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Book Review

Christine M. Philliou. *Turkey: A Past Against History*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

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This book depicts transformation of the Ottoman and Turkish society between the Second Constitutional Monarchy (1908) of the late Ottoman Empire and the 1960s of modern Turkey with a focus on the life and works of Turkish journalist author Refik Halid Karay (1888-1965). Karay is known with his short stories and novels in Turkish literature. Using excerpts from Karay's newspaper articles, stories, and novels, Philliou shows how an Ottoman liberal criticized the policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the nationalists in Ankara during the Turkish War of Independence and the subsequent regime in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Using the term *muhalefet* [opposition], Philliou focuses on the transition of Karay from a dissident figure into a discontent patriot. While doing this, Philliou skilfully draws the framework of Turkish modernity between 1908 and 1960.

In the first chapter of book, "Against Power?", Philliou focuses on the formation of Refik Halid as an Ottoman establishment writer. Tracing the education of Refik Halid, the reader is also able to follow the meaning of modernity and education for the Ottomans during this era. Philliou examines Refik Halid's early career as a translator and writer in newspapers and analyses his first short stories. Philliou concludes this chapter with Refik Halid's early messages about the social problems brought by narrow political freedoms and economic modernization of the Constitutional revolution of 1908.

In the second chapter, "The Contradictions of Ottoman Constitutionalism and the Remaking of Muhalefet (1908-1913)", the reader follows the shift in the meaning of *muhalefet* and how Refik Halid's satirical persona the Porcupine (*Kirpi*) was born. In his short satires and essays, Refik Halid criticized the forced programs of centralization and

modernization of the CUP and portrayed the conflict between the CUP officers and the Westernized Ottoman bourgeoisie. Philliou explains how the term of *muhalefet* signified the groups favouring the restoration of the constitution in 1908 and how it became synonymous with the opposition to the same ideas and its carriers in the CUP in 1913. Philliou used Refik Halid's short stories and newspaper articles as examples to show how an Ottoman liberal perceived the CUP. The chapter ends with Refik Halid's deportation from Istanbul to Anatolia by the leaders of the CUP.

The third chapter, "The Joke (1913-1918), covers the years of Refik Halid's first exile. Although he could not return to Istanbul and had to switch the cities in which he lived, he received a salary from the government because he was employed in the civil service. Refik Halid also received money from his father on a monthly basis. We see social realist stories in this era. During his exile, Refik Halid had close relations with Unionists, specifically with the Unionist Provincial Governor of Ankara, Dr. Mehmed Reşid. Many of Refik Halid's writings were either censored or rejected, only few of his stories met readers in the war years. Philliou focuses on a particular story, "Joke", which narrates a misadventure of three drunken men. "Joke" ends with a dark humour as one of the men ends up dead while he was trying to harass a Greek woman. Philliou's attachment of this story to wider violence of war appears to be overstretched.

Philliou begins the fourth chapter, "The True Face of Istanbul (1918-1922)" with an emphasis on the power of Unionists in Ottoman society and institutions, which they controlled throughout their rule. This can be seen in the formation of Ottoman Turkish identity and the impact of Unionists on power networks after the end of World War I in the national independence movement. Focusing on the term of *muhalefet*, Philliou argues that the new *muhalefet* condemned the national movement for its ties to Unionism. Refik Halid was among the intellectuals, who sought for the guidance of a foreign power and he joined the associations pinning their hopes on England and the United States. He also had a government position as the general director of Post and Telegraph, which was a turning point in his life. During his post, he took a clear stance against the national movement and its leader, Mustafa Kemal by blocking his telegrams, forbidding the telegraph operators to receive or transmit those and he even called Mustafa Kemal to resign from his official position as a military inspector. In his journal articles, Refik Halid criticized the nationalists and condemned them as Unionists.

The fifth chapter "Muhalefet From Abroad (1922-1927)" examines Refik Halid's second exile. Once Mustafa Kemal's nationalists became victorious and gained the control of country, Refik Halid fled to French-ruled Syria and carried on his opposition to Mustafa Kemal and his national movement in the form of memoirs. He emphasized that the new regime showed continuities with the Unionist regime. The dichotomy between new capital Ankara and Istanbul regarding freedom of expression can be traced in the publication process of Refik Halid's memoirs. Philliou argues that Refik Halid's *muhalefet* towards the new regime continued until 1927, the year when Mustafa Kemal consolidated his power and eliminated any potential rivals within the country.

In the sixth chapter, "There is a World Underground (1928-1945)", Philliou focuses on Refik Halid's change of sentiments toward the regime. Still in exile, Refik Halid took a patriotic stance regarding the annexation of the Hatay/Alexandretta region by Turkey and used articles he wrote in a newspaper (*Vahdet*), his personal and political contacts in the region to serve the republic about the cause. Philliou points out how Refik Halid drew away

from direct discussion of the Unionists and their relations with the new republic. After he was pardoned in 1938, Refik Halid republished his older works with some omissions and revisions carrying on the narrative that stitches together the Ottoman past and Turkish present. The removal of the “*muhallif*” dimension was a reinvention of Refik Halid in order to be accepted in this new regime. He also took his name, Karay, as it was required after surname law passed in 1934.

In the final chapter, “Muhalefet in the Free World (1945-1965)”, Philliou analyses the formation of an opposition party, Democrat Party (DP) in 1946 as a reaction to the dominant power with an emphasis on the liberal freedoms. After the DP won the 1950 elections, political environment of Turkey changed dramatically. Philliou argues writers and journalists gained a sense of freedom of expression as long as they were not communists. During this period, Karay believed that his dream of a liberal democracy had been achieved, with some minor differences. The 1960 military coup ousted the DP but brought a previously unprecedented liberal constitution, which created ideologically diverse Turkey by the time Karay died in 1965.

The book gives a glimpse of tumultuous transformation of modern Turkey from the ashes of Ottoman Empire as it heavily focuses on Refik Halid Karay’s life and works as case study. Philliou gives his readers a view of this transition from a perspective of liberal opposition figure. A fragment of Karay’s liberal vision arrived late in his life, in the 1961 constitution of Turkey. He set an example of sturdy opposition to future journalists and writers, who ironically shared a similar destiny despite the premise of liberalism.