

Hale Yilmaz. *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016. 352 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8156-3467-6.

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The Turkish republic was founded on October 29, 1923, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as its first president. The Republican People's Party (RPP) was the only political party of the new regime and it ruled the state single-handedly for over two decades (from 1923 until the shift to the multiparty regime in 1946). The single-party era, especially the 1920s and 1930s, witnessed numerous nationalizing and modernizing reforms, also called Kemalist reforms. These reforms, for example the introduction of the Hat Law in 1925 (which obliged all male citizens to wear Western-style, brimmed hats), the adoption of the Swiss civil code and the Italian penal code in 1926, and the adoption of a Latin alphabet in 1928, expanded to all aspects of everyday life, from economics to agriculture, marriage, clothing, and education. Hale Yilmaz revisits some of these reforms and discusses their reception in society by exploring lived experiences. Thus, this book contributes to the growing scholarship on mundane lives and ordinary citizens of the early republican era.[1]

The book focuses on four cases: men's clothing and headwear, women's dress and headgear, the alphabet reform, and national holidays. Yilmaz is not explicit about her reasoning in bringing together these particular cases. However, all of them deal with the body or embodied practices

(e.g., dressing and writing) and greatly influenced the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of gendered individual and collective identities. Thus, analyzed together, these four cases demonstrate social, cultural, and habitual changes experienced at the personal and societal levels. In her analysis, Yilmaz uses multiple sources, including the state archives, contemporary magazines, newspapers and books, oral histories, family photo albums, and contemporary travelers' accounts. By doing so, this book brings together the archival data that is new to the scholarship and sheds light on the Kemalist reforms in everyday lives.

The book is thematically divided into four chapters. The first two chapters concentrate on the body and embodied practices, and explore gendered aspects and experiences of the clothing reforms. Chapter 1 introduces changes in men's clothing and headgear in the late Ottoman period and focuses on the republican clothing reforms, in particular the Hat Law. It demonstrates that there were multiple interpretations and implementations of this law by different state authorities (e.g., the Parliament, police, gendarmerie, and judiciary) and in different geographical areas (e.g., central [i.e., Ankara] and local). Moreover, citizens' attitudes towards and experiences of the hat reform varied. Different factors, including

monetary ones, social class, and religion influenced interpretations of and reactions to the Hat Law. For instance, noncompliance with the Hat Law did not necessarily imply opposition to it, but rather could have been due to the unavailability of Western-style hats in local markets, especially in towns and remote areas, and/or individuals' inability to afford them. Yılmaz also explains that some opponents of this law employed several coping strategies. These included seclusion (i.e., staying at home and not entering the public sphere) and the selective use of clothes. For example, in remote areas of southeastern Anatolia, men continued wearing regional or tribal outfits, and only changed into Western-style clothing and headgear when going to urban areas, where the chances of encountering state authorities and thus of being fined and/or arrested were higher.

Chapter 2 deals with women's dress and the regime's attempt, if not to unveil, then to "modernize" women's looks by replacing the *çarşaf* (black outerwear that consists of a loose top covering the head and upper body and an ankle-length loose skirt) and *peçe* (face veil) with the *manto* (overcoat) and headscarf. However, the state neither clearly articulated women's dress codes nor gave explicit instructions to local authorities for their implementation. Therefore, as Yılmaz illustrates, differences existed in the interpretation and enforcement of dress codes and bans by the center (i.e., Ankara) and by local authorities. This chapter also demonstrates the two levels of domination, that of the state and that of men, that women faced in their clothing and veiling/nonveiling preferences and practices, and thus provides further evidence for the patriarchal characteristics of the single-party regime and its reforms.[2]

Chapter 3 is somewhat misleadingly entitled "Language," because what it actually covers is the implementation and reception of the 1928 alphabet reform (i.e., the abolition of the Arabic script and adoption of a Latin alphabet). It therefore

does not investigate Kemalist reforms of the Turkish language at this time, for example the invention of the Sun Language theory and the purification of Turkish by purging it of non-Turkish, especially Persian and Arabic, loanwords; the creation and development of new words; and the resurrecting of archaic Turkish words. This chapter provides a thorough review of the alphabet reform discussions starting from the late Ottoman period and concentrating on the alphabet reform of the republican era. With the aim of increasing the literacy rate, a variety of state and private institutions, for example the Nation's Schools (*Millet mektepleri*), newspapers, and the army, were all involved in teaching and spreading the use of the new alphabet. However, the transition to a new alphabet was not easy, especially for those who had been literate in Ottoman. They continued using the Ottoman script solely or in conjunction with the new alphabet not only for informal, private matters (e.g., personal notes), but also for formal matters in the public sphere (e.g., police reports). However, as Yılmaz notes, this was not necessarily a form of opposition or resistance to the regime and its reforms, but rather out of habit.

Chapter 4 focuses on national holidays and celebrations, such as April 23 (National Sovereignty and Children's Day), May 19 (Youth and Sports Day), and October 29 (Republic Day). Referring to Eric Hobsbawm's notion of invented traditions, Yılmaz discusses how these holidays helped the regime create a nation-state, form a Turkish national identity, and build a collective historical memory. The chapter gives extensive information on national holidays in the late Ottoman era and compares the objectives and rituals of the Ottoman national holidays to the republican ones (e.g., reciting patriotic poems and staging performances). For instance, April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day (which commemorates the opening of the Grand National Assembly in 1920), shares similarities with several celebrations of the late Ottoman era (e.g. Children's

Day and Students' Day) and underlines the identification of children with the future of the nation-state.

Furthermore, although these were exclusionary events limited to the upper social strata (mostly politicians and public officers), the mixed-gender activities associated with republican national holidays, particularly balls, contributed to the regime's aim of achieving social and cultural change. These activities set an example for modern Turkish couples: men and women dressed in a modern way and, more importantly, unlike in the past, socialized together, for example eating, drinking, listening to Western music, and dancing in a Western style. However, Yılmaz notes that such activities were not always welcomed by society nor readily adopted even by proponents of the regime because they were considered examples of "overt Westernization," and, more importantly, because they led to women's public visibility as well as physical proximity to other men. Thus, as with women's clothing and headwear, the gendered tensions and negotiations of the reforms were apparent in mixed-gendered celebratory meetings of the national holidays.

This book shows that experiences of the Kemalist reforms cannot be understood solely in terms of support or resistance. Yılmaz points to multiplicity in the interpretation, implementation, and experience of these reforms in society, and at different levels and in different institutions of the state. *Becoming Turkish* is recommended for scholars and students as well as a general readership with an interest in the Turkish republic and the nation-building efforts of late modern states.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Elif Ekin Akşit, *Kızların Sessizliği: Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005).

[2]. See, for example, Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılâp: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (Istanbul: Metis, 2003).

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