī 2012, 325. See also Bein 2017, 168).

68 ar-Rayyis 1969, 120. On this point see also the introduction to Kawṯarāni's study 1996, 32–3.

69 See Kreiser 2008, 131.

70 Especially in his published Master's dissertation: Barrū 1960.

71 Mevlânzade Rifat wrote his book *Türkiye inḳılābının iç yüzü* (The hidden face of the Turkish coup) in Ottoman Turkish, and published it in Aleppo in 1929 through *Maṭbaʿat al-Waqt*. He was included among some 150 personae non gratae after the failed attempt to assassinate Atatürk in 1926. For the Arabic translation of this work, see Rifat 1992. See also, regarding this work and its author, Herzog 2016.

72 See the foreword by Muḥammad Šafiq Ġurbāl in Barrū 1960.

the European colonialist powers, at a time when the Arabic-speaking regions still suffered under the yoke of European colonialism.

Similarly, Atatürk was not viewed so positively among the early supporters of pan-Islamism. After Atatürk abolished the caliphate in 1924, this group washed their hands of him. Among them was Prince Shakib Arslan, who in 1908 had taken part in the war between Italy and Libya alongside Atatürk. He also later met with him in Berlin in 1917. After the war and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Arslan joined the ranks of the traditionalists and Arab nationalists, and had a close relationship with Muḥibb ad-Dīn al-Ḫaṭīb, in whose journal *al-Fatḥ* he published articles which were highly critical of Atatürk.[73]

To conclude my observations on the portrayal of Atatürk in the Arabic discourse of this period, I would like to highlight the fact that his representation as Jewish or Dönme is absent from this discourse. This includes the work of Shakib Arslan after his break with the Unionists and at the height of his criticism of Atatürk's policies at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, in which he spoke of Ankara as having done away with Islamic principles and destroyed the soul of Islam, and described the Kemalist government as atheist.[74] Even the picture that Muhammad Rashid Rida conjures in an article[75] of the conspiratorial enemy Jew was at this point yet to cast its shadow over the image of Atatürk. Instead, Rida literally says that Atatürk was 'a Muslim, born and raised'.[76]

5. The Representation of the Atatürkian Past in Arabic Discourse during the Turkish War of Independence, 1919–1923

In contrast to the foregoing, what we find in Arabic discourse from the first two decades of the twentieth century, and especially during the Turkish War of Independence, is a representation of Atatürk as an undisputed hero. His heroism in this war resonated in many Arabic-speaking regions, which rejoiced at his victories.[77] For example, the journalists Amīn Saʿīd and (1891–1967) and Karīm Ḫalīl Ṯābit (d. 1964) published a book in which they presented a brief biography of Atatürk, before giving a detailed account of the Turkish War of Independence with total focus on Atatürk's leading role and heroic successes.[78]

This image is perhaps most clearly displayed in the panegyric 88-line poem on Atatürk victories by Ahmed Shawqi (1868–1932), one of the most celebrated poets of

73 See Cleveland 1982, 2–3. See also the articles that Shakib Arslan published in *al-Fatḥ*, which were collected and published in Ībiš, Ḥūrī and ʿArīḍa 2011, e.g. 212–4, 269–71, 300–2.

74 Of Arlsan's articles in *al-Fatḥ*, see for example issue 53 from 14/7/1927, issue 54 from 21/7/1927, and issue 58 from 18/8/1928.

75 Muḥammad Rašid Riḍā, 1929.

76 Arslān 1937, 316–7.

77 Riḍā notes that the King of the Hijaz represented an exception to this trend. See Riḍā 1922, 714.

78 Saʿīd and Ṯābit 1922.

Atatürk's time. In the best known lines of the poem, frequently repeated by the newspapers of the day, the poet compares Atatürk to one of the key heroes of early Islamic history, Khalid ibn al-Walid: 'God is great! What a wondrous victory. Khalid of the Turks, restore to us Khalid the Arab!'[79]

In the same poem, Shawqi compares Atatürk to another Arab hero, who features equally prominently in the collective memory of the Arabs, namely Saladin (Ṣallāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī). Before this poem was composed, shortly after the Turkish victory against Greece and the recapture of İzmir in 1922, a picture of Atatürk with Saladin and the Sheikh of the Libyan Senussi Sufi order was widely circulated.[80] The line in question runs as follows: 'You follow in the footsteps of Saladin, in times of slaughter both uncouth and unjust.'[81]

Shawqi's opinion of Atatürk was unchanged by the former *Šayḫ al-Islam* Mustafa Sabri's poem and open letter in response, in which he described Shawqi as ignorant.[82]

In the context of the War of Independence itself, we do not encounter in Arabic texts a representation of Atatürk as a traitor to Sultan Vahideddin and collaborator with the English, as we do in many later texts. Rather we find Rashid Rida speaking of 'the great man' with 'vaulting ambition',[83] whose soldiers are as brave as lions.[84] Rida did not change his stance on the matter even when the Ankara government issued a decree on 1st November 1923, according to which Sultan Vahideddin was stripped of all political authority – that is, the sultanate – while retaining the formal position of the caliphate.[85] Instead, Rida declared the Ankara government's removal of Sultan Vahideddin to be legitimate, since it was his government that was a signatory to the Treaty of Sèvres on 10th August 1920, which put an end to the Ottoman Empire. Rida therefore held that political authority lay with the high national council in Ankara.[86]

We can explain the above reactions of Arabs – and of Muslims in general, such as the Muslims of India, for example – as a celebration of the fact that the Turkish victory was also a blow against their common enemy, namely the English and French, who subjected numerous Arabic-speaking and Muslims regions to their occupation. We

79 The original Arabic: *Allāhu akbaru kam fi l-fatḥi min ʿağabin // yā Ḫālida t-Turki ğaddid Ḫālida l-ʿArabi*. This poem was first published in *al-Ahrām* on 24th October 1923. See also Šawqī 2009, vol. 1. 55–9.

80 See Mizrahi, 2003, 145–6. Here too I would like to thank Professor Jamal Barut for bringing this information to my attention.

81 The original Arabic: *Ḥaḏawta ḥaḏwa ṣ-Ṣallāhiyyīna fi zamanin // fihi l-qitālu bilā šarʿin wa-lā adabi*.

82 See Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī, "*Ḫiṭāb maftūḥ li-amīr aš-šuʿarāʾ Aḥmad Šawqī Bāy*", *al-Muqaṭṭam*, 27 October 1923. When the caliphate was abolished, Shawqi expressed his own and the generalised sense of shock in another poem, which he published in *al-Aḫbār* on 15th April 1924, with the title 'The Caliph of Islam' (Arabic: *ḫilāfat al-Islām*), in which he called for persons of intelligence in Ankara to rein in Atatürk. See Hassan 2018, 142–5.

83 Arslān 1937, 318.

84 See Riḍā 1922, 716.

85 See Ardiç 2012, esp. 254–6; Hassan 2018, 194–6.

86 See Riḍā 1922, 718.

must not, however, overlook the fact that these texts are born of a particular context, in which the principle of loyalty to the institution of the caliphate – even after the abolition of the sultanate and curtailment of the authority of the caliph – was still a powerful part of Muslim consciousness at the time, prominently manifested by the thought and activity underlying the pan-Islamic movement.[87] It is from this perspective that we can best explain the rise of the Khilafat movement in India and the large amount of financial assistance sent to Atatürk by India's Muslims during the War of Independence.

During this period, Arab nationalist thought was still in its infancy, having not yet crystalised into a pan-Arabist independence movement. Rather, many of those who were later seen as pioneers of Arab nationalism were at this stage to be found within the pan-Islamic movement, and the changes that they proposed – such as the establishment of a decentralised regime – were envisaged as remaining within the institution of the caliphate. As noted above, Arslan theorised a regime based on two institutions: the caliphate and the sultanate. In this system the caliph Abdul Hamid would retain for himself spiritual authority, while earthly matters (politics and the armed forces) were entrusted to his sultan, Imam Yahya in Yemen. Note in this connection that Arslan was a supporter of a decentralised administration, which would give the Arabs administrative independence. For his part, Rashid Rida, who in 1920 headed the Syrian-Arab conference, wrote to Atatürk after his victory in the War of Independence with a proposal for an Arab–Turkish confederacy.[88] Rida had previously made the same proposal to the Unionist government during a visit he made to Istanbul shortly after the removal of Abdul Hamid II in 1909, advertising the idea in elite political circles while he was there. Atatürk was by no means dismissive of the idea – at least to the extent that the policy aligned with his own interests. Arslan states that Yunus Nadi, head of the foreign affairs committee in Ankara and owner of the Cumhuriyet newspaper, had written to him a little while after Rida's letter to Atatürk offering him a 'policy of fraternity'.[89]

87 The label "pan-Islamsim" acknowledges that this was a political movement whose goal was to establish a political entity uniting all the world's Muslims on the basis of a religious link. Intellectually, this movement is linked to the thinker Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), politically to Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918), and historically to the reality of the expansion of Western colonialism in the Middle East and Indian Subcontinent at the end of the nineteenth century (the Russo–Turkish War and the heavy defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1877; France's occupation of Tunisia in 1881; Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882). For more information on this point, see Browne 2005.

88 Arslān 1937, 434–7.

89 Ibid., 318. There is a view which holds that Atatürk himself was at this time still influenced by the ideas of the Committee of the Ottoman Union, as evidenced by his determination to maintain Ottoman control of western Tripoli, his volunteering in the war to defend it, and his dealings with the Sheikh of the Senussi order in Libya. There was even a photograph of him in traditional Libyan dress that circulated at the time. For more on this view, see Kreiser 2008, 65–7. The photograph in question can be viewed at the following address: URL: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530679986.r=Atat%C3%BCrk?rk=107296;4 (29 July 2022).

Moreover, in a letter to Talaat Pasha, dated 29th February 1920, Atatürk mentions that he himself had discussed the idea of establishing a confederacy with Arab delegations including some close allies of Prince Faisal, and found the idea to be feasible, despite the need for caution in dealings with Faisal, whose political plans were likely devised with the help of the French.[90]

6. Conclusion

The present article has first offered an examination of the way in which Atatürk is represented in Arabic discourse. It has shown that his depiction in the texts in question is neither unitary nor static, and the process through which this image was constructed was not concluded by the texts written during his lifetime, nor did it end with his death. Rather, this process of image construction has continued until the present day. By means of a complex process of remembering, via the interaction of the text / author with social and political, internal and external variables, this process of image construction produces a new representation in every new context.

Secondly, drawing on the work of the German historian Jörn Rüsen on the concept of historical culture, this article has investigated the practical presence – and instrumentalization – of the past (here the Atatürkian past) in the present and political and cultural life of a society (here Arab society). In so doing, it has shed light on the normative dimension (in Jan Assmann's terms) acquired by texts at all stages.

The process of constructing a normative past consists of various mechanisms, some of which are employed in a number of our texts. These include what German historian Dietmar Rothermund calls the selective interpretation of tradition. By this he means that, by returning to the past (whether of events, people, or ideas), a carefully selected part of this tradition is rewritten or reanalysed in a particular way, and then reintroduced into the collective memory to be used thereafter in the process of constructing a shared identity for the group.[91] The selective interpretation of tradition is then often accompanied by what Tarif Khalidi refers to as conscious or unconscious omissions, by means of which any part of the tradition which is not in conformity with the normative past aspired to can be marginalised or excluded.[92] Some of our texts also indulge in distortion, demonisation, and character assassination, while others are tantamount to hagiography. As a result of all this, collective memory becomes, in the words of Peter Burke,[93] a vessel whose contents are determined by political and ideological forces – which also determine what is discarded and thus forgotten.[94]

90 I would here like to thank Alp Yenen for providing me with information concerning this letter, which was published in Yalcın and Kocahanoğlu 2002, 211–2.
91 See Rothermund 1989, esp. 144.
92 See Khalidi 1997, XI.
93 Burke 1991, esp. 289.
94 For more on this topic, see Le Goff 1988.

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