

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Six-Day Speech of 1927: Defining the Official Historical View of the Foundation of the Turkish Republic

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ABSTRACT *The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 as a modern nation-state. The years preceding this, 1919 to 1922, are seen by the Turks as the years of their struggle for independence (millî mücadele), led by Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938), later known as Atatürk and the first president of the republic. On October 15–20, 1927, Kemal presented his famous six-day speech (Nutuk) at the General Congress of the Republican Party, giving his own account of the War of Independence. This essay analyzes the role this speech plays in defining the official historical view of the foundation of the Turkish Republic.*

Introduction

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. The years preceding this, 1919 to 1922, are viewed by Turks as the years of their struggle for independence (*millî mücadele*). As a result of this struggle, the Turkish state (*devlet*) was rebuilt in a totally new form, as a republic, in spite of the partition schemes of the victorious Allies during and after World War I. The Ottoman Empire had fought the First World War in alliance with Germany, and the Allies were prepared to split the Ottoman territories among them. Ultimately, this scheme came to nothing since the Turks rose in arms, and Britain and France were not ready to start a full-scale war in Anatolia. Thus, the Turkish War of Independence meant a war with Greek forces trying to enlarge Greek territory in western Anatolia. This battle was won by the Turks, securing Anatolia as a whole as a Turkish state.

The Anatolian resistance movement was led by Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938), later known as Atatürk. He managed to unite various organizations that were established throughout Anatolia in an effort to prevent an Armenian state from being constructed in eastern Anatolia. In the long run, Mustafa Kemal also managed to organize a regular army capable of fighting the army of the sultan and the Greek forces. During and after the struggle for independence, Kemal gathered political power for himself, declared

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a republic, and ended the 600-year-old Ottoman dynasty, as well as the institutions of the sultanate and the caliphate. Atatürk became the first president of the newly founded state. On October 15–20, 1927, Kemal presented his famous six-day speech (Nutuk) at the General Congress of the Republican Party, giving his own account of the War of Independence. This essay will analyze the speech as a central factor in defining the official historical view of the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

Some students familiar with modern Turkish history may find this effort to be somewhat conservative. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the struggle for independence have been, and still are, the subject of an enormous quantity of research. Studies focusing on Atatürk and Kemalism are published every year, and Atatürk's famous Nutuk is used as the most important source in nearly all of them. As the Dutch historian of modern Turkey Erik J. Zürcher has stated, the Nutuk was presented by Atatürk as the true history of the period of 1919 to 1927, and by and large, this claim has been accepted in Turkey as well as abroad.¹ With this knowledge in mind, it can be said that there are two possible ways of using the Nutuk in historical research. The first and the most commonly used is to see the Nutuk as a source, capable of being empirical evidence for various arguments. This is how the speech has been used in most of the studies about Atatürk and the struggle for independence. The other way to approach the Nutuk is to see it as the focus of the study. This means that the goal of the study is the analysis of the Nutuk as a narrative text and as a representation of history.

It is somewhat surprising how little academic research falls into the latter category. The studies focusing on the Nutuk as a narrative text and as a representation of history hardly reach half a dozen. In this article some of the best are cited, namely, Taha Parla's *Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Resmî Kaynakları Cilt 1: Atatürk'ün Nutuk'u* [The Official Sources of Turkey's Political Culture, Volume 1: Atatürk's Great Speech],² Aysel Morin's "Crafting a Nation: The Mythic Construction of the New Turkish National Identity in Atatürk's Nutuk,"³ and Hülya Adak's "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal."⁴

This study takes the position that the thesis of nationalism as a social construction should be taken seriously. The conception of shared history is at the core of the collective identity of each particular community. It is fairly commonly acknowledged that modern nation-states include something that can be called an official view of history. This manifests itself in public presentations of history, in the official institutions of the state and in their self-conception, and in public rituals and commemorations. This essay analyzes how this official history in the case of the Republic of Turkey is defined by Atatürk's six-day speech in 1927. This is done by asking how the Nutuk works as a myth of the rebirth of a nation and how it presents the struggle for independence as an effort accomplished by the Turkish nation to construct a Turkish nation-state through descriptions of the internal enemy and the national will.

The analysis is based on the conviction that texts do not just reflect reality but as a matter of fact to a large degree construct that reality. This is not to say that the Turkish

struggle for independence did not exist outside the language, but it is to say that those things have a meaning only through the medium of language. In Turkey, the language and speech echoed most strongly was that of Kemal Atatürk. That is why the official view of the history of the foundation of the Turkish Republic is constituted in Atatürk's Nutuk.

Nutuk as an Account of the Rebirth of a Nation

Mustafa Kemal began his epic speech by describing how he, when landing at the Black Sea coast town of Samsun, saw before him his fatherland, the Ottoman Empire, being defeated in the First World War, in a state of humility. Kemal also portrayed how the people were exhausted and in poverty, the burden of the long years of war on their shoulders. Right after this, he named those responsible for the situation:

The group of powers, to which the Ottoman Empire was one, has been defeated in the Great War. The Ottoman Army has been surrendered in all directions and an armistice with harsh terms has been signed. During the years of Great War, the people were exhausted and driven to poverty. Those who had sent their nation to war have now escaped, their only anxiety being their own welfare. Vahdettin, the one carrying the titles of Sultan and Caliph, degenerated; only dreaming of the ways to save his throne. The government under the grand vizirate of Damat Ferit Paşa, without honor, frightened and incompetent, under the command of the sultan and in the same boat as him, ready to accept anything for the sake of their lives.⁵

This first description is very characteristic of the whole speech. Kemal did not give any reasons for the participation of the Ottoman Empire in the Great War. Additionally, the opening of the speech presented a view seen by Kemal in May 1919, defining the very moment as the collapse of an empire; after that, the narrative is told from the personal perspective of Mustafa Kemal's own actions. In this description, the Ottoman Empire is defeated with no reasons given to further explain why. The wartime politicians' motives were not included; they escaped and abandoned the country, leaving it in the hands of incompetents. This was the way in which the Nutuk presented the timeframe—the crucial moment of end of the Ottoman state. Everything was now set for the story of the nation's rebirth.

Yet what kind of a narrative is the Nutuk? Hülya Adak points out that the Nutuk is a linear presentation of the historical events that started in 1919, but as a story it does not include any development or maturation of the narrator himself. The speech is more like a cyclical narration of the narrator himself, who has prophet-like knowledge and an inner call to save his nation. This static narration also characterizes also the narrator's "other" (the degenerated sultan and the incompetent government), in which neither is developed but remains throughout as the narrator's enemy.⁶ Furthermore, Taha Parla emphasizes that the Nutuk depicted its narrator as staying

the same right from the beginning, knowing the course of events from the start. In accordance with this knowledge, the national struggle was destined to succeed. According to Parla, what matures during the narrative, or rather, what is developed by the narrator, is the nation itself. Parla here uses an interesting metaphor, namely, the self-development novel (*bildungsroman*); in this national development novel, the hero is society, but the original hero is the narrator of the story, the "I" (Atatürk) who has an inner vision of the latent developmental ability of his people.⁷ It is true that the first-person narrative led to a situation where all the action of the struggle for independence was vested to Atatürk. All other characters in the narrative were placed in two opposing categories: those who were with him and those who were against him.

In Kemal's account, the Ottoman Empire was in its death throes in 1919, the army existed only in name, and no one except him knew where salvation could be. It was strongly emphasized that the army and the people were altogether unaware of the sultan's treachery and were faithful to him, stemming from a centuries-old tradition. As a reference to himself, Kemal also stated that those who even considered handling the situation without the guidance of the sultan were immediately considered as infidels and traitors. Kemal wrote:

The enemy states were attacking the Ottoman State materially and psychologically; they were determined to partition it. The person carrying the titles of the sultan and caliph was only anxious to save his own life. The government was behaving similarly. The people left without guidance waited in darkness, anticipating an unknown future. Those who began to understand the horrible situation were contemplating the ways of salvation, turning to those tools familiar to them. The army existed only in name. The officers were exhausted after the Great War, while the terrible situation before them was tearing their hearts out, and still they were searching the ways to salvation. Here I want to stress one important thing. The army and the people were altogether unaware of the treachery of the sultan-caliph. They were attached to these institutions by their soul, an affection based on a tradition of several centuries. The people could not even consider their salvation without the guidance of the sultan-caliph.⁸

According to Kemal, it was a common stance for both the elites and the masses to believe that in searching for salvation one should not irritate European powers and should also remain loyal to the sultan. In this situation, proposals for action included seeking the protection of Great Britain or the United States, as well as the more independent but altogether destructive idea of each region trying to save itself. Kemal was, according to the narrative, opposed to these proposals. They were based on a false assumption of the enemies' desire to keep the empire intact. In his account, Kemal depicts these wishes as untrue. Kemal writes: "The Ottoman state had already been partitioned. What still existed was a handful of fatherland protected by the Turks."⁹

In Kemal's depiction, the Ottoman state no longer existed; there was only the fatherland (*ata yurt*). It is interesting that Kemal in this particular sentence did not use the common term *vatan* for fatherland. For many of his compatriots, "*vatan*" still had a strong connotation with the Ottoman Empire, while Kemal here wanted to emphasize that fatherland was something else. It still existed, even though the Ottoman Empire had collapsed. This sentence also makes clear how the Nutuk, from the perspective of 1927, conceptualized fatherland as something that was to be protected specifically by the *Turks*. The fatherland saved in the troubled years of 1919 to 1922 was the land of the *Turks*. Right after this, the Nutuk presented the message that has been taken as its basic historical truth: in this situation, there was only one possible conclusion. It was the founding of a totally new—in every aspect independent—Turkish state, based on the principle of national self-determination: "Gentleman, in this situation there was only one possible solution. That was the creation of the fully independent new Turkish State." ("*Efendiler, bu durum karşısında bir tek karar alınabilirdi. O da millet egemenliğine dayanan, kısıntısız, koşulsuz, bağımsız yeni Türk Devleti kurmak.*")¹⁰

In 1919, the Ottoman state was, according to Kemal, full of different political associations, all aiming to influence postwar political development. Some of these organizations, for example, the so-called Society for the Friends of England (*İngiliz Muhipler Cemiyeti*), were working with the enemy, trying to eliminate "the national consciousness" (*millî şuuru*).¹¹ What was this "national consciousness" in the context of 1919? Did it even exist? According to the Turkish historian Baskın Oran, national consciousness was nonexistent in the beginning but came into fruition as an outcome of Mustafa Kemal's actions during the struggle for independence. In Oran's view, a movement is to be called nationalistic only if its goal is an independent nation-state. This of course is a bit of a problematic stance, but Oran continues with the more relevant assertion that the independent nation-state was Mustafa Kemal's goal from the beginning, though not the goal of the Anatolian peasants or even that of the landlords and merchants. These groups were ready to act, to the degree they did, in line with Kemal because of the territorial demands of the Anatolian Christian minorities, namely, the Armenians and Greeks. The resistance organizations established in different places in Anatolia were not born out of the occupation schemes made by the Allies but in response to the threat felt in the face of the demands for land and property in Anatolia by the Christian minorities.¹²

Oran's claim about the reasons that set Anatolian Muslims in action is basically correct. It should not, however, be understood in the way that Oran himself proposes. Oran makes the claim that Turkish national consciousness was born in the modern nation-state sense during the years of the independence struggle. Yet it seems more likely that the possibility for an ethnically Turkish national consciousness as a collective identity for the masses was born only after Mustafa Kemal defined the struggle of 1919 to 1922 as struggle fought by the *Turks* and as a collective effort to save the Turkish state as an independent nation-state in his Great Speech.

Oran is, however, correct in emphasizing that contrary to often-heard interpretations, the Anatolian resistance movement was not ethnically homogenous. The

program of the resistance movement, *Misakı millî* (National Pact), does not speak of Turks but uses the phrase “*osmanlı-Islam ekseriyet*,” namely, the Ottoman-Muslim majority. For example, Circassians, in addition to rebelling against Kemal, also formed an important part of the “national forces” of the Ankara government. Oran further states that under the circumstances of a multi-front war, the resistance movement was bound to use pluralistic methods in the government as well as in choosing its allies. This meant cooperation with non-Turks.¹³

Though it is presumed that in speaking in his 1927 speech about national consciousness Kemal intended Turkish national consciousness, no such thing in the meaning of mass movement existed from 1919 to 1922. The Turkish term “*millet*,” which is the key term in the context of national consciousness, was commonly understood to refer to the national and religious rights of the Ottoman-Muslim community from 1919 to 1922. The phrase “*osmanlı-Islam ekseriyet*” (Ottoman-Muslim majority) in the “National Pact” from the years of the struggle for independence strongly supports the claim that people then felt they were fighting to preserve the Ottoman state. It was only after Atatürk in his Great Speech included this document as a part of the Nutuk’s systematic narrative of the Turkish nation and the birth of the Republic of Turkey that this document, and the making of it, came to be seen as part of Turkish and Republican national consciousness.

This talk about “national consciousness” (*millî şuuru*) is best understood in the context of the analysis of the Nutuk’s narrative character. In her own article, Hülya Adak asserts that the speech is most of all a mythical narrative of the rebirth of a nation. Also, Adak states that in the speech the Anatolian resistance movement of 1919 to 1922 is depicted not as an effort to save parts of the Ottoman Empire but as a struggle to create the Turkish Republic.¹⁴ The idea of the speech as a mythical narrative of the rebirth of a nation is very useful, at least as a heuristic device. When Kemal in 1927 spoke about national consciousness, this must be understood within the discourse of national rebirth. This national rebirth is precisely the rebirth of a Turkish nation from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. There did not exist a Turkish national consciousness among the masses in the years of 1919 to 1922, but Kemal strived to develop this consciousness in the Nutuk by depicting enemies of the resistance movement—for example, those involved in the Society for the Friends of England—as trying to eliminate “national consciousness.”

As Adak further points out, practically all nations have their mythical self-narrations, but nowadays many of them have been put under scrutiny by academic research. In Turkey, the Nutuk as this kind of narrative has largely been ignored by critical scholarship. Adak gives a relevant clue as to why this is the case. Atatürk presented the events of the independence struggle through his own activity as a first-person narrative of the saving of his nation. Because this speech became hegemonic in the public understanding of how the Turkish Republic was created—depicting Kemal as the hero of the War of Independence and the father of the republic—the whole nation is defined through his person. As a consequence of this, the text (Nutuk), the man (Mustafa Kemal), and the nation (Turkish nation) together form wholeness. To critically analyze one part of this three-sided unity causally leads to

an evaluation of the two others. This means that critical analysis of the Nutuk is seen as a critical analysis of Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish nation/nation-state. This is too radical an act for many Turks who are anxious about the national unity of the country.¹⁵

Perhaps it is suitable to stress here that the Nutuk's position as a still-dominant base of the official historical view is not dependent on the state of the official ideology, namely, Kemalism. Kemalism (or *Atatürkçülük*) as an ideology has been interpreted on both ends of the political spectrum in many—sometimes contradictory—ways since the 1960s. During the 1990s, many of the intellectual elite declared that Kemalism was outdated and could no longer serve as an ideological base for Turkish society. It is altogether a different case when the publicly accepted official view of history is under discussion. This Republican view of history is not dependent on Kemalism. The Nutuk's definitions regarding a unified nation are part of the problematic attitude towards Turkey's ethnic minorities; that is, Kurds and Armenians.

The Nutuk included Kemal's presentation of those thoughts with which he started the workings of the Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*). First, it was stated that Kemal had become convinced that the governing methods of the Ottoman state could no longer serve as the guidelines for the new Turkey. This was followed by a social-Darwinian description about societies' struggle for life, describing how the peoples of the East first attacked the peoples of the West. This was, according to Kemal's account, one of the turning points of history. He further claimed that it was common knowledge that of the Eastern peoples, the Turks were one of the strongest. As a matter of fact, the Turks before and after Islam had attacked the interior parts of Europe. After briefly mentioning the Arab attacks on Spain and the borders of France, Kemal came to his conclusion: "Gentlemen, an attack is always followed by a counterattack. If one is not prepared for this, the result is defeat."¹⁶

Kemal continued his presentation to the congress by recalling the kingdom of Attila, stretching all the way to the lands of the Romans, after which he described how the Ottoman state was founded on the ruins of Seljuk Empire and soon conquered Byzantium. Some of the Ottoman sultans had desired to be emperors of the whole Islamic world (*bütün İslâm dünyasını*), while some others wanted to rule both the Islamic world and Europe. According to Kemal, the West's counterattack, the internal rebellions of the Islamic world, and the impossibility of harmonizing different peoples in union led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ This was followed by the definition of the internally strong state. Kemal wrote:

Gentlemen, the state's foreign policy's most important base is the inner structure of that state. Foreign policy must be in harmony with the inner structure of the state. The inner structure of the state, including many cultures and national characters, different aspirations, and disharmonious peoples with their contradictory wishes, is undoubtedly without a solid ground and therefore rotten. In a situation like this, the foreign policy of the state cannot be on a safe foundation.

Because the inner structure of a state like this is not national, its political system cannot be national. As a result of this, the policies of the Ottoman state were not national, but personal and ephemeral.¹⁸

This was Atatürk's conception of the nation-state and its value presented in a crystallized form: only a state with a solid internal structure could hope to have a strong foreign policy and external security. An internally strong state is possible only when the state is cohesive, and cohesiveness is achieved when the state is a political organization of one nation; that is, a nation-state. This was how the Nutuk worked as a myth of the rebirth of a nation. It brought to the surface the mistakes of the Ottoman period in view of the interests of the nation and presented a conception of the Turkish nation as a force that when cohesive not only enlivened the internal structures of the state but was also capable of resisting the external enemy. Thus, the Nutuk clearly made the point that the nation stayed the same during the transitional phase from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. Interpreting the Nutuk as a myth of rebirth is useful because it permits an understanding of the idea provided by speech, that the history of the Turkish nation did not begin with the founding of the Republic, but that the nation was reborn when it took the government of the state into its own hands from the personal rule of the sultan. In the Nutuk, Mustafa Kemal was the primary mover that set this latent development trend in motion.

As noted earlier, according to Baskın Oran, the Turkish struggle for independence of 1919 to 1922 was transformed, as result of Atatürk's determined action, from a movement that aimed to defend the traditional rights of the Anatolian Muslim community into a nationalistic movement aiming to secure an independent Turkish nation-state. Again, according to Oran, as a result of Atatürk's determination, the national congresses abandoned the idea of a mandate under the Great Powers and adopted as their principle the slogan "Independence Now!" (*Derhal Bağımsızlık!*).¹⁹ It seems that Oran here makes the claim that by adopting the "Independence Now!" principle, the national congresses were transformed into a nationalist movement aiming to achieve an independent Turkish nation-state. However, it can be argued that the idea of an independent Turkish nation-state as a goal of these national congresses was an idea that was constructed in Atatürk's Nutuk, a conception that was later adopted by ethnic Turks, Oran included.

Kemal said in his speech that communication with the Istanbul government was difficult because the government did not open a direct line between Ankara and the sultan, in this way preventing the will and wishes of the nation from being delivered to the sultan. Kemal continued by explaining that the Istanbul government formed a barrier between the people and its sovereign, also inciting people to kill each other. In this context, Kemal used the phrase "our national movement" and blamed the government for its way of presenting this movement as illegal.²⁰ This is a fine example how the Nutuk created an image of the nation in transition, while the truth is that neither during the period described nor during the Great Speech were people actually part of a "movement." They were certainly not acting to

support the nationalists. Like Oran points out, only those landlords and merchants who had much to lose if Anatolia was split among the Allies were active. Even members of this group made deals with the enemy if it suited their interests at the moment.²¹

As a result of the Erzurum Congress (July 23–August 7, 1919), a popular representative congress of the seven most eastern Anatolian provinces aiming to unify the decisions of the local “Defense of the National Rights Organizations of the Eastern Provinces” (Vilayati Şarkiye Müdafaa-i Hukuku Milliye Cemiyeti) and opposed to the Armenian territorial demands in these provinces, the so-called Representative Committee (Heyeti Temsiliye) was created. Mustafa Kemal was selected as a spokesman, though not without criticism. Kemal himself stated in his speech that his leadership was necessary because he did not trust the ability of the loose congresses, such as the one gathered in Erzurum, to work effectively enough. This is something Kemal openly admitted in his speech. Here, as in many other places, Kemal turned to history to back his arguments. He said the following:

Gentlemen, history proves it undisputedly, that success in great efforts requires one determined and capable leader. As the whole elite of the state was in despair and feeling powerless ... as the whole nation was in the dark without a leader, as everyone was calling himself a patriot, the thoughts and workings of thousands of people were being presented in the meetings, everyone tight in various motives and memories ... could this lead to the destination so hard to achieve? Does history show us any one case where events had turned out right this way?²²

This paragraph shows not only the idea of a universal history that Kemal had adopted but also his conclusions about history, namely, from the French Revolution. As many scholars have noted, Kemal was deeply interested in the history of the French Revolution, taking lessons from it to guide his own work. He also admired Napoleon, though not without reservations. Kemal was, first and foremost, a positivist, and the positivist motto “order and progress” portrayed well his vision of how to modernize society. Kemal did not want to see Turkey in the hands of various committees, easily falling to anarchy. It was his major concern that there be one single leader at the head of the movement, someone vested with the ability to know how the destination was to be reached. This leadership he had early on booked for himself.

This is a fine place to point out that the Nutuk provides a view of history that in two interdependent ways expresses the idea of one universal history. First of all, Mustafa Kemal’s own worldview included the idea of a general history constituted by the continuous actions of humankind. The Turks were definitely part of this universal history, and during Kemal’s own lifetime they were to join the progress generated by this universal historical movement, which most clearly manifested itself in the scientific and technological civilization of Europe. On the other hand, the Nutuk presented the Turkish nation’s struggle for independence as a single

series of events, led by Mustafa Kemal himself, giving birth to the Turkish Republic, as foreseen by Kemal. In this narrative, the contradiction between real events and various aspirations vanished from sight. The years of the struggle for independence were viewed from a single perspective, this way constituting one history of the Turkish War of Independence, which as a part of universal history displays the position of the Turkish nation in progressive civilization. Even though the idea of universal history as a part of Kemal's worldview offers a context in which to understand the Turkish struggle for independence, this context is very arbitrary. According to the picture provided by the Nutuk, the Turks' history as a nation re-began in 1919. The 600-year-old Ottoman period, as well as the Turks' role in Islamic civilization, was pushed aside as irrelevant in this narrative of the rebirth of a nation.

Thus far, it has been shown that the possibility of the birth of a "national movement" in the sense that Atatürk meant in his 1927 speech was born only with that very speech. In the context of the year 1927, after victory in the War of Independence and the period after the founding of the republic, when Kemalist elites abandoned Islam as a ground for collective identity, the national movement as a formula of the speech meant the national movement of the Turkish nation. The Turkish nation was now to become the base of the collective identity, and Atatürk's Nutuk provides a meaningful account and solid historical presentation of these efforts. It seems that everything speaks on behalf of the claim that the possibility of national consciousness for the Turkish masses was provided by Atatürk's Nutuk. It was only after Atatürk in the Nutuk had shown that the fights of 1919 to 1922 constituted the struggle for independence for the Turkish nation that this kind of conception was able to spread to society. As noted earlier, the speech became The Speech; it took its place as the official view of history provided by the state to its citizens. The Nutuk's view of history was reprinted in an endless stream of schoolbooks and official publications and in the media in general. The Nutuk became a narrative told by the community to itself, presenting the true story how the Turkish nation was reborn and how it built its own nation-state through a fight that was obviously justified.

Nutuk's Descriptions of the Enemy Within and the Will of the Nation

After naming the most important enemy within, namely, the degenerated sultan and the incompetent government, the internal enemies were defined. These included the Christian minorities living in the empire who were described as being complicit in an effort to break down the Ottoman state. Atatürk wrote: "In addition, in all corners of the country, the Christian minorities were showing their personal ambitions, this way working to destroy the Ottoman State."²³ Christian minorities were accused of plotting with the worst internal apostates, the members of the Society for the Friends of England, and with the Freedom and Concord Party (*Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası*).²⁴ The actions taken by the Christian minorities were not often mentioned in the speech. The point is that they were immediately identified in the beginning as

splitters of the state, and later on, Armenians and Greeks were accused of attacking Muslims. In many cases, these descriptions of Christians oppressing the Muslims were given as a response to the Allies' accusations of maltreatment of Christians in Anatolia.

The Nutuk also included a range of descriptions of various officials, politicians, and men of religion who were presented in the category of internal enemy. These are people who opposed the stand taken by Mustafa Kemal and as a result were defined by him as apostates, despicable beings only concerned with their own well-being. It is fair to say here that often the people depicted as renegades understood the situation differently and behaved rationally and on the basis of their knowledge. They decided to cooperate with the Allies in the hope that in so doing they could save at least something of the Ottoman Empire and avoid the continuance of war.

Aysel Morin approaches the Nutuk as a mythic narrative by analyzing the speech in light of the ancient writings of Turkish culture. Morin's article "Crafting a Nation: The Mythic Construction of the New Turkish National Identity in Atatürk's Nutuk" concentrates on analyzing the speech through the lens of myths presented in the so-called Orkhon inscriptions from the sixth century. According to Morin, Atatürk used these myths, or reformulations of them, in his Great Speech. The four symbols picked by Morin include: ancestors; the internal enemy; the siege; and modern Europe. Through these symbols, Mustafa Kemal was able to present the struggle for independence as a defense of the most salient values of the Turks. Morin's article is valuable most of all because of its ability to show how nationalisms should always be analyzed in their own cultural context, in addition to international comparative analysis. As noted, one of the mythical symbols identified by Morin is the internal enemy. According to Morin, this myth of the internal enemy became part of the political discourse at the Sivas Congress (September 4–11, 1919), which aimed to gather the various local "Defense of Rights Groups" into a single nation-wide organization, as the proponents of a foreign mandate were presented as internal enemies.²⁵

As noted earlier, the category of internal enemy in the Nutuk included from the very beginning the sultan, the government of Damat Ferit Paşa, and the Christian minorities working to split the Ottoman state. In the narrative of the Sivas Congress, the "enemy within" category came to include those who did not have faith in the ability of the Turks to survive without the mandate of one of the Western powers. Some of these enemies had been Kemal's close comrades. The Nutuk provided a long presentation of the polemics and debates of the Sivas Congress concerning the mandate. From among Kemal's original officer comrades, Refet Bele was depicted as a manipulative speaker whose arguments favoring the acceptance of the mandate were, according to Kemal, poisoning the minds of the listeners.²⁶

According to Kemal, the Turkish nation was characterized by the virtues of honor. This meant that the only possibility was independence or death because the Turkish nation living with honor could not accept being a slave to other states.²⁷ Also, Morin states that the personal qualities of those favoring the mandate did not correspond to those characteristics that Kemal defined as being typical for Turks.²⁸ Atatürk's

assertion of independence or death (*ya istiklâl ya ölüm*) is the manifestation of the most absolute claim presented in the Nutuk, namely, the primacy of the idea of freedom and self-sufficiency of the community. Using a formula so typical of other nationalisms, the Nutuk introduced the habit of sanctifying the Turkish nation-state. For the first time, communal core values among the masses were to be concentrated around the abstraction called the nation in a manner that pushed aside loyalty to the Islamic *umma* (nation) or the Ottoman dynasty. In this same context, Kemal also stressed that only a fully independent Turkey could be respected in the eyes of others. In this way, national self-determination was defined as a universal value common to all civilized nations.

Kemal's assertion, that only a fully independent Turkey could be respected by others, led to the descriptions of the will of the nation. Throughout the speech, the resistance movement opposing the Istanbul government was defined as a vehicle with which to materialize the will of the nation. Kemal described the scene in his great speech this way:

I took my turn to speak and I declared loudly: Gentleman, power and sovereignty are not given from one person to another by scholarly debates or polemics. Sovereignty is taken by force. The Ottomans took the sovereignty of the Turkish people by force. These usurpers managed to rule 600 years. Today the Turkish Nation has reclaimed that sovereignty for itself. This is an accomplished fact. There is no need to discuss this further. It is quite desirable that those present here can accept this truth. Otherwise some heads will roll during this process.²⁹

As one analyzes Atatürk's great speech, one must always keep in mind that the documents presented in the text—for example, numerous declarations and telegraph messages—and the interpretation and context given to these documents by Mustafa Kemal are two different things. This may sound like a truism, but it is relevant when analyzing the speech as a narrative and as a representation of history. From his sovereign position in 1927, Kemal could depict the events of 1919 to 1922 according to contemporary needs. The Nutuk was filled with descriptions of the resistance movement as an execution of the will of the nation.

Like Oran has rightly pointed out, the reality of the years of 1919 to 1922 was something different. The Anatolian peasantry needed to be forced to fight against the Istanbul government and the external enemy by the so-called "Independence Tribunals." Much more than supporting Kemal, the peasantry volunteered for the gangs loyal to the sultan.³⁰ One of most urgent tasks to be done in view of achieving the goals set up by Kemal was to replace the so-called "national forces," composed of bandits and irregulars, with the regular army. Despite their name, the national forces were indeed local, without national consciousness. After one local victory, they could have decided that the job was done and dispersed. These bands were also highly unpredictable with regard to Kemal's aspirations, and after one successful mission ordered by Ankara these groups could the very next day turn openly against

Kemal. As Oran points out, it was not possible to achieve national unity with a force like this.³¹

The nation was expressed in the Nutuk as a collective entity with a consciousness and was defined, from the perspective of 1927, precisely as a Turkish, not Ottoman, nation. Kemal stated the following: “The aspiration stemming from the heart of the Turkish nation was the most evident: Salvation ...” (“*Türk milletinin kalbinden, vicdanından doğan ve ilham alan en köklü en belirgin istek ve inancı belli olmuştur: Kurtuluş ...*”)³²

The speech is full of similar descriptions of the resistance movement as the execution of the national will—for example, the telegraph Atatürk sent to the spokesman of the Ottoman parliament that was functioning in Istanbul until spring 1920. Atatürk wrote:

There is no power, no authority that could prevent our nation doing this obligation ordered by history. Only a government enjoying the full confidence of the nation can satisfy the sacred anxiety of this nation, filled with readiness to sacrifice itself for the sake of the independence of the nation and the safety of the fatherland. During these historical days the whole nation waits impatiently that a government expressing the full force of the national will is to be working with utmost determination. In the eyes of history and fatherland, while the whole world is watching you carrying the burden of heavy responsibility, let it be known to you, gentlemen, that if you base your decisions on the sacrificial determination of the nation, and work patriotically, the whole nation stands beside and supports you.³³

This passage includes many interesting expressions. First of all, Kemal stated that the national resistance movement was “an obligation ordered by history” (*bu tarihin emrettiği görev*). This was followed by an assertion that the nation was in “sacred anxiety” (*kutsal heyecanı*). Further, it is noted that these were “historical days” (*bu tarih günlerinde*), when a government enjoying the confidence of the “national will” (*millî iradesi*) should be in power. In the end, it was said that the representatives should execute their mission “in the eyes of history and fatherland” (*vatana ve tarihe karşı*). As noted above, these sentences were part of the telegraph sent to the spokesman of the Ottoman parliament in March 1920. Fully without a reference to the way these phrases were understood at the time, by bringing them as a part of the general overall narrative of the Nutuk, they come to possess a very special meaning. The War of Independence, the founding of the republic, the exaltation of Turkish national culture at the end of the 1920s, and the massive Westernization reforms of the Atatürk period all come to be seen as an “obligation ordered by history.” It is exactly this kind of interpretive context provided by the Nutuk that made the speech so forceful in defining the official view of the history of the Republic of Turkey. In the overall narrative of the Nutuk, each individual event and account of the event pointed toward the new Republic of Turkey emanating from the will of the nation that was born at end of the story.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to first analyze some of the core themes presented in Atatürk's six-day speech and then to approach it as a narrative and representation of history. It has concentrated on the Nutuk's character as a myth of the rebirth of a nation and its presentations of the internal enemy and the will of the nation.

It must be stated that the Nutuk was a grand narrative of the Turkish nation-state. It was an overall account in which the founding of the Turkish Republic received its categorical expression. The culture of the Turkic peoples is stamped with stories and must be one of the largest stores of epics in the world. The Nutuk is in many respects a very fine piece of literature, something that belongs in the curriculum of schoolchildren in Turkey. The Western intellectual atmosphere at end of the twentieth century was filled with speculations about the death of the "grand narratives," a phrase most commonly used to refer to the idea of the bankruptcy of the vision of progress as a meta-explanation of the world. In the Republic of Turkey, this narrative of progress has literally been "situated" in the same piece of text with the story of the struggle for national independence and the rebirth of a nation. This is because Atatürk's Nutuk is a story about a nation taking its place within civilization, as characterized by the Western-dominated world of progress, by the justified struggle to achieve national self-determination.

In his speech, Atatürk presented an account and an explanation of the history of the Turks from a 1927 perspective. This speech brought together an interpretation of history of the Ottoman Empire, an account of the Turkish independence struggle as culmination of the Turkish nation, and a vision of the new Turkey as a progressive nation-state. Kemal Atatürk was the hero of the Turkish War of Independence and the first president of the republic, from 1923 to 1938. As a consequence of his central role, Atatürk and his reforms have been the subject of a massive stream of publications. The scholarship dedicated to analyzing modern Turkey has generally concentrated on Atatürk and on his numerous reforms. In these studies, Atatürk's six-day speech has always been, and still is, the most important single source of what should be included.

In this study, this famous speech has been treated more as a subject in itself rather than as a source of phenomena in the greater world. It is fruitful to analyze the Nutuk as a narrative and as a representation of history because the speech has for so long been working as a fundamental to the official view of the history of the Turkish Republic. When the speech is analyzed as a narrative that constructs identity, it is easier to understand the official definitions of Turkey and its national past and to see how these definitions were born on the level of narration and concepts. This study has only scratched the surface, showing how the speech produced the foundations of the official historical view of the rebirth of a nation and the will of the nation and internal enemy. Final judgments about the position of the Nutuk in today's Turkish society have been avoided, but it is presumed that it still functions as the basis of the official public view of history. It is obvious that in critical scholarly study, at least, the speech is continuously being reevaluated.

Notes

1. Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995), p.183.
2. Taha Parla, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Kültürün Resmî Kaynakları. Cilt 1. Atatürk'ün Nutuk'u* [The Official Sources of Turkey's Political Culture, Volume 1: Atatürk's Great Speech] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1994).
3. Aysel Morin, "Crafting a Nation: The Mythic Construction of the New Turkish National Identity in Atatürk's Nutuk," Presented at the Cornell University Turkish Forum on European Turkey: Modernization, Secularism, and Islam, December 3–4, 2004, available at www.einaudi.cornell.edu/Europe/initiatives/pdf/Morin_Paper.pdf.
4. Hülya Adak, "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (2003), pp. 509–27.
5. *Nutuk* (Istanbul: Kitapzamanı, 2006), p.7.
6. Adak (2003), p.515.
7. Parla (1994), p.30.
8. *Nutuk* (2006), pp.13–14.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.14–15.
10. *Ibid.*, p.15.
11. *Ibid.*, pp.10–11.
12. Baskın Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği. Resmî İdeoloji Dışı bir İnceleme* [Atatürk's Nationalism. A Study Opposing the Official Ideology] (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1997), pp.125–6.
13. *Ibid.*, pp.136–7.
14. Adak (2003), p.516.
15. *Ibid.*, pp.513–17.
16. *Nutuk* (2006), p.343.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.343–4.
18. *Ibid.*, p.344.
19. Oran (1997), p.117.
20. *Nutuk* (2006), p.107.
21. Oran (1997), p.83.
22. *Nutuk* (2006), pp.47–8.
23. *Ibid.*, pp.7–8.
24. "In Istanbul the Freedom and Concord Party, Nigeşban Army Association, and The Society for the Friends of England were forming a block. This block with Ali Kemal and Sait Molla were inciting the Christian minorities to attack the national forces." *Nutuk* (2006), p.197.
25. Morin (2004), p.16.
26. *Nutuk* (2006), pp.77–8.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.15–16.
28. Morin (2004), p.16.
29. *Nutuk* (2006), pp.529–30.
30. Oran (1997), p.82.
31. *Ibid.*, p.129.
32. *Nutuk* (2006), p.281.
33. *Ibid.*, pp.312–13.

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