In the Land of Free People: A Turkish Liberal Utopia between the State and the Individual

Savas S. Barkcin

Abstract

Presented here is an analysis of the political thought of Ahmet Ağaoğlu, one of the sounding boards of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In his utopian work "In the Land of Free People," he is preoccupied with the idea of making Turkey a "progressive" state so that it can attain the standard achieved by Western civilization. How it is done does not matter, as long as the country is put on the path of "liberalism," which to him is the shortcut to development. The liberalism suggested by Ağaoğlu is not via privileging individual rights through popular will (as in the West), but through manipulation by the state; even if it must be achieved through despotic practices.

Ahmet Ağaoğlu and Kemalism

The utopian story *Serbest Insanlar Ülkesinde* (In the Land of Free People) that we are going to analyze was written by Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869-1939), one of the most interesting figures in modern Turkish political thought. In the 1920s, during the founding years of the modern Turkish Republic, Ağaoğlu emerged as a prominent figure witihin the close circle of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic. This thinker of Azeri origin got involved in almost all possible strands of thought of his time. This ranged from advocating Persian nationalism to Turkish nationalism, from pan-Islamism to agnostic secularism.[1] His volatile intellectual profile and persistent attachment to eclecticism may

Savas S. Barkcin *is a Ph.D. candidate in political theory in the Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey.*

surprise many today, but broadly speaking this was a salient feature of most intellectuals who lived in the transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. This instability, and at times inconsistency in thinking, signals the overwhelming political crisis of that transition, since intellectuals would pick any idea they deemed useful for the salvation of the State and then turn the imported idea to an *etatist* (state socialist) tactic.[2]

To analyze the Kemalist elements dominant in Ağaoğlu's liberal utopia, we need to summarize what Kemalism is (the explicit official ideology of the Turkish republic). First of all, it is a radical program of modernization and secularization to attain the universal civilization that is represented by the West, based on the personal cult of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk. The tenets of Kemalism are conventionally listed as republicanism, populism, nationalism, *etatism,* secularism, and revolutionarism.[3] The Kemalist modernization project developed by Atatürk during the 1920s and 1930s is a project of social engineering that defines the role of the State and society in social change, with the State taking precedence over society. In this sense, the nation-state and society are conceived as forming a unity.[4] The best motto characterizing the Kemalist ideology is "government for the people, despite the people," not *by* the people.[5]

Kemalism is distinctive for its somewhat utopian project of forced transformation of the Turkish society through wholesale adaptation of Western ways, from administration to clothing. The masses were forced to accept these changes, and the Islamic past and culture were eradicated in favor of Kamalist ideas. In the name of Atatürk's utopia, an oriental nation was transformed into an occidental one via enlightened despotism. The Kemalist program included establishing an elitist State apparatus, Jacobin in character, that set all the objectives before the newly-defined nation and used police force whenever it felt that popular acceptance was low for such reforms; for example, the Western hat, secular education, and prohibition of Qur'anic teaching. So the utopia of the Kemalist State was at the same time the dystopia for a large portion of the Muslim population.

In this sense, Kemalism with its *etatist*, elitist, progressivist, positivist and Jacobin characteristics represents the most extreme of all the modernization programs advocated by various schools of thought in the later Ottoman period, such as pan-Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, and pan-Turkism.

Ağaoğlu was one of the most fervent champions of the Kemalist project of political and cultural westernization. All his writings, including the lib-

eral utopian story that this article discusses, refer to his conviction that the West must be adopted in its entirety by the Muslim Turkish people in order for the latter to become "civilized." In this sense, his understanding of westernization seems quite radical in comparison with some other thinkers, including Ziya Gökalp, the pan-Turkist corporatist ideologue of the Republic, and Mehmet Akif, the Islamist poet. Both shared the view that what was to be adopted from the West was only its technology and science, not its culture. Other cultural elements were seen as detrimental and decadent, hence to be rejected. In contrast, Ağaoğlu stands for a complete adoption of Western values and ways, technology as well as culture, political structures as well as political ideas.

Ağaoğlu could articulate these views in the founding years of the Kemalist State because this position was also supported by the absolute leader, Atatürk, and the hegemonic discourse of the regime. Apparently, he was protected and backed by the government for he was appointed to various government posts, including a guaranteed seat in the parliament with the consent of Atatürk. All those favors came to an end, however, when Ağaoğlu took part in establishing an opposition party in 1930 that was soon shut down by the government. The emergence of the liberal-minded Free Party was the idea of Atatürk himself who was already the chairman of the official single party, the Republican People's Party (RPP).[6] Atatürk reviewed and approved the program of the new opposition party, which was designed to appease popular discontent toward the single party regime and its control over the populace.[7] Atatürk informed Ağaoğlu that he was a founding member of this party. But soon, when the masses started showing strong support for this managed party, Atatürk dissolved it and ended the favoritism Ağaoğlu had been receiving from the government. Ağaoğlu then started giving lectures at the university, but this too was terminated by the government in 1933. Afterwards we see him writing in newspapers and periodicals until his death.[8]

During this last period, Ağaoğlu carried out a polemic with the *etatist* intellectuals gathered around the periodical *Kadro,* who regarded Kemalism as an extension of their interpretation of Marxism. In his polemics he utilized liberal arguments against the socialists, and just like his antagonists, he drew upon Kemalism, the hegemonic discourse of the time, to support his position. He stressed the primacy and importance of the individual as opposed to the State, encouraged private enterprise, and the ideal of a modern liberal State that is free of corruption, nepotism, and

favoritism. But as was the case with his debates on other subjects, Ağaoğlu's intellectual campaign against this group was also fraught with erratic interpretations of such philosophers as Marx and Engels.[9]

Ağaoğlu's defense of the individual is complex. He characterizes the heavy-handed Kemalist regime as something almost liberal, while refuting the Islamic tradition of interdependence between individual and community as a source of hindrance to the development of Muslim societies. He favors adoption of Western individualism not only because the West offers the ideal, but also because it had triumphed over the Islamic and the Buddha-Brahma civilizations.[10] Note that this conviction was almost common sense among Turkish intellectuals, who were faced with the collapse of an empire and subsequently dire times under a new State.[11]

This eclecticism makes it difficult for us to locate Ağaoğlu on the political spectrum. Analysts like François Georgeon often call him a liberal: "The admiration Ağaoğlu has for the Enlightenment and French Revolution, in short, the liberal West had never diminished. But at times we sense that he was cautious about this."[12] As we are going to demonstrate, his liberal position seems at least questionable in the light of his strong attachment to the totalist statecraft that has been represented in the name of Kemalism in Turkey. Hence, no wonder his name is never mentioned among the liberal thinkers in books written on the evolution of Turkish liberalism.[13]

In the next section, we analyze a utopian story that was written to demonstrate the weaknesses of the Kemalist regime and present Ağaoğlu's vision of a new and entirely modernized society designed along Western lines. Interestingly, very few political utopian writings exist in Turkish, for various reasons—historical, cultural, and political. Instead, satire has proven to be a preferred form of literature. This, however, does not mean that the utopian concept has had no relevance in Turkish political thought. Some observers like Serif Mardin attribute the utopian tendency of the late Ottoman intelligentsia to the extended opportunities for education and studies of the time.[14] Reading many books translated from Western sources of political thought, many Ottoman intellectuals actually acquired an image of the West that existed only in books, not in reality. As a result, they created a utopia purely out of their reading of European civilization.

This lack of a prevailing utopian context in Turkish political literature may also be attributed to the fact that the thinkers of the time had already an active utopia at work that was sponsored by the Kemalist regime, trans-

forming every single Turkish individual into a Western equivalent. The West was naively represented as the sole source of prosperity, humanity, and values. It was civilized, progressive, rational, egalitarian, advanced, and humanitarian.[15] Utopia was already incorporated into the State's discourse and policies, and the State represented almost the only symbol, in the name of which, alternative ideas could be legitimately defended.

In the Land of Free People: A Liberal Utopia

The story, *In the Land of Free People*, was first published in 1930 as a series of articles in a daily newspaper. Later that year it appeared in the form a of book. A few months after the publication of the book the Free Party was established.

The story tells of a chained man, the author himself, who escapes to "Free Land" where he learns the virtues of freedom. The prison he escapes from is Oriental society and the land he takes refuge in is apparently the West. The man unchains himself, opens a hole in the wall of the castle where he has been enslaved and escapes. He sees a desert and starts to walk. He then arrives at a bifurcation where there is a signpost pointing in opposite directions. To the left is the road to freedom; to the right is the road to slavery. Naturally, the escaping slave picks the road leading to freedom. Eventually, he arrives at a castle-city. In front of the main gate of the city, the guardians stop him and ask him several questions to check whether he is eligible for freedom. He replies correctly to all of them and thereby enters Free Land.

Once inside he meets with the elders of Free Land who give him a book titled "The Principles of the Land of Free People." This treatise describes the principles of freedom applied in Free Land, which are at the same time prerequisites for any person to become its citizen. The elders ask him to learn all these by heart in a couple of weeks. He reads the book and is amazed at the clarity and attraction of the principles. The elders are not sure whether he can become a free man since he is burdened with Oriental remnants of slavery. But he is zealous to learn and be persuaded, so he holds periodical conversations with the elders. They also test him to see whether he is being trained properly for freedom. He finds it difficult to be a free man. It requires constant awareness, toil, and rethinking. But at the same time, he finds it satisfying.

His days in Free Land pass in dialogues, indeed, therapy sessions with the elders. He is taken to various locations, including a movie theater, a university, a chemical institute, a factory, an airport, a primary school, a

library, a parliament building, a park, an academy of sciences, and the like. Everywhere he goes, he feels the stark contrast between what he sees there and what he remembers from his past. With each comparison he increasingly realizes how backward is Oriental society and how idyllic is Free Land.

At the end of this learning period, the author becomes fully assured that he can become a free man after all. He announces his decision to the elders who then take him to a ceremonial hall. Before the elders, he takes the oath of freedom and citizenship, and signs a certificate of freedom. With pleasure he takes part in this free society as a dignified and civilized citizen. He finds everything so beautiful and full of joy. Eventually, he understands that he has fallen in love with the angel of freedom. (p. 128)[16]

Elements of Illiberalism in a Liberal Utopia

Georgeon describes *In the Land of Free People* as "a mixture of Oriental style stories and the utopias of the Enlightenment."[17] Some other analysts prefer to call it an allegory.[18] Whatever it is called, what Claeys talks about when he is discussing the 18th century British utopias is also relevant to Ağaoğlu's work, namely, that there is a tension between the liberal humanitarianism that talks about equality, abolition of classes and etiquette, and illiberal elements of stress on republican public virtue and responsibilities.[19]

Ağaoğlu says he wrote this utopia "in order to establish the moral aspect of the ideology of the Republic," i.e., Kemalism.[20] Clearly, such a task was needed since later Atatürk ordered the establishment of the opposition party. This confirms what Kumar asserts when he discusses utopias: "utopian conceptions are indispensable to politics."[21]

As we know, the utopian literary genre is adopted primarily to imagine societies of greater virtue and equality, both as a means of criticizing inadequacies and seriously proposing ideas or plans of superior societies.[22] In our case, the ideal is Western society where the individual's initiative and freedom is fostered. In Ağaoğlu's story, both criticized and idealized elements exist contemporaneously in real life. So, our utopia serves to suggest a reform in a so-called liberal sense for Kemalist *etatism*. In this sense, the story offers a critique of the dominant ideology of the time, Kemalism.[23] Ağaoğlu uses the utopia "as an expression of extreme or implausible principles of social reform,"[24] thus implicitly criticizing the Kemalist regime and, at the same time, trying not to seem too radical, since it could cost him

his freedom and his career. Therefore, Ağaoğlu makes several references to Atatürk, praising him and deifying him in many ways, both in the preface and also in the story.

The story is interesting because it provides us with a rich repertoire of symbols and meanings prevalent in Turkish political thought in the 1930s and in the present. Therefore, our analysis not only establishes the ideological links between Turkish liberalism and Kemalism, but also relates to the paradoxes, conflicts, and co-optations that are produced as an outcome of that ideological linkage. There is the official State ideology and its reality on the one hand, and a liberal alternative and its utopia on the other. So, Ağaoğlu's utopia may be seen as the euphoric side of the Kemalist dystopia that was being implemented.

The work is indicative of the acceptance of the Kemalist regime as the only framework within which the Turkish nation could become westernized and therefore civilized. The elders of Free Land are working for the realization of the modernization project and the objectives of the "Great Genius," i.e., Atatürk. Therefore, this utopia stands on the firm ground of Kemalism and develops its subtle critique by commenting on a liberal society. Interestingly, Ağaoğlu is too careful to exempt the personal leadership of Atatürk in his critique of *etatism*.[25]

In the story, he says that it was "God's Prophet," i.e., Atatürk, who saved the homeland. Because the author heard the voice of "God's Prophet" he could unchain himself and escape from slavery. The elders, listening to this account, confirm the truth of his experience excitedly: "Yes! Yes! We also know that hero and we love him. And whatever we do in this Free Land is in the name of his ideals" (p. 6).

The first theme we observe in the utopia is Turkish nationalism. One of the basic tenets of Kemalism was to create a Turkish nation out of the cosmopolitan, multinational Ottoman State. There was no talk of a distinct Turkish nation until the very last decades of the Empire. In order to justify the new Republic, however, Kemalists relied on developing a Turkish ethos, accenting pre-Islamic Turkish history, and revising much of the Ottoman history to call it a Turkish empire. In this way, just like the personal cult of Atatürk, nationalism was supposed to replace Islam as the singular mode for political legitimacy. In this period, nationalist propaganda sometimes assumed very peculiar forms that could be called racist.

This nationalist theme is found in many parts of the story. When the elders ask Ağaoğlu about his background, he responds: "my tradition is noble,

my homeland is select and my blood is pure." And he goes on to explain why his original homeland got corrupted: because "our blood was mixed, we have obeyed the tradition of our slaves, and my master nation became enslaved" (p. 5). Indeed, what he means is that the Turkish dynasty of Ottomans, by relying on a religious empire rather than a particular national identity, sacrificed the Turkish culture for the Arabic and Persian cultures, an argument still frequently expressed in Kemalist and nationalist circles. Thus, Ağaoğlu sees the Republic as the fulfillment of the nationalist awakening of the Turkish race. He advances this claim by blaming the past: "I wish our forefathers would have begun before us, yet we suffer so much when we remember their laziness and indifference" (p. 126). He also attributes the Orient's lagging behind, although it had been "the cradle of all civilizations," to its ignorance of the concept of nationhood (p. 70).

Another interesting element we detect in the utopia is the displacement of Islamic symbols with liberal ones. A sense of an exotic and spiritual journey is felt throughout the text. Some Islamic symbols and metaphors are used, nonetheless, with adverse connotations. In this way, while the utopic land is given some sort of purity and divinity, thus exalting the Kemalist State, the Islamic connotation is being negated. For example, four questions the guardians at the gates of the Land ask him are more than liberal ones: "Do you have control over yourself? Do you cherish the rightful? Do you admit the truth in every case? Do you have self-dignity?" (p. 4). When the free people sing about the virtues of Free Land, their song sounds like some verses from the Qur'an though with humanist tones:

> Man is the consciousness of the universe
> and we worship him
> we bless him
> the Land of Free People is the Temple of Liberty
> in it we shelter and put our trust (p. 11)

Ağaoğlu talks about the virtues of liberty in the story. But this is done more in a preaching style, as if he is involved in prophesying a new religion.[26] This is not surprising, especially when we remember that the Kemalist discourse is primarily based on the idol of Atatürk, and certain quasi-spiritual elements like loyalty to Atatürk even after his death, designed to replace the Islamic creed. Hence, Ağaoğlu's quasi-religious rhetoric is only an extension of the hegemonic discourse of Kemalism. Other examples, carrying the same signification can be easily detected in the story. For instance, when he takes the oath of freedom and citizenship,

the elders warn him that the oath is sacred and whoever breaches it faces a divine curse. The angel of freedom follows every new citizen and curses them whenever they deviate from their promise (p. 127).

In the story, we can also witness the centrality of a native Orientalist discourse. For the free man, whatever beneficial work has been created, it is because the Westerners made it. As Ağaoğlu says in the story: "None of these works belong to us. We are like parasites living on the back of all humanity" (p. 74). The Orientalist outlook usually manifests itself with an inferiority complex and self-hatred. This self-hatred is visible when the author tells himself: "If I could, I would throw away this [Oriental reason] I possess and replace it with a new one" (p. 98). In this connection, he claims that the Oriental people are insensitive toward rights "and eventually the concept of rights becomes obsolete. Yet in the West that is antithetical to the Orient, when one person's right is violated, all other people defend him" (pp. 105–6). For him, as he says elsewhere, "the individual has been strangled in the East while fostered in the West."[27] The feeling of inferiority leads him, like all other Orientalists, native or foreign, to conclude that the West and the East stand in exact opposition to each other and that the East represents all human failures while the West the represents the promise of humanity.

Free Land is understandably the West. So the West is Ağaoğlu's "active utopia." The utopia is already there and realized, waiting to be imitated and adapted. Thanks to Orientalist discourse, however, the West the author refers to is no longer the West in reality with its achievements and its shortfalls: It is an imagined West which is, at the same time, the counter-culture of the Islamic world.[28]

The West, especially French liberalism, can be seen in many parts of the work as the active utopia. As Georgeon realizes, the principal law of Free Land is inspired partly from the French Declaration of Rights of Men (p. 79). The Academy that the protagonist visits and is fascinated with is similar to the Académie Française. In Free Land, there is also a park where every person can voice different ideas freely. This clearly refers to Hyde Park in London.

Just like the apparent positivistic message of utopia, Kemalism too subscribes to positivism together with rationalism and Orientalism. Progress is the basis of this utopia and it goes hand-in-hand with Orientalism. Ağaoğlu thinks that as the West is advanced, other cultures must follow its lead and become civilized (p. 112). On the other hand, we see that the hero of this

utopia thinks all humanity and history is progressing toward freedom and this is something that Easterners would not understand (p. 77). He tells us in the story that in the past it was clergymen who were the guides for humanity, but now it is the scientists (p. 71). We also observe that the author is fascinated by what he sees in the factory (p. 99). This love for the machine exists identically in Kemalism whereby the success of the Kemalist regime has often been portrayed by images of factories and railroads.

A significant portion of the text is allocated to a discussion of despotism, particularly Oriental despotism and its humiliating effects on individuals. Ağaoğlu talks about a liberal West versus a despotic East that comfortably fits the prevalent Orientalist discourse of the time.[29] When Ağaoğlu condemns despotism, however, he carefully exempts the Kemalist regime.

Despotism may not be there anymore in Free Land, but it may pervade everywhere. "And wherever there is despotism, you have anarchy" (p. 13). Freedom is the antithesis of despotism not only in the form of governance, but also in terms of ethics and values. The elders tell the author that "freedom is a question of culture." This falls parallel to the Kemalist program of imposing education, not for free and critical thinking, but for indoctrination of the masses. In the story, the elders say that freedom is a virtue because "being free is difficult whereas being a slave is not" (p. 30). This theme is one of the most preferred messages of the author and constitutes the basis for his defense of adapting the entirety of Western science and culture.

Just like the Kemalist dystopian reality, Free Land has its propaganda. Wherever the author travels in Free Land he sees statues, inscriptions of official slogans on buildings, and movies bashing the past. The regime employs propagandists in the very same manner as the Kemalist reality: "[They] have orators everywhere in [the] land. They constantly travel the towns and show the right way to the public, particularly the youth" (p. 57). Wherever the author travels he finds lecturers indoctrinating the laborers, students, and common people about the virtues of freedom.

Another interesting element found in the text is the use of elders as virtual propagandists in a liberal land. The image of elders resemble Sufi masters more than Western sages. They "initiate people to the [Free] Land" just like Sufi masters initiating people to their orders.[30] Claeys remarks that "utopias embody an ideology or order rather than of freedom, and of paternal protection rather than increasing individual independence and responsibility."[31] Similarly, the author's utopia makes the elders the authorities who

teach, disseminate, and uphold Free Land's values of freedom. This is reminiscent of Ottoman paternalism, where the State is the only authority for which individual or communal activities may be justified, constituting a value in itself. We still hear it whenever people call the State "father" in Turkish. Kemalism's significance lies also in its selective inheritance of Ottoman Islamic paternalism and turning it into a secular paternalism, indeed a hegemonic ethos. Finding this hierarchy of power in a so-called liberal utopia shows the downside of Turkish liberalism, arguing for the primacy of the State, and emphasizing order over diversity, and public duties over individual rights.

What Ağaoğlu presents as an ideal society is not the one where social inequalities are removed altogether, but softened.[32] In Free Land schools, children, whether rich or poor, wear the same cheap uniforms, the State finds jobs for beggars, and it provides school expenses for all. Thus, there is a hint that the State pretends to be a welfare State like those in the West, but falls short of being a State responsive to a society that enjoys political and social autonomy.

The liberalism that is purportedly applied in Free Land requires individual action, but this does not lead to extreme individualism, rather it fosters solidarity among Free People. The solidarity that is implied in the text reminds us of the corporatist roots of the Kemalist ideology and its principal ideologue, Ziya Gökalp. Kemalism defends establishment of an "organic society" that is based on the principle of unity of State and nation.[33] What Ağaoğlu prescribes in the text is not exactly this meaning of solidarity. It is something closer to corporatism than liberalism when we consider the constitution of Free People and Free Land.

Unlike the Kemalist reality, only those people with merits can govern in Free Land. Every public person is liable to give account of his/her public and private life whenever asked by the people (p. 37), "because there is no legitimate line dividing the public and private life of a public official" (p. 39).

Democracy in the Free Land is not direct. It is a representative regime but based on an elite acting as intermediary. This is reminiscent of the Kemalist political, administrative, and intellectual elite who were recruited to become the servants of the Republic and indoctrinated in the personal cult of the "eternal chief," and who were needed to impose Western policies on the masses who were usually seen as ignorant and inferior.[34]

Ağaoğlu is equally elitist and fearful of the popular will in its unobstructed manifestation. He says elsewhere: "I never thought that the disoriented masses can have the ability to do any job ... [To the contrary,] I always sided with strong government. ... It is no doubt that strong governments and strong people are essential in countries like ours that have primitive political and social experience."[35] Ağaoğlu's preference for a "despotic liberalism" is clear in relation to his loyalty to the official single party of the Kemalist regime. As he says elsewhere: "I have always taken the RPP as a democrat and liberal party throughout my membership and activity inside that party."[36] Ağaoğlu's liberalism is an ideology where the State takes the center and imposes its values and lifestyle on the people.[37]

The strict order that the Kemalist State relied on to materialize its utopian project, constitutes another aspect of Ağaoğlu's utopia. In his utopia Ağaoğlu applies similar forms of regimentation, for example, enforcing a uniformity of dress and housing, which is more a totalitarian rather than a liberal trait.[38] Free Land has a highly disciplined order that fits the general characteristics of the ideal city in utopias.[39]

There are other nonliberal, but certainly Kemalist-inspired elements in Free Land: certain maligned citizens like spies, liars, cowards, con men, and lazy people are isolated from the society. Applauding a singer, a musician or a lecturer is forbidden (p. 52). Hypocrisy and exaggerated praise are serious crimes. Those found guilty of these crimes are stoned to death by the people (p. 8). Those who do not want to work are forced to do so for the State (p. 46). And he says this is done to protect freedom, not undermine it. This supports Kolakowski's explanation, namely, that "utopia leads to totalitarian coercion."[40]

Conclusion: Turkish Liberalism Between the Individual and the State

Here and there, now and then are intertwined in utopia. We have a background and base of reality that is simultaneously kept and rejected.[41] In other words, utopias are both transformative and oppositional.[42] In this regard, *In the Land of Free People* is no exception. Ağaoğlu subscribes ambitiously to the Kemalist reality that could be hardly called "liberal" with its single party elitist rule, with a parliament that is composed of deputies personally appointed by the single eternal leader, and where party heads in provinces are themselves the governors. By showing how close and related his utopian liberalism and the official ideology are, he wants to

give the impression that he is not directly taking aim at Kemalism . His utopia also benefits from the fact that "utopic discourse is ideological because it itself is not criticized," as Marin suggests.[43] Therefore, the utopia that we have discussed in this article comes to present no alternative to the Kemalist dystopian reality, just a corollary to it.

In fact, the utopia we have discussed seems to be a conservative utopia as defined by Levitas, rather than a liberal one since it constructs "an image of a desired society where there is unquestioned loyalty to the State, hierarchy, deference, order, centralized power."[44] Therefore, while the work seems to be critical of the Kemalist regime, its implications are conservative.[45] Indeed, Ağaoğlu's utopia serves to strengthen the Kemalist *status quo* because its function as compensation in a situation where there is no hope of changing social and material circumstances.[46] In reality, what the author does is justify the Kemalist present and postpone any liberal prospect. He does this by reducing liberalism to developmentalism and economism, an approach that still haunts Turkish liberalism, and which has been advocated by conservatives as a strategy to improve the economy and "attain the Western civilizational standard."[47]

Georgeon claims that Ağaoğlu wrote this story as "a defense for adding more democracy to the Kemalist regime."[48] As we have seen, however, the implications of Ağaoğlu's effort to reconcile the nonliberal present with a liberal future point in the opposite direction. Even if Ağaoğlu had such a motive, the outcome of the utopia he constructs serves to justify the dystopian reality. So much so that passage to multiparty democracy could be achieved only after 22 years of Jacobinist, single man rule in Turkey. Because of this eclectic and tactical approach to liberalism, Turkish liberals generally seem to be no different than the illiberal Kemalists in defending a State-centered polity and top-down governance with no recognized civil society.

In the Land of Free People is often called a liberal manifesto against the prevailing Kemalist one-party/one-man regime; however, in the light of our preceding discussion, it may also be characterized as a work suggesting total adoption of Western civilization, even though despotism. It can also be seen as an Orientalist utopia in which whatever is Oriental or Islamic is presented as backward and undesirable and whatever is Western is progressive and perfect.

A parallel can also be drawn between this fondness of authority among the majority of Turkish intellectuals and their personal careers. Ağaoğlu,

for example, had always been a favored government official until he lost Atatürk's support. For a long time, he was the editor of the official Kemalist daily *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* and served as the director general for press, whose primary function was censoring the press.[49] In addition to his government career under an antiliberal regime, Ağaoğlu's disabled liberalism can be attributed to what his son observed in his personality: "a symbol of endless authority and violence."[50]

In the Land of Free People reveals the ultimate paradox for the Turkish intellectuals, namely, the difficulty of reconciling liberalism and full-fledged democracy, which are the hallmarks of the Western political tradition, with the Kemalist project of social engineering that has been applied to direct the masses toward that goal. What was often sacrificed for this end was not enlightened despotism, but pluralism and diversity within the populace that persisted better before coercive politics prevailed. Because saving the State was the central objective and all other ideas that lacked this goal were considered treasonous, the liberal arguments, like those of Ağaoğlu's, could easily be transformed into decorations for an illiberal rule.

The utopia we have discussed reveals the fact that "defending the individual and his rights becomes the hardest task for any liberal approach in a society where the political culture has been shaped by divine principles and a sense of belonging to the community has been so strong."[51] Ağaoğlu did not try to install the individual by limiting the Kemalist State, as would a Western liberal; rather, he preferred to defend the Kemalist project that aims to replace the Islamic political ethos with a modernist and totalitarian one. The *etatist* nature of Ağaoğlu's utopia also shows us the coopting function of intellectual activity in which the State grants rights and freedoms to be enjoyed by the people, rather than mandates them by popular will. So Ağaoğlu, as a contented liberal, faces the dilemma between State and individual.

Ağaoğlu's utopia is a good example of the Turkish intelligentsia's cognitive void, which was created by a sharp break from the past when the quasi-liberal elements of the Islamic and the Ottoman political tradition were rejected. Hence, the work posits the greatest dilemma before Turkish liberals: the legitimization of their position by reinforcing the centrality of the nation-state that is expected to grant rights and freedoms.

Our conclusion is that wherever the State takes center stage in any political imagination and modeling, the individual can only become a marginal figure. Even in a liberal utopia such as *In the Land of Free People*.

Notes

1. See François Georgeon, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)" (The Rise of an Azerbaijani Intellectual: Ahmed Ağaoğlu's Years in France, 1888–1894), [translated from French] *Toplumsal Tarih* (August 1994): 6. Georgeon says Ağaoğlu, who was later to become a pan-Turkist, accused Turks of destroying Islam and Iran in those years.

2. Ağaoğlu too thinks the best method for understanding social phenomena is eclecticism. See Murat Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu ve Liberalizm Anlayışı" (Ahmet Ağaoğlu and His Liberal Understanding) *Türkiye Günlüğü* (Summer 1993): 67. For his nationalist ideas see Yusuf Akçura, *Türkçülük* (Pan-Turkism) (Istanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını, 1978). As a figure bridging Islamism and pan-Turkism, see Süleyman S. Öğün, "Bir Türkçü-İslamcı Eklenme Figürü Olarak Ağaoğlu Ahmed" (Ağaoğlu Ahmed as a Convergence Figure of Turkism and Islamism), in *Modernleşme, Milliyetçilik ve Türkiye* (Modernism, Nationalism, and Turkey) (Istanbul: Bağlam, 1995), 195–203. As a contended liberal, see Murat Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu ve Liberalizm Anlayışı."

3. Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset* (Society and Politics in Turkey) (Istanbul: İletişim, 1997), 181.

4. Fuat E. Keyman, and Hasan B. Kahraman, "Kemalizm, Oryantalizm ve Modernite" (Kemalism, Orientalism and Modernity), *Doğu Batı* (February-March-April 1998): 71–73.

5. Ibid., 72.

6. Although Free Party is often portrayed as a rightist party in comparison to the *etatist* RPP and in favor of private enterprise, it is hard to characterize it as liberal once its program is examined. See Ayşe Trak, "Liberalizm-Devletçilik Tartışmaları (1923-1939)" (Debate on Liberalism and Etatism), in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (Encyclopedia of the Republican Era Turkey) (Istanbul: İletişim, 1983), 1087.

7. "It is known that [Atatürk] did not interfere with the essence of the party program, but made a few corrections." See Tevfik Çavdar, "Serbest Fırka" (Free Party), in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi,* 2053–55.

8. Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 66.

9. Bakırezer shows how erratic and confused are Ağaoğlu's references to some of the Western philosophers. See Güven Bakırezer, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," *Toplumsal Tarih* (May 1994): 37.

10. Ağaoğlu warmly embraced Marx although he was no Marxist, and translated Kropotkin into Turkish although he was no anarchist. See Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 60.

11. See Cemil Meriç, "Batılılaşma" (Westernization), in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi.*

12. François Georgeon, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu: Aydınlanma ve Devrim Hayranı Bir Türk Aydını" (Ahmet Ağaoğlu: A Turkish Intellectual Admiring Enlightenment and Revolution), [translated from French] *Toplumsal Tarih* (December 1996): 30.

13. For example, see Tevfik Çavdar, *Türkiye'de Liberalizm (1860–1990)* (Liberalism in Turkey [1860–1990]) (Ankara: Ymge, 1992), which discusses modern Turkish liberal thinkers but does not mention the name of Ağaoğlu among them.

14. Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum*, 200.

15. "Prominent writers of the Tanzimat Era [1839–1908] are proponents of [a Western style] civilization. But none of them has a systematic definition of what they mean by civilization. And they are no exceptions in this regard when we recall the administrators of the time" (from Meriç, "Batılılaşma", 237). Niyazi Berkes too underlines the distorted perception of the West by the Ottoman modernists: "They were thinking about what the Western individual possessed in terms of living standards, environment and freedoms," see Niyazi Berkes, "Osmanlı Aydınlarının Gözüyle Batı Uygarlığı" (Western Civilization in the Eyes of the Ottoman Intellectuals), *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, 252.

16. From this point onward, all quotations taken from the book are indicated with page numbers inside the brackets. The edition is *Serbest Ynsanlar ülkesinde* (In the Land of Free People) (Istanbul, 1930).

17. Georgeon, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)," 28.
18. Yılmaz is an example. See Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 66.
19. See Gregory Claeys (ed.), *Utopias of the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvi.
20. Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 67.
21. Kumar, *Utopianism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 95.
22. Claeys, *Utopias*, viii.
23. Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1990), ix.
24. Claeys, *Utopias*, ix.
25. Bakırezer, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 40.
26. Ibid., 39.
27. Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Devlet ve Fert* (The State and the Individual) (Istanbul: Şafak Kütüphanesi, 1933), 27.
28. We use this term in the sense Kumar utilizes it when referring to Zygmunt Bauman's characterization of socialism as the "counter-culture of capitalism." See Kumar, *Utopianism*, 97.
29. Georgeon, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)," 32.
30. Georgeon, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)," 33.
31. Claeys, *Utopias*, xvi.
32. Bakırezer, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 38.
33. Keyman and Kahraman, "Kemalizm," 72.
34. For elitism in Ağaoğlu's pan-Turkist writings, see Öğün, "Bir Türkçü-Yslamcı," 202.
35. Yılmaz, "Ahmet Ağaoğlu," 64.
36. Ibid., 62.
37. Trak, "Liberalizm-Devletçilik," 1089. He defends private enterprise only to the extent that whatever the individual cannot initiate, the State must be in charge.
38. Claeys, *Utopias*, xvi.
39. For the ideal city in utopias see Kumar, *Utopianism*, 13.
40. Ibid., 90.
41. Marin, *Utopics*, 95.
42. Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Philip Allan, 1990), 183.
43. Marin, *Utopics*, 196.
44. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 188.
45. Ibid., 192.
46. Ibid.
47. Yılmaz, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)," 68.
48. Georgeon, "Azerbaycanlı Bir Entellektüelin Ortaya Çıkışı: Ahmed Ağaoğlu'nun Fransa Yılları (1888–1894)," 33.
49. See entry on "Ağaoğlu Ahmet," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (Encyclopaedia of Islam), vol.1 (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi, 1988), 465.
50. Samet Ağaoğlu, *Babamdan Hatıralar* (Memories from My Father) (Ankara: Zerbamat, 1940), 23.
51. Atilla Pamirli, "Birey ve Devlet İkileminde Türk Liberalizmi" (Turkish Liberalism: Hesitant between the Individual and the State), *Çerçeve* (April 1998): 31.