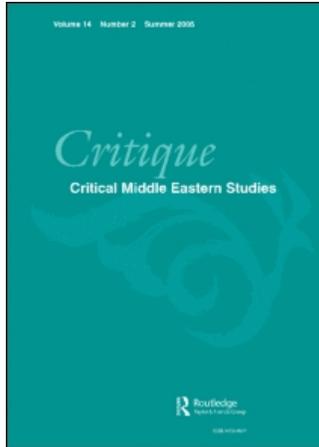


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An Oxymoron: The Origins of Civic-republican Liberalism in Turkey

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An analysis of the origins of Turkish liberalism reveals the increasing importance of a civic-republican view at the turn of the twentieth century that accompanied the acceleration of the nation-building processes within the Ottoman Empire. The rising importance of Turkish nationalism coupled with attempts to overthrow the sultanate changed the course of the liberal ideas in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Although these earlier ideas were liberal-individualist, those that were expressed subsequently after the proclamation of the republic in 1923 were solidarist, moralist, and nationalist while simultaneously professing to be liberal.

In this article I will analyze the ideas of two critical liberal thinkers, namely Prince Sabahattin (1878–1948) and Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869–1939), who represent the early and later liberal currents, respectively. Sabahattin's liberal views, expressed with political vigor before 1923, were not shadowed by the necessities of the nation-building processes. In contrast, Ağaoğlu's civic-republican liberalism reached its peak as a political ideology in the 1930s when he became one of the founders of a liberal opposition party. He was a civic-republican first and a liberal secondarily.

One of the distinguishing features of the Turkish modernization project is that it paved the way for the emergence of citizens at the expense of individualism.¹ Accordingly, people who try to be good citizens may end up losing their individuality, while those who insist on individualism are unable to become good citizens. The uneasy juxtaposition between individualism and citizenship portrays the drowning of liberal ideas within a civic-republican tradition. This juxtaposition can be illustrated by comparing the lives and liberal ideas of Prince Sabahattin and Ahmet Ağaoğlu.

Life and Liberalism of Prince Sabahattin

Prince Sabahattin was born in Istanbul in 1878, the son of Damat Mahmut Celalettin Paşa and Seniha Sultan. He descended from the royal family through his mother, who was the

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¹ Ayşe Kadioğlu, 'Citizenship and individuation in Turkey: the triumph of will over reason,' *CEMOTI* (Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le monde Turco-Iranien), 26 (1998), pp. 23–43.

daughter of Sultan Abdülmecit and the sister of Sultan Abdülhamit.² His father was personally interested in the education of his two sons, Prince Sabahattin and Lütfullah Bey. He hired the best teachers available in the country for his sons to study literature, art, and music, as well as the Ottoman, Arabic, Persian and French languages. The Kuruçeşme palace in which the family resided was almost like a private university for the two sons.³ Hence, Prince Sabahattin grew up in a very refined environment with an excellent command of French as well as Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

Because Sultan Abdülhamit saw Damat Mahmut Celalettin Paşa as a dangerous enemy, he kept him and his family under supervision. The family had to leave the country for France in 1899 when their father's dispute with his brother-in-law, Sultan Abdülhamit, made life unbearable for them in Istanbul. This dispute influenced Prince Sabahattin's thoughts; he sided with his father and decided to join organizations opposing the sultanate during his years in Paris. In particular, his affiliation with the Young Turks began in France.

The Young Turks were organized, mostly in European capitals, after Sultan Abdülhamid shelved the first constitutional monarchy in 1876; their aim was to topple the sultanate regime.⁴ They made their first visible presence in Europe after the foundation of the first Young Turk organization, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1889. Until the second constitutional monarchy (1908), political dynamics were determined to a great extent according to the struggle between the monarchists and the CUP as well as by the cleavages among the Young Turks. The CUP's official Paris journal, *Mechveret Supplément Français*, was introduced as *Organe de la Jeune Turquie* (the organ of the Young Turks). Although initially the CUP was called the Committee of Ottoman Union and Progress (*Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) in 1895 under the increasing influence of Ahmed Rıza, who was influenced strongly by August Comte's positivist philosophy and hence adopted the latter's motto of *ordre et progrès*.⁵ Ahmed Rıza led the positivist, Unionist wing within the CUP. It was during the First Young Turk Conference that

² Accordingly, the title Prince was a misnomer because only those who descended from the sultan's family through their fathers could use it. Men like Sabahattin who descended from the sultan's family through their mothers normally were called 'Sultanzade.' Prince Sabahattin's utilization of the title 'Prince' was probably related to his quest for prestige during his years spent in Europe; see further Ali Erkul, 'Prens Sabahattin,' in: Emre Kongar (Ed.) *Türk Toplum Bilimcileri I* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1982), pp. 83–150.

³ Nezahet Nurettin Ege, *Prens Sabahattin: Hayatı ve İlmî Müdafaaları* (Istanbul: Güneş Neşriyatı, 1977), p. 6.

⁴ They acquired the name Young Turks from the French words *Jeune Turks*. In the Ottoman context the term comprised all those persons and organizations that tried to overthrow the Hamidian regime via activities in European cities. Universally, the term has been used to refer to all political leaders who try to topple regimes in their own countries from outside through opposition activities abroad.

⁵ The Committee was divided into two in the aftermath of the First Young Turk Conference in 1902, which was convened in Paris. While the liberal wing founded a separate organization espousing individual initiative and decentralization as well as British custody for Turkey, the more centralist wing began to advocate Turkism as opposed to Ottomanism. In the period between 1902 and 1906, Young Turk activities in Europe relaxed to a certain extent but they were rejuvenated in 1906 with the arrival of new members fleeing from the Ottoman lands. In the aftermath of the Second Young Turk Conference in 1907, again in Paris, the centralist, Turkist wing began to acquire prominence. It was through the activities of this wing that the road to the second constitutional monarchy was opened. In 1906, the rejuvenated organization was called Committee of Progress and Unity (with internal and external wings). The organization reclaimed the name Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress after the second constitutional monarchy was established in 1908.

convened in Paris in 1902 that the division between the Unionists and the Liberals within the CUP became evident.⁶

The Liberal wing was led by Prince Sabahattin who espoused individual initiative in order to rejuvenate a market economy and further political decentralization. The Liberals within the CUP were upper class, well-educated, Westernized Ottoman intellectuals. They expected Britain to back the regime that they envisioned: a constitutional monarchy led by high bureaucrats.⁷ The high bureaucrats were the pashas of the Sublime Porte who were overshadowed by the palace until 1908. Owing to their competence in Western languages and espousal of modern attitudes, they had earned the confidence of European diplomats in Istanbul. The social background of the high bureaucrats and the Liberals within the CUP were similar. The Liberals within the CUP also had the backing of religious groups that welcomed curbs on the powers of the sultan, believing that would give them more independence in their activities.

The Unionists within the CUP, led by Ahmed Rıza, also defended a constitutional monarchy, yet they were against any intervention by foreign powers. Hence, they carried a nationalist potential. The Unionists were critical of a laissez-faire economic policy and political decentralization as advocated by Prince Sabahattin's group. The Unionists wanted to curb the powers of both the palace and the high bureaucrats and instead invest all authority in an elected assembly that they would control. In contrast to the Liberals, the Unionists tended to be from the lower middle classes, such as school teachers, state officials, and junior officers in the army. Thus, while the Liberals relied on the flourishing of conditions that would further individual initiative, the Unionists had already instigated a search for a state that would administer a revolution from above. After 1908, the Unionists strengthened their position within the CUP. In the process, they had to overcome a major setback in 1909.

In that year, the members of the Porte unseated the CUP government that had won the elections in November–December 1908. The CUP declared this a *coup d'état* and a violation of constitutional principles. Within the chamber of deputies, the CUP activated a vote of no confidence in the new government that was being formed. As a result, the coup against the Unionists was largely reversed in 1909. This event prepared the conditions for a conservative, anti-Unionist backlash that culminated in what is known as the Incident of 31 March, when an insurrection broke out in the Istanbul garrison and was led by religious groups demanding *şeriat* (religious law). The insurrection was suppressed with the aid of the Third Army in Macedonia, which came to rescue the Unionists.⁸

The eventual outcome of Unionist thinking was nationalism. When the CUP activities were rejuvenated in 1906 with the fleeing of some CUP members to Paris, Turkist

⁶ The division within the CUP between the Liberals and Unionists is summarized succinctly by Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp. 33–51. The information regarding the parameters of the conflict between the Liberals and Unionists in this text is informed by Ahmad's book.

⁷ Although Prince Sabahattin opposed the invitation of Western powers to back the regime at the beginning, it is very likely that he later succumbed to British intervention in order to 'prevent other haphazard, unwanted interventions' that may have been forced on the Ottoman regime during a crisis. Hence, he embraced the idea of 'intervention by those free and liberal Western powers whose interests match our interests'; see Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki* (Istanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1980), p. 40.

⁸ The Third Army in Macedonia had been a home for many Unionist officers, including Enver Paşa and Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk); see *ibid.*, p. 36.

currents that had originated among Turkish émigrés from Russia were embraced.⁹ One of the distinguishing features of the Second Young Turk Congress that convened in Paris in 1907 was the elimination of proposals to invite intervention from Western powers in the process of reviving constitutional monarchy.¹⁰ The subsequent years witnessed an increase in the number of Turkists among the CUP cadres.¹¹ Turkism was latent in the thoughts of the Unionists who embraced Westernism.¹² Adoption of national identity was regarded as a prerequisite to being Western. The predominance of the ideas of the Unionists signaled the beginnings of the overwhelming influence of the positivist philosophy as well as a solidarist view of society in subsequent Turkish political thought.

Prince Sabahattin returned to Istanbul after the proclamation of the second constitutional monarchy in 1908. He was greeted and welcomed with great interest in Istanbul. Yet, with the forced withdrawal of the sultan from the political scene, the tension between the Unionists and the Liberals within the CUP became more intense. After the Incident of 31 March, Prince Sabahattin was arrested for alleged involvement, although there is no definite proof in the literature that he was involved in it.¹³ Rather, his arrest constitutes vital evidence of the difficulty of maintaining a distance between liberal and religious views in the Ottoman-Turkish tradition. It also foreshadows the eventual victory of the Unionists over the Liberals. Despite the fact that he was released, thanks to the help of his friends within the CUP, he left the country because he felt he was regarded with suspicion. He returned to Istanbul in 1918, after the armistice, and gave his support to the new regime. However, he was expelled in 1924 on the basis of legislation that required those who descended from the Ottoman dynasty to leave the country. He spent the remainder of his life in Europe and died in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1948 where he led a lonely and poverty-stricken life.

Prince Sabahattin's liberalism should be studied against the background of his struggle not only with the sultanate but also, and perhaps more significantly, with the Unionist wing of the CUP. His ideas were highly influenced by the thoughts of Edmond Demolins (1852–1907). Demolins was one of the key representatives of a school of thought founded by Fredric Le Play (1806–82). Le Play's school represented thoughts that constituted a stark contrast with the Comtean positivist school. Le Play tried to apply the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences. His methods were followed by other 'social

⁹ The CUP members who fled to Paris from Erzincan were Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr. Nazım. They resorted to Turkist themes when they dominated the CUP after 1906. The first text referring to the history of Turks that influenced the works of subsequent Turkists was written by a Polish refugee who acquired the name Mustafa Celaleddin Paşa. It was titled *Les Turcs anciens et modernes*, and had been published in 1869; its author was the grandfather of the eminent Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet. For the origins of Turkism, see Şerif Mardin, '19.yy'da Düşünce Akımları ve Osmanlı Devleti,' in: *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi 2* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1985), pp. 342–351.

¹⁰ Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*, p. 65.

¹¹ Sükrü Hanioglu, 'Türkçülük,' in: *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi 5* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1985), pp. 1394–1399, esp. p. 1397.

¹² Ahmet Ağaoğlu's Turkism, for instance, is quite revealing in this sense. Ağaoğlu regarded the principle of national sovereignty as a prerequisite to being Western. Hence, his Turkism was laden with Westernist motifs; see Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Garp ve Şark,' in: *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı yayınları, 1992 [originally published in 1923]).

¹³ See Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*; and Erkul, 'Prens Sabahattin,' pp. 83–150.

scientists' like Demolins who founded the school of *Science Sociale* in France. Prince Sabahattin describes his first encounter with Demolins' work as follows:

One day, as I walked on one of the famous streets of Paris in a tired and sad way, both spiritually and materially, my eye caught Edmond Demolins' book *A Quoi Tient La Superiorite des Anglo-Saxons* (What accounts for the Superiority of Anglo-Saxons) . . . That night, I read the book in a dash. In the author's answer to this question, I sensed the presence of a scientific method that I have not encountered before in the sociology literature, which was akin to the methods of positive sciences.¹⁴

After this encounter, Prince Sabahattin joined the *Science Sociale* school and even developed a personal friendship with Demolins. He projected Le Play's and Demolins' analyses onto Ottoman society. According to Demolins, the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons stemmed from an educational structure that nurtured individualism. Prince Sabahattin argued that Ottoman society, on the contrary, was a communitarian society that inhibited the growth of the individual.

Prince Sabahattin's diagnosis of the problems within Ottoman society were in stark contrast to the views of the Unionist wing within the CUP, led by Ahmet Rıza, who, as already mentioned, was influenced by Comtean positivist philosophy. Ahmet Rıza diagnosed a 'political' problem within Ottoman society that could be healed by a change of regime from above, i.e., by the proclamation of a constitutional monarchy. Prince Sabahattin, however, thought the 'political' problem would linger in a constitutional monarchy, and even in a republican regime, unless one addressed its source. The source of the problem, for him, was 'social' rather than political. The reason why the Ottomans were governed by such monarchic and military regimes was mainly because they were a communitarian society rather than an individualist one. Hence, a change in the social structure was necessary in order to 'save' the country.¹⁵ A change in the political structure, then, would not suffice unless there was a social structural revolution. The Unionists, led by Ahmet Rıza, opted for a political revolution from above to be undertaken by the military cadres.¹⁶ According to Prince Sabahattin, they did not understand that political problems stemmed directly from deficiencies in the social structure.

Prince Sabahattin thought that communitarian social structures nurtured deductive thinking patterns. He saw the educational institutions within the Ottoman Empire as being designed not toward creating independent individuals who would go into productive businesses but to push people toward state offices. State offices always had more leverage over productive businesses and they prevented the blossoming of individual initiative. State offices, by definition, were based on the protection and supervision of the state. People who were employed in such offices progressed mainly through nepotism, and this prevented the formation of free, independent souls. Prince Sabahattin wrote:

¹⁴ Cited in Ege, *Prens Sabahattin*, p. 36 (my translation). This encounter with Demolins' book is reminiscent of a well-known verse by Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk: 'One day I read a book and my whole life has changed'; see Orhan Pamuk, *Yeni Hayat* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1994).

¹⁵ 'How to save Turkey?' was the title of the book that Prince Sabahattin published in 1918. Prens Sabahattin, *Türkiye Nasıl Kurtarılabilir?* (Istanbul: Türkiye Basımevi, 1950).

¹⁶ This view became predominant especially in the Second Young Turk Congress, in 1907.

Can a youngster who has no means of progress other than favoritism develop a solid personality? ... Certainly, not. Because the poor thing has to take the shape that his guardian wants rather than what he wants ... Those who are white in the eyes of their guardians, even though they may be black in their own eyes, have to give in to white as black.¹⁷

Prince Sabahattin advocated the flourishing of productive work areas freed from state patronage. He raised the necessity of a new educational system designed toward that end by opting to push individualism to the forefront. He pointed to lack of individual initiative in the countryside and, therefore, lack of commercial farming. The educational structure that constantly trained state servants pushed ambitious individuals away from commercial activities.¹⁸ He also raised the issue of individual property. He complained about the lack of security for private property within the Ottoman system. He advocated a transition from common property to individual private property.

The other aspects of the Ottoman social structure that he criticized were its centralized administrative structure and its militarism. He posed an anti-militarist stance in his criticism of military personnel's involvement in internal political affairs. He criticized the central administrative structure of the Ottomans for its perpetuation of red tape and inefficiency and for creating an irresponsible public that expected everything from the state. Since he located the source of all the ills of Ottoman society in its communitarian social structure, Prince Sabahattin espoused a transition from a communitarian society to an individualist one. He thought such a transformation of social structures was possible:

Just as a mammal is separated from a ringed animal anatomically, a communitarian society is separated from an individualist society socially. Yet, although it is impossible for an anatomic being to be transformed into another one, given the necessary conditions, it is possible to transform from one social structure into another one.¹⁹

Prince Sabahattin pointed out the necessity of establishing the principle of individual initiative (*teşebbüs-i şahsi*) in society. He placed a lot of responsibility on the educational establishment in promoting individual initiative. He even suggested the utilization of the English public schools as models in amending the existing educational system. He thought young men and women who would develop entrepreneurial skills in this way should be encouraged via private property arrangements to build their own independent businesses outside the realm of public offices. He envisioned individualism in the form of freedom from the state. Hence, any notion of freedom, for him, was based on a distance from the state. For instance, he not only emphasized the significance of the existence of an independent bourgeoisie for society but also underlined the individual sense of responsibility of even public officials whom he detested so much. He thought that such public officials as judges could serve the

¹⁷ Cited in Erkul, 'Prens Sabahattin,' p. 128 (my translation).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁹ Cited in ibid., p. 118 (my translation).

country only when they had individual responsibility stemming not from their office but from their individual character. The educational system, then, should be geared not toward raising people to be public servants but rather to developing individuals. Hence, in his line of reasoning, raising autonomous individuals had priority over filling public offices.²⁰

Similarly, he defined intellectuals based on their distance from public offices. He believed a person could not call himself an intellectual unless he kept a distance from the state, because a public servant whose *raison d'être* is related to state power could think only in terms of state interests. Prince Sabahattin's own efforts as an intellectual to detach himself from public interests are reflected clearly in this statement:

We did not become a candidate to be a member of parliament nor a public servant.
We never have asked the help of any human power to be directed to us personally.
We do not want it. We will be as independent toward the potential government as we were toward the previous government.²¹

Prince Sabahattin argued for the transformation of the Ottoman social structure via administrative reforms that would establish an administratively decentralized state structure (*adem-i merkeziyet*).²² He criticized the inefficiency and red tape produced by central administrative structures. Instead, he professed the necessity of adopting an administratively decentralized structure. It must be emphasized that he did not advocate 'political decentralization' but rather 'administrative decentralization.' Yet he was criticized for jeopardizing the indivisibility of the political boundaries of the Ottomans. Moreover, his critics argued that administrative decentralization would benefit mostly the non-Muslim groups within the empire. Prince Sabahattin responded to his critics by arguing that it was, in fact, administrative decentralization that would further the political centralization of the Ottoman lands.²³ He opted for achieving political centralization via administrative decentralization. Contrary to his critics, he argued that under the existing centralized structure, the non-Muslim groups were granted more benefits than the Muslims, especially in the realms of taxation, the court system, and education. Hence, he maintained that an administratively decentralized structure would ameliorate the position of the Muslims especially in such areas.²⁴ According to Prince Sabahattin, more effective administration required the settlement of problems in the areas where they emerge rather than imposing central solutions. He maintained: 'Centralization means delimitation of freedom, suppression of the minority by the majority, the violation of the principle of initiative.'²⁵ Accordingly, he suggested administrative decentralization in order to ensure political centralization as well as for the blossoming of freedom and initiative.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

²¹ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 103 (my translation).

²² When the CUP was divided at the end of the First Young Turk Congress of 1902, Prince Sabahattin founded a new organization that stressed the two goals of individual initiative and decentralization, the Committee of Individual Initiative and Decentralization (*Teşebbüs-ü Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti*).

²³ He wrote three exegeses as a response to his critics between 1908 and 1910. He addressed the issue of administrative decentralization especially in his second exegesis, cited in Ege, *Prens Sabahattin*, pp. 173–189.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 183–186.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187 (my translation).

The division between the Prince Sabahattin group and the Ahmet Rıza group was portrayed very clearly in the First Young Turk Congress in 1902.²⁶ After this point, and with the increasing significance of the Ahmet Rıza group within the CUP, Turkish liberalism took a different turn and moved away from its origins, rooted as they were in the schools of Le Play and Demolins. With the strengthening of the positions of the Unionists within the CUP, the emerging liberal currents began to build their ideas on Unionist principles that extolled Turkish nationalism. Prince Sabahattin's ideas were distinguished by a liberalism that opposed the Unionists' ideas. In a sense, Turkish liberal individualism made its public debut through the efforts of Prince Sabahattin in 1902 in the First Young Turk Conference. It was discussed on legitimate grounds there for an historical moment, but in a few short years it disappeared into the dustbin of history.

The Life and Liberalism of Ahmet Ağaoğlu

While Prince Sabahattin's liberalism opposed the ideas of the Unionists, Ahmet Ağaoğlu was first of all a Unionist and then a liberal. Accordingly, he tried to strike a balance between the rising nationalism of the Unionists and the main tenets of a liberal ideology. He was born in 1869 in Karabağ, Azerbaijan. He went to Paris in 1888 to study law, history and political science. He returned to the Caucasus in 1894, worked for the unification of Russian Muslims, and participated in activities against the tsar.²⁷ He immigrated to Istanbul with his family in 1909 in the aftermath of the second constitutional monarchy since he was facing political pressures in Russia. He became one of the founders of a Turkist organization called *Türk Yurdu* in 1911. In those years, he wrote for the organization's journal. In his articles, he tried to portray the compatibility of Islam and Turkism. He also began to teach at Istanbul University (in those years called *Darülfünun*). In 1914, he was elected to the chamber of deputies as a member from Afyonkarahisar. In 1915, he became a member of the central unit of the CUP.

During the years of occupation of Istanbul (1918–21), British forces exiled Ağaoğlu to the island of Malta. After 1923, he joined the Republican People's Party (RPP)—the only political party—in the newly founded republic and entered parliament as its deputy from Kars. Simultaneously, he also taught at the new Ankara Law School. Although he was a member of the RPP, Ağaoğlu became actively involved in the formation of a brief, 'loyal' opposition party called the Free Republican Party (FRP, *Serbest Fırka*). The creation of an opposition party was not his idea at the outset. In his memoirs, he describes how Mustafa Kemal actually gave him the task of constituting such a party.²⁸ However, the FRP survived as a legitimate opposition party for less than four months. It was after failure of the FRP that Ağaoğlu's liberal ideas became more pronounced in his writings, and he never returned to the ranks of the RPP after the closure of the FRP. He continued to teach

²⁶ This Congress was convened largely thanks to the personal efforts of Prince Sabahattin and his brother. These two young men even gave financial support to the Congress for funding the trips and accommodation of the delegates invited from Egypt, Italy, Switzerland, Romania, and England; see further Erkul, 'Prens Sabahattin,' pp. 92–96.

²⁷ Ahmet Ağaoğlu's family life, the first years of his education, his years in France and his activities upon his return to his place of birth are covered in detail in A. Holly Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

²⁸ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Fırka Hatıraları* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1994).

at *Darülfünun* until he was asked to leave in the aftermath of the education reform at the university in 1933. He spent his final years producing a fascinating literature on a peculiar brand of liberalism.

Ağaoğlu's journey through liberalism is interesting since it portrays the changes in the mind of an intellectual who one day finds himself as a founder of the republic and the next day is given the task of leading a controlled liberal opposition within the confines of the regime. The more he was pushed outside the central ranks of the regime and the more he found himself in the position of real opposition, the more liberal he became. Yet his liberalism was delimited by his earlier embrace of the positivist philosophy of the Unionist wing of the CUP. Ağaoğlu became a liberal in the aftermath of internalizing the positivist philosophy of the Unionists as well as embracing the main principles of the republican regime that were clearly formulated by 1931 and symbolized in the insignia, the six arrows of the RPP, namely, Secularism, Nationalism, Republicanism, Populism, Etatism, Revolutionism.²⁹ This sharply separated his liberalism from the liberalism of Prince Sabahattin who challenged the Unionists.

One of the fundamental pillars of Ağaoğlu's thought was his Westernism. His Westernism constituted an outer lens through which transmitted all his other thought. Both his Turkism and Islamism as well as the traits of individualism in his thought reflected a particular form of Westernism that stayed as a constant in his writings. For example, in one of his earlier studies, originally published in Russian in 1901, Ağaoğlu, tried to portray the position of women in Islam.³⁰ He was interested in studying women in Islam after observing the progress of feminism in Europe and the United States. His real concern was finding out whether Islam was responsible for the deplorable situation of women in Muslim societies. Following Ömer Hayyam, Ağaoğlu argued that the cause of the backwardness of Muslim societies was not really Islam itself but rather the way it was practiced in Ottoman society.³¹ He claimed that women were not subordinated during the time of the Prophet Mohammad, *Asr-ı Saadet* (golden age of Islam). Yet, Islam as a religion deteriorated as a result of Persian influences in the ninth and tenth centuries. Ağaoğlu suggested two reforms to redress the backwardness of Muslim societies. First, measures geared toward an amelioration of the position of women; and, second, a reform of the alphabet.³² Ağaoğlu's study on women and Islam portrays not only his early Westernist views but also the elitist tendency in him that later would lead him toward an embrace of the views of the Unionist wing of the CUP, the wing that professed a revolution from above to be undertaken by the bureaucratic-military cadres. The influence of the latter ideas led him to argue that Muslims had to produce a leader from among themselves, one with an iron will, a man who was a brave and selfless reformer.³³ Ağaoğlu had to wait for about two decades to meet the leader of his dreams, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whom he would continue to admire until his death despite their apparent disagreements.

²⁹ The de-liberalizing impact of the republican principles is portrayed in Simten Coşar, 'Liberal thought and democracy in Turkey,' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(1) (February 2004), pp. 71–98.

³⁰ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *İslamiyette Kadın* (Ankara: Birey ve Toplum yayınları, 1985 [originally published in 1901, translated from Russian to Turkish by Hasan Ali Ediz]).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Since Ağaoğlu did not think of Islam as the cause of the backwardness of Ottoman society, he looked elsewhere to account for underdevelopment. In comparing Indian and the English societies, for instance, he argued that the cause of the enslavement and the imprisonment of Indian society was the inability of the Indians to constitute a national conscience.³⁴ He argued that Eastern societies were distinguished from Western ones by virtue of the fact that they lacked national sovereignty (*hakimiyet-i milliye*).³⁵ Hence, he professed the need for the establishment of national sovereignty in the East as a prelude for development and progress. Ağaoğlu's nationalism and/or Turkism thus was a step that he envisioned for achieving the larger goal of Westernism. His nationalism was a type that precluded a nativist culture. It was a nationalism that embraced Western civilization while professing an abandonment of Eastern culture. Moreover, Ağaoğlu thought that the principle of national sovereignty was compatible with early Islamic principles. His nationalism was laden with motifs of Westernism, civilizationism, and Islamism as well as populism.

An element of populism is easily detected in one of Ağaoğlu's writings in which he opposed the views of Zeki Velidi Togan, a prominent figure within the more nativist Turkist circles that glorified the notion of race. Ağaoğlu thought that advocating national sovereignty while at the same time retaining the native culture was paradoxical since it was the latter that made the emergence of the former impossible. In confronting Zeki Velidi Togan, Ağaoğlu said:

My dear Velid Bey! Where did you get the pencil in your hand, the ink facing you, the paper in front of you? From Baghdad, Samerkand, Kandehar, Lahor, or Germany? Where did you get the fabric and style for your costumes? . . . Where did you get the ideas and information in your head? . . . In spite of the fact that for your personal needs you resort to the West, and appropriate from the West, things ranging from your costume to your spirit, you deny the same things to other people and the general public? Why, although you prefer Paris to Kandehar personally, when you address the nation you urge a disposition toward Kandehar rather than Paris.³⁶

Ağaoğlu's criticism of Zeki Velidi Togan stemmed from his conviction regarding the incompatibility of the principle of national sovereignty with Eastern culture. Hence, he urged an abandonment of Eastern culture, although he continued to maintain positive views toward Islam.

Ağaoğlu had a love/hate relationship with the masses. He was a populist and an elitist at the same time. Although he was convinced of the need to restrain the masses, he was skeptical of the activities of state authorities toward that end. His populism mainly came out into the open in the course of his debates with Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, who represented the ideas of a group that gathered around the journal *Kadro*. The *Kadro* group professed a certain type of etatism both economically and politically. In their journal—published between 1931 and 1934—they envisioned a corporatist, solidarist

³⁴ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Milli Şuur,' in: *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı yayınları, 1992 [originally published in 1924]), pp. 97–101.

³⁵ Ağaoğlu, 'Garp ve Şark,' p. 85.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86 (my translation).

social structure freed from class cleavages. Ağaoğlu opposed the ideas of Şevket Süreyya Aydemir who professed a type of revolution that would serve the people: 'For the good of the people, *despite* the people, yet, for the people.'³⁷ Yet, although Ağaoğlu embraced the category of the people in his debates with the *Kadro* group, at the same time he feared the idea of unrestrained rule by the people, especially those whom he regarded as the uneducated, propertyless masses. For him, education was a prelude to self-rule.

The conflicting principles of elitism and populism co-exist in Ağaoğlu's writings. While on the one hand he had a view of the people and especially the peasants as the true sovereign, on the other he professed the need for education in order to exercise the right to rule. He resolved this tension in his thought by adhering to an elitist view of democracy. He placed a lot of emphasis on the role of the vanguard in leading the people. He pointed to the fact that in all times and places, governance had always been undertaken by a vanguard group. Any argument that challenged this fact was doomed from the outset.³⁸ Ağaoğlu pointed out that even Rousseau, who was the primary defender of rule by the people confessed that the states in which he envisioned rule by the people were quite limited in size, perhaps as big as a city.³⁹ Ağaoğlu's fear of the masses was nowhere expressed more clearly than in his arrival in Izmir harbor during the election tours of the FRP. The sight of the hundreds of people who came to greet them at the harbor made him utter the following words: 'I saw for the first time how scary a hundred headed crowd could be. Both its love and its hostility is a curse.'⁴⁰

Yet Ağaoğlu also could defend the crowds at times. Following the increasing popularity of the FRP, he relates how one day, Mustafa Kemal told him that the people who gathered to cheer the FRP around a voting place in Antalya broke a chair over the head of one of the commanders. Mustafa Kemal informed Ağaoğlu that the commander was quite a patient man because if this had happened to him he would have brought a machine gun and crushed them all. Ağaoğlu responded to Mustafa Kemal by asking what a commander was doing in a voting place. When Mustafa Kemal answered that the commander had come to end anarchy, Ağaoğlu records his response:

No! Anarchy stems exactly from his presence there! Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa founds a Republic, the laws on which this Republic was based give the people the right to participate in elections. The people go to the ballot boxes and encounter the armed forces there! A conflict is quite natural!⁴¹

Despite his occasional populist remarks, Ağaoğlu was an elitist and feared the unrestrained masses. The freedom that he envisioned for individuals was not an egoistic, selfish freedom. He advocated a moral individualism as well as a view of freedom that he described as 'ordered freedom.'⁴²

³⁷ Cited in Murat Yılmaz, 'Ahmet Ağaoğlu ve Liberalizm Anlayışı,' *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 23 (Summer 1993), pp. 56–71, esp. p. 64 (emphasis mine).

³⁸ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *İhtilal mi İnkilap mı?* (Ankara: n.p., 1941–42), p. 38.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Fırka Hatıraları*, p. 59 (my translation).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴² Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Nizamlı Hürriyet,' *Akım* (daily), 5 June 1933.

Ağaoğlu, like Prince Sabahattin, tried to account for the causes of Ottoman society's backwardness. In doing so, he emphasized the lack of individualism in Ottoman culture. He thought that in the East, in general, individuals were not given the opportunity to live. Rather, they were drowned under despotic regimes. Although he was convinced that the Ottoman state was superior compared to European ones in the course of the fifteenth century, he pointed to opposing currents of development in the East and the West afterward. In his own words:

In the Orient, the individual was drowned, in the Occident he had unclosed himself; on the one side the individual . . . was squeezed, weakened, and made into a meagre being under the increasingly ferocious despotism and put into his own narrow and constricted sheath. In the Occident, on the other hand, the individual gradually took a hold of his freedoms and, by constantly opening up, felt the pleasure of living and working as a result of the weakening of despotism. As a result, the Oriental societies composed of constricted individuals in their own sheath also became constricted and weakened.⁴³

Ağaoğlu thought that the lack of basic freedoms in Oriental cultures was the immediate cause of backwardness in the Orient.⁴⁴ Accordingly, he envisioned a type of individualism that would open up Eastern societies to a vision of freedom. This individual would be the opposite of selfish. Ağaoğlu described this individual in detail in his book *Ben Neyim?* (Who am I?), which was published in 1936, three years before he died.⁴⁵ In this book, he pointed to a distinction between egoism and altruism, and, while he detested the former, he advocated the latter. Egoist individuals, according to him, typically existed in the Orient. They were those individuals who did not care about the good of others. They were, in his words, 'put into their own sheath.'⁴⁶ He listed three reasons that were responsible for the emergence of such selfish individuals in the Orient. First was the family structure and the position of women within the family unit in Eastern societies. Second, he referred to the educational system and the poor state of the existing literature in accounting for the lack of altruism in Eastern societies. The third reason for the setback of Eastern societies was the existence of long-lasting despotic regimes.⁴⁷ He further argued that since the family structures separated the men's and women's physical realms, there was no solidarity between them. This situation had nurtured egoism.⁴⁸ He also blamed the leading literary figures for being alienated from society and for not providing society with role models.⁴⁹ Hence, the Ottoman-Turkish soil was not a fertile ground for the blossoming of virtues such as altruism or selflessness. In placing his hopes in an altruist, selfless

⁴³ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Devlet ve Fert* (Istanbul: Sanayii Nefise Matbaası, 1933), p. 27 (my translation).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁴⁵ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Ben Neyim?* (Istanbul: n.p., 1939 [an earlier, incomplete version was published in 1936]).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Özcülük ve Özgeçilik (Egoizm ve Altörizm),' *Akın* (daily), 30 May 1933.

⁴⁹ He suggested, for instance, that in Ottoman-Turkish literature there was no equivalent of Goethe's Margret, Shakespeare's Dezdamon, Dante's Beatrice, and Pushkin's Tatiana, all of whom constituted role models for German, English, Italian, and Russian women; see Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Serbest Kadın,' *Akın* (daily), 25 June 1933.

individual, rather than a selfish one, Ağaoğlu was displaying his longing for a solidarist structure in society.

In *Ben Neyim?* Ağaoğlu portrays a series of fascinating dialogues between his selfish outer self and selfless inner self. In the course of these dialogues between these two aspects of the self, the inner self sometimes wants to become separated from the outer self. The outer self, in return, mocks the inner self for being selfless and yet so helpless since it has to surrender to the urges of the outer self at times. In short, the individualism that Ağaoğlu professed did not glorify the selfish, egoistic man represented in the outer self. On the contrary, his individualism carried the traits of the inner self, and hence was laden with altruist and solidarist motifs. This solidarist individualism was an oxymoron.

Ağaoğlu did not place too much emphasis on the role of institutions and laws in giving birth to selfless individuals. In the tradition of Montesquieu and De Tocqueville, he placed his hopes not in institutions and laws but rather in the adoption of certain moral values, because he thought despotic frames of mind continued to exist in Turkey despite the republican reforms.⁵⁰ He believed that a moral, virtuous individual could be created by two methods. First, he placed a lot of importance on the role of the leading literary figures, such as poets, novelists and intellectuals of his time. Ağaoğlu thought, for instance, that the French Revolution was a product of intellectuals such as Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. He thought that the revolutionaries were influenced directly by the works of such intellectuals. Hence, he garnered a view of literary figures and intellectuals as motors of progress. Accordingly, he voiced major disillusionment with the works of the intellectuals in the Ottoman-Turkish lands.⁵¹ Ağaoğlu's selfless individual was to be molded by the key literary figures and intellectuals of his time. State institutions were expected to facilitate the task of such intellectuals by providing education for the people. Ağaoğlu's vanguardism was expressed nowhere more clearly than in his utopian novel *Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde* (In the land of the free men). Here, he described the process through which an egoist individual was transformed into a selfless man. All along, this individual was guided by a group of intellectuals that were called the 'pirs'.⁵² Hence, Ağaoğlu's individualism contained vanguardist motifs.

His second method for creating selfless individuals was by their own internal selves. Ağaoğlu did not think that egoist individuals could be molded into selfless beings simply by virtue of a political regime change to a republic or by institutional arrangements. Rather, he pointed to the significance of an inner self which would tame the outer self. Since Ağaoğlu refers to the taming of the egoist individual by an inner self and/or spirit, it is possible to refer to the impact of Henri Bergson (1859–1941) on his thought. Bergson's thought, interestingly, influenced a number of intellectuals in Istanbul in the 1920s, several of whom translated and published his work.⁵³ The distinguishing feature of Bergson's philosophy was its metaphysical dimension. This was a revolutionary and anti-intellectualist philosophy that was situated vis-à-vis evolutionary, intellectualist, and positivist currents that were prevalent at the time. Followers of Bergson argued, in their

⁵⁰ Such a feature of Ağaoğlu's thought is depicted in a very eloquent article by François Georgeon, 'Ahmet Ağaoğlu: Aydınlanma ve Devrim Hayranı Bir Türk Aydını,' *Toplumsal Tarih*, 36 (December 1996), pp. 28–35, esp. p. 32.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, p. 31. See also Ahmet Ağaoğlu, 'Entellektüellerin Zaafı,' *Akın* (daily), 7 June 1933.

⁵² Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde* (Istanbul: Sanayii Nefise Matbaası, 1930).

⁵³ On Bergsonism, see Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi* (Istanbul: Ülken yayınları, 1979).

journal *Dergah*, that the secret of success of the Independence War (1919–22) was something more than technical advances in the military. It was not something that could be measured by the categories of the positive sciences. Rather, military victories spilled from a basic instinct of all living creatures that was called *élan vital* (spirit of life). One of the common denominators of Bergson's followers was their stance against positivist philosophy. Although Ağaoğlu embraced positivism, at the same time he seems to have harbored some Bergsonian ideas. This may account for some of the apparent paradoxes in his thought, such as his love/hate relationship with both the intellectuals and the people.

In a fascinating book, in which he described the life and works of his father's friends, Ağaoğlu's late son, Samet Ağaoğlu, pointed to his father's moralism.⁵⁴ He argued that his father's ideas placed the individual outside of the realm of the state. Nevertheless, he still placed more emphasis on duties rather than on rights. Ağaoğlu's views were distinguished by his vision of an individual who eventually would be aware of his duties through the efforts of his own inner self. Hence, Ağaoğlu underlined the significance of will over egoism. Since spirit was made up of both reason and will, reason had to give in to will for the achievement of a solidarist social structure composed of selfless, responsible individuals. Although one should not exaggerate the presence of Bergsonian motifs in Ağaoğlu's thought, it is only by the delineation of such various influences on his thought that certain Romantic themes in his writings, such as will and honor, can be understood. Ağaoğlu not only emphasized will over reason but also glorified honor over material things.⁵⁵ He consistently described duty-oriented, moral, selfless individuals who were led by 'pirs,' sang the national anthem as a perfect chorus and did not cheer or applaud their national singers for fear of overstepping the boundaries of modesty, wore locally tailored, plain costumes, had a diligent work ethic, and whose women neither drank alcohol nor gambled. At the end, this utopian land of the free man seems more like a dystopia where moral despotism reigns. The selfless individuals of this puritan yet free land seem to have gone through what he calls three types of cleanliness: the cleansing of the body, heart, and spirit.⁵⁶

In the light of the above account, it is possible to argue that Ağaoğlu's individualism carried both vanguardist and solidarist motifs as a result of its emphasis on intellectuals and altruism at the expense of egoism. Yet it also harbored elements of a Bergsonian metaphysics through its emphasis of will over reason, and its glorification of such concepts as honor and morality. Hence, his individualism was solidarist, altruist (as opposed to egoist), moralist, Romantic, and puritan. His individual was not someone who was expected to use his reason but rather was to be dragged to an 'ordered freedom' with the guidance of the intellectual leaders.

Ağaoğlu did not accept a distinction between the concepts of culture and civilization which was quite prevalent at the time. In fact, ever since the beginning of the modernization reforms in the Ottoman Empire, there was always a concern regarding the

⁵⁴ Samet Ağaoğlu, *Babamın Arkadaşları* (Istanbul: Nebioğlu yayınevi, n.d.).

⁵⁵ Ağaoğlu literally utilizes the concepts of 'will' and 'reason.' See Ağaoğlu, *Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde*, p. 98. Moreover, he refers to Şevket Süreyya Aydemir who sets the national ideal as full employment as a 'materialist.' Ağaoğlu, however, thinks having honor has priority over alleviating physical hunger. See Ağaoğlu, *Devlet ve Fert*, p. 86.

⁵⁶ Ağaoğlu, *Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde*, p. 75; see also, Ahmet Ağaoğlu's description of the process of cleansing of the spirit in *Tanrı Dağında* (text attached to Ağaoğlu, Ben Neyim?), p. 61.

need to adopt the good (material) aspects of the West while avoiding its bad (spiritual) aspects and retaining native cultural traits. According to Aġaoġlu, this was not possible. Western culture had to be adopted along with its civilization.⁵⁷ In evaluating the Young Turk revolution and the second constitutional monarchy, he maintained that the major deficiency of this political revolution was its inability to generate a revolution of the mind. In his book written during his exile years in Malta, aptly titled *Gönülsüz Olmaz* (Not possible without affection), he argued for a change in values in order to overcome feelings of egoism and ambition.⁵⁸

Although Aġaoġlu insisted on wholesale Westernization by adopting both the culture and civilization of the West, at the same time he distinguished between culture and religion. In his earlier writings, he pointed to compatibility between Islam and Westernization. In the Turkist journal *Türk Yurdu*, for instance, Aġaoġlu saw a compatibility between Islam and national feelings.⁵⁹ He maintained that, although the arguments of the Islamists regarding the melting of national differences by a common Islamic bond had been 'sweet,' they were far from real.⁶⁰ In reality, he argued, national differences prevailed even before the adoption of Islam. Despite the fact that Islam constituted a common bond among the Turks, Arabs, Persians, Indians, Circassians, Kurds, and Albanians, it was never capable of rising above such national differences. According to Aġaoġlu, one of the reasons why Islam became such a powerful religion was due to its flexibility in adapting to the internal structure of each nationality that embraced it. Such flexibility contributed to the progress of Islam as a religion. Aġaoġlu clearly adopted a modernist view of Islam. He argued that religion should be made subservient to the livelihood of each nation. He had a vision of Islam as an ever-changing, dynamic religion.⁶¹

Aġaoġlu, in fact, pointed to the need for the nationalization, i.e., Turkification, of Islam. He distinguished the fundamental tenets of nationalism as common language, common religion, and common goals.⁶² He argued that the lack of such commonalities was responsible for the lack of a national bond among the Turks. Language, for instance, failed to form a national bond since Ottoman literature, both in its subject matter and manner of expression, was largely alienated from the people. It constituted a binding element only among those who belonged to the high culture. Aġaoġlu thought that the manner of adoption of Islam in the Ottoman lands also prevented the formation of a national bond among the Turks since Turks were alienated from their own religion due to their lack of

⁵⁷ His thought in this sense was in line with extreme Westernist thought currents led by Abdullah Cevdet and Celal Nuri. On Aġaoġlu's insistence on the adoption of Western civilization and culture as a whole, see Güven Bakırgezer, 'Batı Medeniyeti Hayranı Liberal Bir Aydın Çelişki ve Sınırları: Ahmet Aġaoġlu,' *Toplumsal Tarih*, 41 (May 1997), pp. 36–51, esp. p. 41.

⁵⁸ Ahmet Aġaoġlu, *Gönülsüz Olmaz* (Ankara: n.p., 1941).

⁵⁹ Ahmet Ağayef (Aġaoġlu), 'Türk Alemleri,' *Türk Yurdu*, 1 (1327/28), pp. 195–201, reprinted in *Tarih ve Toplum*, 11(63) (March 1989), pp. 146–148.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶¹ Such features in Aġaoġlu's thought paved the way to arguments that depict an articulation of Turkist and Islamist themes in his work. See Süleyman Seyfi Öġün, 'Bir Türkçü -İslamcı Eklemlenme Figürü Olarak Aġaoġlu Ahmed,' in: Süleyman Seyfi Öġün, *Modernleşme, Milliyetçilik ve Türkiye* (Istanbul: Bağlam yayınları, 1995).

⁶² Ahmet Aġaoġlu, 'Milliyetçilik Cereyanının Esasları,' in: *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı yayınları, 1992 [originally published in 1925]), pp. 115–122, esp. p. 117.

comprehension of the Arab language. Hence, Ağaoğlu argued that an ordinary Turk was incapable of comprehending the meaning of his own prayers that he repeats five times a day. Thus, he was prevented from having a direct relation with God since he had no national religious language with which he could communicate easily. He argued that religious laws, taken from the sermons of key political figures of the Abbasid era, simply ‘killed the Turk,’ i.e., made it impossible for a Turkish national identity to thrive.⁶³ He thought that the judicial system had to be in touch with life rather than be appropriated from frozen religious texts and dead preachers.

Such views did not protect Ağaoğlu from being labeled as a religious dogmatist at times. For instance, in the aftermath of the Menemen incident, a rebellion staged with religious symbols in 1930 and crushed by state forces, Ağaoğlu felt the need to distance himself from religious discourses. The rebels, who were from the Nakşibendi Sufi order, beheaded the reserve officer who came to quell the disturbance and stuck his head on a flag pole that they paraded around the town. Such uncivil behavior was quite disturbing for the leaders of the Republican People’s Party as well as for Ağaoğlu. In the aftermath of the Menemen incident, Ağaoğlu wrote an article in which he discussed what prompted him to give a speech in the parliament and mention ‘a feeling of responsibility’ that came over him after this incident.⁶⁴ The feeling of responsibility, he said, stemmed from his recognition of the fact that the Turkish revolution had not been internalized by the masses. This, he thought, was largely due to the failure of the intellectuals to write the ‘book of the Republican religion.’⁶⁵ He pointed to an inability on the part of the intellectuals to produce codes that could replace the popular religious codes of conduct. Yet his confession of a feeling of responsibility was—to his surprise—interpreted by his opponents as his confession of responsibility in prompting this rebellion. Ağaoğlu thought his name was almost associated with the leader of the rebellion. This was not the first time that the opposition party, the FRP, was blamed for having religious affiliations.⁶⁶ In fact, the secularist line of the RPP had become such an official line that every opposition movement was associated with religious dogma. Ağaoğlu was clearly not a religious dogmatist. Moreover, the FRP embraced secularism as one of the fundamental pillars of its party program. But the allegations that were addressed to Ağaoğlu and the FRP were significant in pointing to the difficulty of maintaining a distance between liberal opposition and religious dogma in the Turkish political tradition.

From Anti-Unionist Liberalism to Civic-republican Liberalism: A Comparison

The ideas of Prince Sabahattin were formulated largely prior to and in opposition to the victory of the Unionists within the CUP. Ağaoğlu, in contrast, was first of all a Unionist and then a liberal. His liberalism contained motifs of a rising nationalism within the CUP. Prince Sabahattin attributed the source of Ottoman society’s backwardness to its social structure, which he defined as communitarian. He envisioned a transformation toward an

⁶³ Ibid., p. 120.

⁶⁴ Reprinted in Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Firka Hatıraları*, pp. 219–223.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 220.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, the allegations that were addressed to the leader of the Free Republican Party, Fethi Okyar in *ibid.*, p. 110.

Anglo-Saxon, particularist social structure through the aid of an education system that would encourage individual initiative as well as administrative reforms such as decentralization. For him, individual liberation had priority over national liberation. He advocated private property rights in place of common property. He envisaged a transformation from a consumption-oriented, static, and state-centered society to production, initiative, and freedom from central state impositions.

Ağaoğlu regarded the universalist and rigid application of Islamic principles as an obstacle to the formation of a national Turkish identity. He argued for the Turkification of the Koran and prayers as early as 1925. In his arguments pertaining to the need to Turkify Islam, Ağaoğlu's distaste for Ottoman religious practices became evident. Such a negative view of Islam as the cause of backwardness and an obstacle to the formation of a nation-state, along with Westernization attempts, became a key feature of the arguments of the republican elite in the course of the early years of the republic. Still, there were differences between Ağaoğlu's thought and that of the early republican elite, and these differences eventually situated him within the liberal opposition. Ağaoğlu did not harbor feelings of distaste against Islam per se, but rather against the way the Muslim religion was practiced by the Ottomans. He thought Islam did not preclude national feelings. In other words, he embraced Islamic practices that were agreeable with national, Turkish motifs while at the same time opting for a wholesale Westernization. He harbored feelings of hatred for Eastern culture rather than for Islam.⁶⁷

Ağaoğlu was a liberal who had a great admiration for the ultimate secularist figure of the French Enlightenment, Voltaire (1694–1778), who expressed his anti-Church feelings in the well-known statement, 'Crush the infamous thing!' Furthermore, Voltaire had portrayed the Prophet Mohammed as an impostor in his 1742 play *Mahomet*. Despite this, Ağaoğlu described his encounter with a statue of Voltaire in the yard of Collège de France in Paris, in 1889, as a critical moment in his life. He saw signs of life in the eyes of the statue of this man whom he described as a 'great personality who lived in my thoughts for years.'⁶⁸ Ağaoğlu was at the same time a student of Ernest Renan (1823–92) during his Paris years; Renan attracted the hostility of religious circles in France and glorified Prussian national unification. Also during his Paris years, Ağaoğlu met Cemalattin Afghani (1838–97), the famous Islamist thinker whose ideas constituted the basis of modernist Islamic trends. Ahmet Rıza, the leader of the Unionist wing of the CUP, was another person whom Ağaoğlu befriended in Paris. His later thought carried motifs of the thoughts of all such key figures: He was an admirer of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; he wanted to Turkify Islamic practices; he had a modernist view of Islam; and his thought was akin to the solidarism of the Unionists in the CUP who advocated a revolution from above by the bureaucratic-military cadres. Ağaoğlu was able to synthesize all such paradoxical ideas by resorting to a Bergsonian moralism. During his later years, he embraced a moralism that was expressed in his accounts of an altruist internal self that was

⁶⁷ His hatred of the Eastern culture and his Orientalism was nowhere better expressed than in his comparison of Nasreddin Shah and Carnot in a public proceeding during the world fair in Paris in 1889. Ağaoğlu was embarrassed with the exaggerated, shiny costumes of this Iranian leader whose pompous display signified the image of despotism. Carnot, the French leader, who represented Western liberalism, was dressed in a simple coat and portrayed a modest image. The sight of the two of them together was a source of humiliation for Ağaoğlu. Cited in Georgeon, 'Ahmet Ağaoğlu,' p. 32.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

responsible for taming an external egoist self. In sum, Aġaoġlu's liberalism was laden with motifs of Westernism, Turkism, modernist Islamism, solidarism, altruism, vanguardism, and moralism. He had embraced a civic-republican ideal by elevating the common good of society above individual rights.

Civic-republicanism has its origins in the ethical and political thought of Aristotle and was reinforced and modified by a succession of political thinkers from Machiavelli to Rousseau. Liberal and civic-republican philosophical traditions are situated at the opposing ends of the Western political thought. While liberalism glorifies the rights of the individual, civic-republicanism elevates the duties of the citizen.⁶⁹ Civic-republicanism places a high value on social cohesion and solidarity of the community. Civic-republican thinkers do not regard individuals as a moral priority for society. Quite the contrary; claims can be made on their lives, time, and resources for the well-being of society. Military service, for instance, constitutes one of the practices of public service in order for individuals to turn into citizens. Aġaoġlu's ideas portray the rise of a liberalism in Turkey that is firmly situated in a civic-republican framework. Aġaoġlu's liberalism was built on the solidarist pillar of civic-republicanism. This could be viewed as liberalism as long as he expected the people to curb their selfish desires via internal, moral restrictions rather than the external interventions of the state. In his thought, civic-republicanism could co-exist with liberalism via moralism. He not only detested the egoist individual but also the individual who was tamed by the state. Rather, his individual was to be tamed by an inner self that would be activated by the teachings of the intellectuals.

It is obvious that the ideas of both Prince Sabahattin and Aġaoġlu at times were utilized by those who professed religious dogmatism and those who blamed them for religious dogmatism. Prince Sabahattin's involvement in the Incident of 31 March was never an established fact. Aġaoġlu's involvement in the Menemen incident was undoubtedly an unreasonable allegation. Aġaoġlu's thought contained some modernist Islamic motifs but he clearly was not a religious dogmatist.

Religious symbolism emerged in the Ottoman-Turkish political tradition as a reaction to the Westernization attempts that were promoted from the center. Religion came to be associated with the discourse of the just in a collapsing empire in which the social classes were not adequately prepared for class rebellions.⁷⁰ Hence, rebellious activity against the center took the shape of religious activity since the central elite had embraced Westernization reforms. The dynamics of this conflict are crucial in grasping the subsequent tension both within the Ottoman system and the Turkish Republic between the Westernizers and the Islamic opposition that came to be regarded as progressives and reactionaries, respectively. Accordingly, Islam came to be regarded as the nemesis of Westernization in Turkey.

The tendency to associate liberal opposition with religious dogma still constitutes a major obstacle in the process of constituting oppositional identities, thoughts, movements, and political parties in Turkey. When the Justice and Development Party, which

⁶⁹ Adrian Oldfield, 'Citizenship: an unnatural practice?,' *Political Quarterly*, 61 (1990), pp. 177–187. See also Michael Ignatieff, 'The myth of citizenship,' in: Ronald Beiner (Ed.) *Theorizing Citizenship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) on the philosophical traditions of liberalism and civic-republicanism.

⁷⁰ For the notions of 'discourse of the just' and 'discourse of the unjust,' see Şerif Mardin, 'The just and the unjust,' *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Social Sciences*, 120(3) (Summer 1991), pp. 113–129.

epitomizes the image of moderate Islam in the Middle East, became the governing party of Turkey in November 2002, it became an outspoken advocate of Turkey's membership in the European Union. The Justice and Development Party is clearly a political party with a religious social base. Yet, ironically, it also became the voice of liberal opposition in Turkey and received the backing of the big industrialists in Istanbul. The difficulty in maintaining a distance between liberal and religious currents of thought still debilitates the parameters of the political realm. There is a consistent reproduction of political parties in Turkey that embrace the discourse of the bureaucratic-military cadres of the state. The representation of such a state discourse in politics pushes the political parties that oppose it into the same camp, despite their apparent differences.⁷¹ As a result, the ideas of the liberal and religious critiques of the state discourse tend to converge. The ongoing tension between the bureaucratic-military cadres and the elected representatives of the governments portray the lack of legitimacy in the realm of politics in Turkey. The association of Prince Sabahattin's and Ağaoğlu's ideas with religious dogmatism is an early manifestation of the difficulty in maintaining a distance between liberal and Islamic currents of thought in Turkey.

In the aftermath of the predominance of Unionist views within the CUP, solidarism constituted the foundation of subsequent Turkish political thought. Prince Sabahattin's liberal opposition was formulated prior to the constitution of such a foundation. Hence, he was able to envision a transition to a society that would create and sustain independent individuals rather than a national union. Ahmet Ağaoğlu, in contrast, had already embraced the Unionist view. He was convinced of the necessity of attaining national sovereignty with the guidance of the intellectuals. The Unionist parameters of his thought limited the scope of his liberalism. He found himself in liberal opposition in 1930 after internalizing the parameters of the Unionist arguments. Therefore, it is possible to say that his liberalism was not only accidental but also *ex post facto*, and hence contained solidarist motifs. He was a civic-republican prior to advocating liberalism. This liberalism was an oxymoron since it placed priority on the good of society while at the same time professing freedom of the individual. In this brand of liberalism, one could be a good individual only by being a good citizen.

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⁷¹ These political dynamics are reminiscent of the convergence of all the anti-Unionist opposition in 1909 before the Incident of 31 March.

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