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## Mukaddesatçılık: A Cold War Ideology of Muslim Turkish Ressentiment

Talha Köseoğlu 

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Eskişehir, Turkey

Email: [tkoseoglu@ogu.edu.tr](mailto:tkoseoglu@ogu.edu.tr)

### Abstract

This paper introduces *mukaddesatçılık* as a Cold War ideological position that reconciles Turkish nationalism, religious conservatism, and Islamist revivalism. *Mukaddesatçılık* channels senses of disempowerment and alienation among people with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities to a sense of resentment against the Turkish modernization process. The paper analyzes *mukaddesatçılık*'s ideational and emotional components based on the writings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. In addition to being the name-father of the concept, Kısakürek was distinguished from other Islam-inspired conservative intellectuals by his appeal to popular mobilization around *mukaddesatçı* ideology through his eloquent and powerful speeches and poems. The paper argues that Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* reconstructed Muslimness as the political identity of the popular masses, who are the supposed victims of the Turkish modernization process, to mobilize them against the so-called Western-minded modernizing elite. *Mukaddesatçılık* informs the current populist policies of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government that seek to maintain the divisive polarization between religious and secular identities.

**Keywords:** Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; Islam; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek; *mukaddesatçılık*; populism; resentment; Turkish nationalism

Ayasofya, sealed by the hearts that were sealed by Allah, will open like the heart of the *mukaddesatçı* Turkish youth, which they tried to seal in the same way [they sealed Ayasofya], but could not do anything, could not stop the influx that increased day by day, and watch the day [the youth] would fall like an avalanche with horror<sup>1</sup>

In July 2020, the status of Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia), the monumental 6th-century A.D. Byzantine sanctuary in the heart of Istanbul, was transformed by presidential decree from a museum to a mosque for Muslim prayers.<sup>2</sup> The first Friday prayer was led by the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the chief religious official in Turkey, and attended by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan together with thousands of his supporters in and outside the building, amid the COVID-19 outbreak. It was quite a showdown—ostensibly symbolizing

<sup>1</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Hitabeler* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1985), 165. This is originally from a speech Kısakürek delivered at a meeting of a youth association in 1965.

<sup>2</sup> The main cathedral of the Orthodox Church in Byzantine times, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1453 and served as the main mosque of the Ottoman Empire with its Turkified name “Ayasofya Camii.” It became a museum in 1934 by order of a cabinet decree signed by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) himself. This decree was repealed by the Council of State on July 10, 2020, and the building was opened to Muslim prayers on July 24, 2020.

Turkey's return to its Islamic roots, and Muslim Turks' salvation from the "yoke" of Westernization.<sup>3</sup> Not merely a message to the world declaring Turkey's priorities and orientation in the international arena, the "re-conversion" of Ayasofya was intended as a sign of victory of the "authentic" Muslim Turkish identity of the people against the Western-oriented secular elite within the country. Domestic repercussions of this issue—fueled by the sermon delivered at the Friday prayer—have largely revolved around this supposedly primordial indigenous-religious and Westernist-secular duality, with frequent references to Cold War-era intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> With the Ayasofya event, among others, Erdoğan's government and its apparatuses aimed to mobilize deep-seated resentments between generations, which are powerfully expressed in the cited quotation written by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–83), the well-known poet, playwright, polemicist, and ideologue of the "Islamic revival" in Turkey (Fig. 1).

Why do Erdoğan's government and its machinery associate the prevalent populist division between the people and the elite with a division between religious and secular identities? What is the connection between current populist policies and Cold War Muslim Turkish intellectuals such as Kısakürek? On what discursive platform has this policy become pervasive, given Erdoğan's long-standing political success? I argue that a Cold War ideological position in Turkey provides the intellectual background to the current mobilization of the division between religious and secular identities in the form of a populist dichotomous rendition of people and the elite.<sup>5</sup> In this article, I will introduce this ideological position, which reconstructed Muslimness as the political identity of the popular masses (the "victims" of the Turkish modernization process) who stand against a coterie of the elite as ostensible perpetrators of modernization-as-Westernization. The new ideological position gradually became dominant in the Turkish political scene during the heyday of the Cold War by successfully reconciling elements of religious conservatism, Islamist revivalism, and Turkish nationalism. Further, it has maintained influence on generations of right-wing politicians

<sup>3</sup> For an op-ed piece on the issue, see Selim Koru, "Turkey's Islamist Dream Finally Becomes a Reality," *New York Times*, 14 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/hagia-sophia-turkey-mosque.html>. Although Turkey was never colonized by an imperial power, Islam-inspired critiques of the Turkish modernization process perceived Westernizing reforms from the 19th century onward, especially those that were carried out in the first two decades of the republican regime established in 1923, as practices of "self-colonization." See Yasin Aktay, "Sunuş," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, vol. 6, *İslamcılık*, ed. Yasin Aktay (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005), 20; and Recep Şentürk, "Türkiye'de Sosyoloji: Gelenekleşme, Yerlilik ve Bazı Temel Sorunlar," in *Türkiye'de Sosyolojinin Yüz Yıllık Birkimi*, ed. E. Çav and E. S. Genç (Istanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2020), 368–93. Note that Yasin Aktay, a professor of sociology, is a deputy chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and served as a member of parliament from the party's ranks between 2015 and 2018. Recep Şentürk, also a professor of sociology, is the founding rector of Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul founded by an association run by President Erdoğan's son. The erstwhile status of Ayasofya as a museum rather than a Muslim sanctuary was perceived as a mark of Turkey's colonization by the agents of modernization—a source of shame for many people with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities since the early Cold War era. Starting at the five-hundred-year anniversary of Istanbul's conquest in 1953, calls for the opening of Ayasofya for Muslim prayers became a central theme among religious conservative and nationalist circles. See İlker Aytürk, "Nationalism and Islam in Cold War Turkey, 1944–69," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 5 (2014): 693–719.

<sup>4</sup> At the first Friday prayer, the director of religious affairs, Ali Erbaş, delivered his sermon by leaning on a sword in his hands and denouncing those who decided to close down Ayasofya for Muslim prayers, that is, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his associates. Erbaş referred in his sermon to Cold War-era conservative intellectuals by citing their lines expressing aspirations to see Ayasofya as a mosque—including a line from Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's Ayasofya speech (part of which appears at the beginning of this article). For the full sermon see "Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Erbaş, yeniden ibadete açılan Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi'nde ilk hutbeyi irad etti," Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (website), <https://www.diyaret.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/29715/diyaret-isleri-baskani-erbas-yeniden-ibadete-acilan-ayasofya-i-kebir-cami-i-serifinde-ilk-hutbeyi-irad-etti> (accessed 21 June 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Despite controversies regarding a proper definition of populism in the existing literature, arguably the common denominator of all populist rhetoric is an emphatic antagonism between the people, in whatever terms they are defined, and the elite or the establishment. See Giorgos Katsambekis, "Constructing 'the People' of Populism: A Critique of the Ideational Approach from a Discursive Perspective," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 53–74.



**Figure 1.** Necip Fazıl Kısakürek.  
Source: <https://www.necipfazilodulleri.com/necip-fazil-fotografari>.

to this day—informing the nationalist-conservative alliance currently in power—with its success in molding a collective sense of alienation and disempowerment vis-à-vis the modernization process.

The particular word that its exponents used to refer to this new ideology representing the marriage of diverse trends within Islamic intellectual movements and Turkish nationalism was *mukaddesatçılık*.<sup>6</sup> It is foremost a call for a return to Islam to correct perceived injustices of the current social and political order, domestically and globally, and to raise new generations in accordance with principles of the Islamic faith.<sup>7</sup> The closest English term, which still misses certain important dimensions of *mukaddesatçılık*, is “religious nationalism.”<sup>8</sup> It is nationalist in its identification of Turkish national identity with Muslimness, alongside

<sup>6</sup> *Mukaddesatçı* is a Turkified word derived from the Arabic root *q-d-s* (q-d-s), meaning holy or sacred. Without the Turkish suffixes, *mukaddesat* is an Arabic word in the plural form, and refers to things and values that are sacred. Therefore, *mukaddesatçı* literally means defender and protector of the holy or sacred things and values, referring to adherents of this worldview that is denoted by the word *mukaddesatçılık*. Translating the word into English is almost impossible; there is no proper English equivalent. This linguistic concern is one of the reasons I use it in the original Turkish; terms such as Islamic conservatism or conservative nationalism do not capture all aspects of *mukaddesatçılık* as an ideological position.

<sup>7</sup> *Mukaddesatçılık* may be categorized as a “thin” ideology, which does not offer any determinate policy programs or schemes for distribution of wealth and resources. For thin ideologies, see Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 97–99.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the term, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). For a rather recent use of religious nationalism to

its imperial ambitions of seeing Turkey and ethnic Turks as natural leaders of the Muslim world. What complicates this picture are the cooperating conservative and revivalist dimensions of *mukaddesatçılık*. It is conservative in its interpretation of Islam, which rejects the direct appeal to Islamic sources of knowledge such as the Qur'an and sunna to derive new norms and principles for social and political processes; it rather submits to established doctrines of Sunni orthodoxy and, most of the time, the guidance of sufi shaykhs. Yet *mukaddesatçılık* is also revivalist in its attempt to mobilize popular masses and its reckless dismissal of existing practices and institutions, albeit in the name of restoring tradition. In contradistinction to a classical conservative elitist attitude to protect tradition and institutions, *mukaddesatçılık* represented a form of revolutionary, destructive politics with its utter pragmatism, as well as its rationalist, or even modernist, social engineering project for raising *mukaddesatçı* generations.

Resting on a notion of the glorious past of Turkish Islamic civilization embodied in the rulers and institutions of the Ottoman Empire, *mukaddesatçılık* suggests that internal and external enemies brought this civilization to demise mostly through undercutting its supposedly Islamic foundations. Especially blamed are the agents of modernization in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods who, in this narrative, transformed an Islam-based world empire into a secular nation-state striving in vain to be accepted by "Western civilization." Accordingly, the history of Turkish modernization is a history of losing the Turkish Islamic soul, identity, and authenticity; it has been a process of alienation. Against this perceived betrayal of Turkish Islamic identity, *mukaddesatçılık* defends the restoration of values, institutions, and practices deemed sacred (*mukaddes*) without a wholesale rejection of reforms and policies of economic and technological modernization. The appeal of the *mukaddesatçı* narrative has gone well beyond its immediate Cold War context because of not only its successful synthesis of diverse ideological positions, but also its emotive appeal to popular discontent with modernization. *Mukaddesatçılık* has channeled existing senses of disempowerment and alienation among people with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities to a sense of resentment against the Turkish modernization process.<sup>9</sup> I contend that the current power bloc chose to inherit the resentful discourse of *mukaddesatçılık* to maintain the imaginary polarization between Muslim Turkish people and the secular elite. *Mukaddesatçılık* stands as the ideological dimension of the current reign of populism in Turkey, with its historical narrative of Turkish Islamic decline as well as its dichotomous rendition of Muslim Turkish people and the Western-oriented secular elite.

In this article, I will introduce *mukaddesatçılık* as an ideology of Turkish Islamic resentment against modernization-as-Westernization by analyzing the works of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. He was, in fact, the first person to articulate and popularize the word *mukaddesatçılık* in early Cold War Turkey. Kısakürek, to be sure, did not stand alone in upholding an Islam-based critique of Turkish modernization, or in formulating *mukaddesatçılık* as an alternative ideology. Nevertheless, in addition to being the name-father of the concept, he was distinguished from other Islam-inspired conservative intellectuals in

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explain the contemporary rise of Islam in Turkey, see Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Resentment, a French word translated as and sometimes used interchangeably with resentment or rancor, is a moral sentiment referring to a deep-seated feeling of envy, grievance, and hostility. It is caused by a perceived wrongdoing toward oneself that one feels powerless to act upon. See "Resentment," *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100416129> (accessed 14 September 2020). The concept is commonly associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, who developed this otherwise primordial human sentiment as a conceptual tool in his historical critique of Judeo-Christian civilization in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, originally published in 1882. Philosophers often use the original French to differentiate the concept from its English counterparts, which lack the emphasis on hatred that resentment in its French form carries. See Manfred S. Frings, "Introduction," in *Resentment*, ed. Max Scheler (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994), 1–18, 5. Since the language of hatred is so central for Kısakürek, too, in building his *mukaddesatçı* narrative, I prefer to use the French term instead of resentment or grievance.

early Cold War Turkey by his appeal to popular mobilization around the *mukaddesatçı* ideology through his eloquent and powerful speeches and poems. Although he is a somewhat obscure figure to people outside Turkey, his words and ideas continue to influence contemporary right-wing politicians, including President Erdoğan and many of his associates, and to resonate with the Islamist and conservative masses, who have regarded Kısakürek as the *üstad* (master).<sup>10</sup>

An analysis of *mukaddesatçılık*'s ideational and emotional pull, based on various writings, speeches, and poems of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, I contend, will underscore how Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* contributed to the formation of a secular-religious duality in early Cold War Turkey. I will argue that the politicization of this secular-religious duality occurred in a particular context, and that it was not at all the primordial feature of Turkish modernization. Second, my analysis will explicate the form of "imagined community" (and its nemeses) that *mukaddesatçılık* espoused—that is, how this ideology defined who the people were and what "the people" meant. Finally, I will demonstrate how Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* operated as an ideology of resentment that enabled an otherwise conservative ideology to rely on populist mobilization, which explains *mukaddesatçılık*'s success to this day, and the current government's reliance on it.

### Contextual and Conceptual Notes: Toward Understanding *Mukaddesatçılık*

*Mukaddesatçılık* is not an unknown word in Turkish intellectual space, yet it is usually juxtaposed alongside and conflated with conservatism, pietism, and nationalism without any serious attempt to distinguish these concepts. A probable reason for this unfortunate indifference has been the paradigmatic hegemony of secular-religious duality in analyses of Turkish society and politics.<sup>11</sup> Scholarly inquiries espousing this duality rely on Şerif Mardin's classic center-periphery framework in which religiosity is an integral analytical component of analyzing the relationship between the elite and popular sectors from the Ottoman Empire throughout the republican era.<sup>12</sup> Since the 1980s, it has been the prevalent framework for explaining the dynamics of Turkish society and politics, and often has been reduced to an essential cleavage between the secular center and the religious periphery.<sup>13</sup> The discourse on secular-religious duality has gone well beyond the realm of social science

<sup>10</sup> See Sean R. Singer, "Erdoğan's Muse: The School of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek," *World Affairs* 176, no. 4 (2013): 81–88; and Svante E. Cornell, "Erbakan, Kısakürek, and the Mainstreaming of Extremism in Turkey," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 23 (2018): 5–32.

<sup>11</sup> The narrative of duality designates modernist political groups, including republican nationalists (*ulusalcı* in Turkish), liberal and social democrats, and leftists of various sorts, on the secular side, whereas conservative nationalists, religious conservatives, and Islamists are on the religious side. Both popular accounts and academic works resting on this narrative take the constitution of these camps as such for granted. For instance, the juxtaposition of a secular ultra-nationalist and a social democrat, a socialist and a liberal, or a Turkish nationalist and an Islamist is not problematized at all. For a critical evaluation of this narrative, see Agah Hazır, "Narratives on Religion-State Relations in Turkey: Continuities and Discontinuities," *Turkish Studies* 21, no. 4 (2020): 557–77.

<sup>12</sup> See Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 169–90. For a critical assessment, see Onur Bakiner, "A Key to Turkish Politics? The Center-Periphery Framework Revisited," *Turkish Studies* 19, no. 4 (2018): 503–22.

<sup>13</sup> Although a myriad of examples of the hegemonic secular-religious duality exist in the literature, it is important to mention scholars such as Şerif Mardin, Metin Heper, Nilüfer Göle, and Binnaz Toprak. They are the early period scholars who wrote on Islamic political, intellectual, and social movements from the 1980s onward, from political scientific, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. Their work contributed immensely to the establishment of secular-religious duality in the public intellectual space and laid out a framework for scholarly analyses that have been prevalent for decades. Reification of the analytical division between the secular and religious sectors of society without any critical consideration impoverished Turkish political literature. Moreover, the identitarian instrumentalization of this otherwise analytical divide by Islamic-oriented politicians and intellectuals further diminished its value. See İlker Aytürk, "Post-post Kemalizm: Yeni Bir Paradigmayı Beklerken," *Birikim* 319 (2015): 34–48; and Tolga Gürakar and Behlül Özkan, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni: Ordu, Sermaye, ABD, İslamizasyon* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2020).



and become so hegemonic that politicians, pundits, and scholars alike often look on it as a natural outcome of Turkish modernization since its inception in the early 19th century.<sup>14</sup> Resting on this discourse, exponents of the emergent Muslim Turkish political identity made sense of political processes in Turkey, and the world at large, based on a strict in-group/out-group duality around religiosity.<sup>15</sup>

The advent of modernization theory in the early Cold War era with its emphasis on secularization as a key dimension of modernization was the bulwark for the politicization of the secular-religious divide. Theories of modernization constructed a dichotomy between traditional and modern societies—designating a binary opposition between the secular (modern) and the religious (traditional).<sup>16</sup> Turkey represented a unique case for modernization theorists, because the country had already been following the steps to modernization, including the enforcement of French-inspired laicity from above to secularize the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Turkish political and intellectual space was all too ready for the political discourse of modernization with its vision of a secular-religious binary. Although sharing the secular-religious binary, Islam-inspired critics including Necip Fazıl Kısakürek rejected the singular vision of modernity offered by modernization theory. They argued for an alternative, Islamic modernity along with a new conception of Muslimness as an alternative way of being in the world. In so doing, they “counterintuitively contributed to a rigid Orientalist conception of Muslims as essentially different from the rest of humanity.”<sup>18</sup> Kısakürek and other Turkish Muslim intellectuals of the early Cold War such as Eşref Edib Fergan (1882–1971), Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti (1917–83), and Kadir Mısıroğlu (1933–2019) inherited the late imperial-era conception of a compartmentalized world along civilizational and racial lines.<sup>19</sup> More strikingly, based on this conception, they molded a distinct Muslim Turkish

<sup>14</sup> Recent studies in revisionist history literature critically assess this narrative and debunk its vision of Turkish modernization history. See for instance, Butrus Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century (1826–1876)* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2001); Frederick F. Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Ali Yaycioglu, “Guarding Traditions and Laws—Disciplining Bodies and Souls: Tradition, Science, and Religion in the Age of Ottoman Reform,” *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 5 (2018): 1542–1603.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the political consequences of creating a divisive polarization within Turkish society that has been utilized by the current government in populist terms, the homologous interpretation of center-periphery and secular-religious dualities has had a severely adverse outcome in social science scholarship. It precludes social scientists from clearly distinguishing social groups with religious sensibilities such as conservatives, Islamists, and nationalists, and deprives students of analytical tools for conceptualizing distinct features of these ideological orientations. It takes constitution of these ideological orientations out of perspective and de-historicizes them, together with their conflicts and cooperations with each other. People with nationalistic and religious sensibilities in the early Cold War era cooperated against the possible advent of leftist ideologies without clear ideological markers that would otherwise distinguish them. Kısakürek’s *mukaddesatçılık*, in this context, appeared as a unifying term to keep these groups under a single umbrella against the left, which, as I shall explain, Kısakürek associated with secular modernization. Despite Kısakürek’s lifelong struggle, the right-wing coalition of early Cold War context had resolved during the 1960s, as religious conservatism, Islamism, and nationalism constituted themselves as distinct ideological orientations. Although his efforts to reverse this separation have largely failed, Kısakürek’s *mukaddesatçılık* has still been formative for all these emerging ideologies. Although today’s Islamists, conservatives, and nationalists do not use the word to identify themselves, because *mukaddesatçı*, as a word, belonged to an era when these groups had not yet separated clearly, *mukaddesatçılık* still brings them together in their discontent with secularism and modernization-as-Westernization.

<sup>16</sup> Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); J. C. D. Clark, “Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a ‘Grand Narrative,’” *Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 161–94.

<sup>17</sup> Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 10–11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. See also Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2011). For an analysis of continuities and ruptures between the late-imperial era Islamism and republican period Islamic thought, see Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın, “Competing

political identity as an alternative to the purportedly Westernized identity that modernizing founders of the republic offered. In other words, they refashioned this otherwise global discourse on Muslim identity to a local political contestation in their Islam-inspired resistance to modernization-as-Westernization. *Mukaddesatçılık* was the ideological fruit of the emergent Muslim Turkish political identity, responding to early Cold War discourse on modernization as secularization.

The emergence of *mukaddesatçılık* and Kısakürek's intervention into debates on modernization and Westernization in Turkey resonated very well with growing interests in national-religious revival and renewal at the onset of decolonization and the rise of postcolonial and anticolonial thought. Within the Muslim world, organizations such as the Ikhwan al-Muslimin in Egypt, Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, Fada'iyan-e Islam in Iran, and Hizb al-Tahrir in Palestine calling for an Islamic revival inspired by ideas of Islamist revivalist ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), Abul A'la Maududi (1903–79), and 'Ali Shari'ati (1933–77) were founded around the time Kısakürek embarked on his self-imposed cause. Similar intellectual and political movements in other parts of the non-Western world also challenged Eurocentrism and the discourse of modernization—giving rise to a postcolonial discourse around vindication of indigenous identities and national revival.<sup>20</sup> In this milieu, Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* constructed a narrative of Turkish modernization, which associated secularization and Western-oriented modernization as the continuation of imperialist encroachments under a different guise.<sup>21</sup>

Studying this ideological response from the perspective of the history of political thought necessitates reevaluating established concepts of the field. *Mukaddesatçılık* is a restorationist ideology informed by religious conservatism, but at the same time it is closely tied to the revivalist current epitomized by modern Islamist movements.<sup>22</sup> It concerns the status of

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Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity," *Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (2013): 479–500.

<sup>20</sup> For a similar discussion relating the discourse of modernization to the search for national revival, see Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Representing Kemalist reform process and Turkish modernization in general as self-colonization, as contemporary followers of Kısakürek's line such as Yasin Aktay and Recep Şentürk do, is inspired by this narrative. The conviction that Turkey was virtually colonized from within, by its own people, arguably resulted in limiting the scope of Islam-based political and intellectual movements to domestic concerns. The nemeses of Islamic thought in Turkey, notably Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık*, have not been the West or modernity directly, unlike Islamists in other parts of the world; rather, they targeted Turkish modernization process and its agents as well as secular political and intellectual movements within Turkey. This domestically oriented attitude dominant in Islamic thought in Turkey, especially in the early Cold War period, solidified the bonds between Muslim identity and Turkish nationalism—which distinguishes Kısakürek's position from that of Qutb, Maududi, and the like. The constitutive role of the Turkish Naqshbandiyya for Islam-based political and intellectual movements with its traditionalist and antireformist conception of Islam has supplied another distinctive feature to *mukaddesatçılık* and Islamic thought in Turkey in general. Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* has a markedly antireformist attitude when compared with the ideologues of popular Islamist movements such as Qutb, Maududi, and Khomeini. Kısakürek strictly rejected their appeal to the original sources, the foundations, or the *salaf*, to reinterpret Islamic knowledge according to current political and social circumstances, and left the authority over Islamic knowledge to the elders of Sunni orthodoxy and Sufi shaykhs. An antireformist conception of Islam together with a sympathy toward Turkish nationalism differentiate *mukaddesatçılık* from other contemporaneous Islamist movements with anti-Western and transnationalist concerns.

<sup>22</sup> Distinguishing different trends and orientations in Islamic intellectual movements often escapes scholarly attention. At the very best, scholars classify existing conceptions of Islam based on some criteria which are either nationality, ethnicity, culture, or attitudes vis-à-vis modernity, the West and secularism. The result is shorthand labels, such as “modern Islam,” “liberal Islam,” or “Turkish Islam.” See, for instance, Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Marc F. Plattner and Larry Jay Diamond, “What Is Liberal Islam?” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 18; and M. Hakan Yavuz, “Is There a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2004): 213–32. These classifications may be inadequate or even misleading, because they are external to debates within Islamic intellectual movements. Instead, I suggest that distinguishing different attitudes toward the process of Islamic knowledge production would be a better way to understand the dynamics of internal divisions in Islamic intellectual movements.

Islam in Turkey and the modern world at large, but it is also nourished by Turkish nationalism.<sup>23</sup> The peculiarities and significance of its locally relevant configuration of these diverse ideological currents make it almost impossible to characterize *mukaddesatçılık* by any single concept in the established vocabulary of the history of political thought. By taking the discursive particulars situated in the local context on their own terms, analyzing *mukaddesatçılık* will shed light on the varieties of Islamic thought in Turkey.

Moreover, the analysis of *mukaddesatçılık*, I contend, would still be inadequate without doing justice to the emotive element in the articulation of its critique of modernization. The embedded sense of resentment in especially the writings and speeches of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek played a formative role in this nascent ideological position in early Cold War Turkey. The growing literature on the political significance of emotions in other fields of political science and sociology notwithstanding, students of intellectual history and political thought may easily, and regrettably, neglect the role of emotions in the formation and salience of political ideologies.<sup>24</sup> Drawing attention to “the role of emotion in shaping the semantics of political language,” Michael Freeden argues for the necessity of taking emotion into account “not just as an adjunct or as a performative act that has an incidental impact on political practices, but as a constituent element of the complex layers of meaning contained

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From this perspective, constructing ideal-typical attitudes within the Islamic intellectual movement would be made possible by answering such questions as: What is the place or weight of Islam in their political considerations? How significant or central is it? Is there any discussion about Islam itself, about the status, validity, or relevance of the sources of Islamic knowledge, or about the way this knowledge is currently practiced? Following this approach, I use Islamism, as an ideal-type, to refer to the name of a specific ideology that draws directly on Islamic sources of knowledge like the Qur’an and sunna. Islamist ideology has three basic tenets. First, political forms ought to be grounded in religious terms. Second, there is an analytical difference between the lived Islam (or tradition) and the Islam of primary sources (or “pristine” Islam). Third, Islamic sources can be interpreted, or should be reinterpreted, to offer new political forms or to justify the demands to change them. Islamism takes its political unit as the umma, the community of believers, and disregards nationalism as an alien ideology. Although this transnationalist wave of Islamism emerged in the 1960s in Turkey, Turkish Muslim intellectuals with conservative and nationalist outlooks, including Kısakürek, dominated Islamic intellectual movement until that time—and continued to be the primary actors on the scene thereafter. Characterizing the position of these intellectuals with conservatism, rather than Islamism, would be more useful. It is true that these intellectuals share the first tenet of Islamism—the building block of these intellectuals’ political thinking was no doubt Islam. Yet, beyond that, they are always at odds with Islamists concerning the second and third tenets. Conservatives regarded primary Islamic sources as sacred and untouchable by lay people. Their main concern is to preserve and improve (Ottoman Islamic or Turkish Islamic) culture and morality. *Mukaddesatçılık* is a distinct strand within conservatism, with its aspiration to restore values, institutions, and practices of this Turkish Islamic culture and its consideration of primary Islamic sources as sacred. For an attempt to map out diverse trends in Islamic political thought in Turkey by attending to internal intellectual contestations, see Alev Cinar, “Islamism vs. Islamic Conservatism: Civilizationism as a Constitutive Principle of Conservative Thought in Turkey,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, 14 October 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Although earlier studies offered dichotomous relations between religion and nationalism, some observers of Turkey suggest that the Turkish case, in which nationalism and Islam have been increasingly entwined since the mid-20th century, shows the shortcomings of earlier accounts. See Gokhan Cetinsaya, “Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’ in Modern Turkish Political Thought,” *Muslim World* 89, no. 3–4 (1999): 350–76. However, the affinity between Turkish nationalism and Islam was by no means an intrinsic characteristic of these ideological positions in Turkey. See Aytürk, “Nationalism and Islam.”

<sup>24</sup> On the role of emotions in politics, see for instance G. E. Marcus, “Emotions in Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000): 221–50; Simon Thompson, Simon Clarke, and Paul Hoggett, *Emotions, Politics and Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For a recent article on emotions in relation to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s populist politics, see Senem Aslan, “Public Tears: Populism and the Politics of Emotion in AKP’s Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 1–17. Although Aslan’s insightful discussion of Erdoğan’s public display of emotionality as “a populist performative act of legitimation and mobilization,” hers and other existing studies in the literature do not touch upon the role of emotions in the formation of the ideological baggage of Erdoğan’s party.



in political thinking.”<sup>25</sup> *Mukaddesatçılık* was able to emerge, persist, and triumph in Turkish political space due to its ability to channel discontent with modernity and Turkish modernization into a sense of resentment. The resentful voice in Kısakürek’s writings and speeches was especially formative in the communication of *mukaddesatçı* ideas and ideals. Furthermore, the expression of *mukaddesatçılık* through the language of resentment by supposedly authentic Muslim Turkish identity against the Western-minded modernizing elite distinguishes the ideology from mainstream conservatism. Against an elitist undertone easily noticed in conservative intellectuals such as Nurettin Topçu (1909–75), Mümtaz Turhan (1908–69), Samiha Ayverdi (1905–93), or Cemil Meriç (1916–87), Kısakürek’s *mukaddesatçılık* drew heavily on a populist line associating the people with Muslim identity and the elite with secularism.

### Introducing Necip Fazıl Kısakürek

Born in 1904 in Istanbul, Kısakürek was from a well-to-do Istanbul family of provincial origin.<sup>26</sup> He received a decent primary and secondary education above the standards of late Ottoman society and was well read in both French and English. He attended the Naval School (*Bahriye Mektebi*), a prestigious school from which numerous intellectuals and literary men graduated, which heavily influenced Kısakürek’s personality and intellectual career. Kısakürek started to become acquainted with the literary elite in Istanbul thanks to poems he started writing in high school. When he enrolled in the philosophy department of Istanbul University (*Darülfünun*) upon graduating from high school, he further developed his contacts with important figures in Turkish politics and intelligentsia such as Mustafa Şekip (Tunç), Peyami Safa, Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu), Falih Rıfkı (Atay), Hasan Âli (Yücel), Ahmet Kutsi (Tecer), and Ahmet Hamdi (Tanpınar). In 1924, soon after he began higher education, he was awarded the state scholarship to continue his studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris. After an unsuccessful year in France, however, his scholarship was revoked, and he was called back home. Kısakürek remembered his experience in Paris as a lost period in his life, confessing in different writings to having adopted a bohemian lifestyle and to a gambling addiction—which presumably continued even after he started to advocate an Islamic worldview.<sup>27</sup> He did not pursue higher education upon returning Istanbul. Having left his higher education incomplete, Kısakürek started working in banks in Turkey to make a living, while maintaining his ties with intellectual and literary circles. His articles, essays, and poems appeared in prestigious newspapers and magazines, securing him a position within the Westernizing elite of the newly founded republic.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Michael Freedon, “Editorial: Emotions, Ideology and Politics,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18, no. 1 (2013): 4.

<sup>26</sup> For a few works on Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’s life, see for instance, Burhanettin Duran, “Transformation of Islamist Political Thought in Turkey from the Empire to the Early Republic (1908–1960): Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’s Political Ideas” (PhD thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2001); Şerif Mardin, “Cultural Change and the Intellectual: Necip Fazıl and the Nakşibendi,” in *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 243–59; Singer, “Erdogan’s Muse”; Cornell, “Mainstreaming of Extremism”; and Umut Uzer, “Conservative Narrative: Contemporary Neo-Ottomanist Approaches in Turkish Politics,” *Middle East Critique* 29, no. 3 (2020): 275–90. These works offer short biographies of Kısakürek, largely depending on his autobiographies and the narratives of his followers. Existing accounts of Kısakürek’s life are partial—leaving no other option than to rely on Kısakürek’s autobiographical notes to illuminate especially his early years. For autobiographical books by Kısakürek, see *Kafa Kağıdı* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1999); *O ve Ben* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1974); and *Babali* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> See especially his *Babali*.

<sup>28</sup> Mardin, “Cultural Change,” 248. According to author and translator Mina Urgan, who was a member of the same elite circle as Kısakürek, he was an amusing character and a gifted man of literature who loved overselling himself. Urgan pointed out that Kısakürek had a tempered drinking habit, but an incorrigible gambling addiction. See Mina Urgan, *Bir Dinozorun Anıları* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 97–99. Note that some of Kısakürek’s adversaries claim that his own lifestyle did not change much after he started preaching about Islamist ideology and an Islamic way of life.

During the early years of his life, Kısakürek was known for his poems reflecting a bohemian lifestyle and curiosity about spiritualist and mystical thought. Three autobiographical pieces he wrote presented these years as a period of protracted inquietude and a search for spiritual fulfillment to resolve the psychological and intellectual crises he claimed to experience.<sup>29</sup> Suffering this melancholic mood, Kısakürek met a sufi shaykh in 1934 and gradually became a follower of the Naqshbandi order.<sup>30</sup> His own narrative and the majority of existing studies about him depict this encounter as a life-changing moment that paved the way for Kısakürek to become the leading ideologue of Islamic revival in Turkey.<sup>31</sup> In a way, Kısakürek resolved the identity crisis he shared with the early republican intelligentsia by submitting himself to Islam and then invited his readers to do so as well. Nevertheless, following this shift, the early republican intelligentsia, including many of Kısakürek's close friends, distanced themselves from him. This was accompanied by a period in which Kısakürek was marked by the political elite as a dangerous reactionary and prosecuted for his writings after the 1940s. On the other hand, as an audacious man of letters who broke with Westernism and put his pen under the "service of Islam," Kısakürek received great support from Islamist and Islamic conservative circles—especially from popular masses and youth with Islamic sensibilities. A key to his popular appeal was no doubt his ability to channel his own personal resentments toward the political and intellectual elite into a collective sense of resentment against the secular republic and Turkish modernization.

Kısakürek published many of his *mukaddesatçı* ideas and ideals in his *Büyük Doğu* (Great East) magazine that later became the banner of his lifelong ideological cause. When Kısakürek started publishing *Büyük Doğu* in 1943, the Turkish political and intellectual scene was not at all welcoming to Islamic-leaning activities in the public sphere—let alone a magazine espousing Islamic conservative, Ottomanist, and anti-Westernist views. *Büyük Doğu* was the pioneer of the republican era Islamic press, and was followed by a myriad of Islamic publications in early Cold War Turkey. Published with intervals until 1978, the magazine enjoyed great popularity among Islamic conservative circles and influenced Islamist, conservative, and nationalist youth. Kısakürek believed that *Büyük Doğu* was a harbinger for a *mukaddesatçı* generation which would save Turkey by reviving Islam, and which in turn would stir up the entire East, led by the Muslim world, against the encroachments of modern Western civilization. Kısakürek constantly reminded his audience in his writings and speeches that *Büyük Doğu* was the first voice in the Turkish intellectual space to raise an Islamic-inspired critique of Kemalism, Westernization, and secularism. Describing the early 1940s as a time when even the mentioning of Allah and morality was forbidden (*Allah ve ahlak demenin yasak olduğu günler*), he stated: "In 1943 the first *Büyük Doğu* appeared. This first *Büyük Doğu* produced a weak and stuttering sound. Iceberg [*cumudiye*]. . . . That was the age of the iceberg. There was no dirt, no cleaning. . . . Everything was frozen."<sup>32</sup> For him, the voice of *Büyük Doğu* slowly but stubbornly melted that iceberg with the hope of carving out a diamond generation to actualize Kısakürek's aspirations. Not only

<sup>29</sup> Kısakürek, *O ve Ben*, 70–72. Note that this self-reported depressed condition was prevalent among the early republican intellectuals who experienced identity crises in the cultural turmoil of the transition from empire to republic. See Nazım İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism: Birth of a Nationalist Quest for Cultural Renewal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002): 87–112; and Mardin, "Cultural Change," 252–53.

<sup>30</sup> The sufi shaykh who offered guidance to Kısakürek was Abdülhakim Arvasi (1865–1943), a member of the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi order. The Khalidi branch is distinguished from other sufi movements by its adherents' strong emphasis on orthodox principles of Islamic shari'a and their call for upholding these principles to combat modern Western influences in Muslim-populated lands. See Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*; Svante E. Cornell and M. K. Kaya, "Political Islam in Turkey and the Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 19 (2015): 39–62; and M. Brett Wilson, "Binding with a Perfect Sufi Master: Naqshbandi Defenses of Rābiṭa from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 1 (2020): 56–78.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance, Mardin, "Cultural Change"; and Michelangelo Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Stories of 'Conversion' and Activism in Republican Turkey," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2014): 98–117.

<sup>32</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çareimiz* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977), 58.

the strength of his pen but also his gift of gab, if I may say, helped him convince his audience that he was the single most important figure promoting the “cause” (*dava*) of Islam in Turkey. Apart from his writings, mostly published in *Büyük Doğu*, Kısakürek delivered numerous speeches throughout Turkey, which broadened his sphere of influence and boosted his popularity.<sup>33</sup>

To realize his ambitions Kısakürek pursued political activity by creating his own political movement first and approaching different right-wing parties or their leaders later—albeit without finding what he sought.<sup>34</sup> His adversaries frequently invoked Kısakürek’s political oscillations as well as the inconsistencies between his own lifestyle and the Islamic way of life—as evidenced by his gambling while advocating for Islamic principles in political and social life in his writings—to cast doubt on the intellectual worth of his ideas. For many, he was not a dignified intellectual but a mere charlatan who pursued his own personal interests and benefits. In addition, the lack of consistency and identifiable source or effect of one or another philosophical current overshadows the quality of his political, philosophical, and historical writings. These critics of Kısakürek may be justified, given the lack of intellectual quality and consistency in his writings, yet they fall short of explaining his prominent position in the Turkish Islamic revival in the mid-20th century and his continuing reputation today. Especially young people with conservative and modest backgrounds who usually came from provincial towns to major urban centers for higher education in the 1960s and 1970s took Kısakürek as their *üstad*. These include not only litterateurs and intellectuals like Sezai Karakoç (1933–2021) and Rasim Özdenören (1940–2022) but also today’s politicians and bureaucrats—all of whom consider Kısakürek the pioneer of the Turkish Islamic revival.<sup>35</sup> Rather than offering a systematic body of ideas, Kısakürek appealed to the

<sup>33</sup> Most of these speeches are collected in his *Hitabeler*. Kısakürek was indeed a skillful orator who knew how to play with words and speak confidently. The usual audience for Kısakürek’s speeches were the youth from different parts of Anatolia. The youth organization called the National Turkish Student Association (Millî Türk Talebe Birliği, MTTB) in particular organized several panels and conferences that hosted Kısakürek. In a MTTB event to celebrate Kısakürek’s fiftieth anniversary as a reporter in 1975, current President Erdoğan introduced Kısakürek to the audience, which marked the first personal encounter between the two. According to the newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the government, Erdoğan gained Kısakürek’s favor with his oratory skills. See “Necip Fazıl’ın 50. yıl jübilesindeki o genç: İşte Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’ın büyük üstad ile olan anıları,” *Yeni Şafak*, 23 August 2020, <https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-buyuk-ustad-necip-fazil-kisakurek-ile-olan-tum-anilari-3554247>. Note that MTTB was swarmed by important figures of the Turkish political scene in the 1960s and 1970s, including not only Erdoğan but also former president Abdullah Gül and former speaker of the parliament İsmail Kahraman, who in fact was the president of the association in the 1970s.

<sup>34</sup> In the late 1940s, Kısakürek seemed to be close to the conservative nationalist Nation Party, positioned against the secular Republican People’s Party (RPP). It was understood after the 1950 elections that the strongest alternative to the RPP would be the Democrat Party; Kısakürek, then, extended his support to the Democrats and the ousted leader Adnan Menderes (1899–1961). Later, in the early 1970s, Kısakürek approached the National Salvation Party, which he saw as an agent that could finally satisfy his political ambitions, given the party’s Islamic orientation. Finally, in the late 1970s, Kısakürek aligned himself with the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party and established links with the party leader Alparslan Türkeş (1917–1997). He hoped that Türkeş and his party would follow his intellectual lead, and that the dynamic youth branch of the party could be the paramilitary force that Kısakürek saw necessary to combat communism and other “destructive” ideologies on the street. As far as I can tell, in this tumultuous story neither Kısakürek’s political stance nor the contours of his worldview have changed much. He gave support to political parties he thought would do the best against the RPP, and approached the parties he thought he could manipulate ideologically. For Kısakürek’s own narrative on his political engagements, see Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Benim Gözümde Menderes* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2016); and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 3*, (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977).

<sup>35</sup> Apart from a certain cluster, Muslim intellectuals in Turkey tied their genealogy to Kısakürek and his *Büyük Doğu* magazine. See Rasim Özdenören, “Necip Fazıl Kısakürek,” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt VI: İslamcılık*, ed. Yasin Aktay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 136–49; and Metin Önal Mengüşoğlu, *Mağrur Öfke: Necip Fazıl - Alelade Figür Değil Resmin Tamamı* (İstanbul: Okur Kitaplığı, 2013). Scholars have been well aware of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’s influence on contemporary political actors, most notably President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. See Singer, “Erdoğan’s Muse”; Fırat Mollaer, *Tekno Muhafazakarlığın Eleştirisi: Politik Denemeler* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 144; and Svante E. Cornell, “Mainstreaming of Extremism.” In the early years of his tenure as

power of sentiments, emotions, and rhetoric to draw the attention of his audience. He skillfully communicated feelings even in his most philosophical writings and speeches. What made him the most prominent ideologue of the Turkish Islamic revival was his ability to give voice to the basic sentiments, in particular of the youth with Islamic sensibilities who have been Kısakürek's main audience.

### Formation of *Mukaddesatçılık* in Cold War Turkey

Kısakürek's ideological transformation happened at a time, following the first two decades of the republican regime, when an Islamic-inspired counterculture had started stirring beneath the surface.<sup>36</sup> The Republican People's Party (RPP) founded by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and his associates remained the single party in this period and carried out Westernizing reforms, including abolishment of the caliphate; full secularization of education; adoption of the Swiss civil code, Gregorian calendar, and Latin alphabet; and implementation of a Western-style dress code in the public sphere. Alienated by the new regime, the Islamic intelligentsia withdrew from the public sphere and remained silent until the 1940s. As early observers suggested, some form of Islamic-inspired movement would inevitably emerge in the public sphere, motivated by Muslims' quest to be accepted publicly as Muslims. Yet it was Kısakürek, with his unique, outspoken personality and worldview, who first expressed this quest.

Kısakürek had a favorable context in which to commence his ideological campaign in the early 1940s. At the domestic level, Turkey made a transition to a multiparty political system in 1945 (seven years after the death of Atatürk). In this context, the then-ruling RPP dropped its strict secularist attitude from the single-party period to make sure that pious electorates would not shy away from the party. Despite its failure to draw support from conservative sectors, as the latter initially supported the Islamist-leaning Millet Partisi and later, increasingly with its political success, the liberal-conservative Democrat Party, the RPP strategy arguably gave way to a tolerant stance toward Islam on the part of the state.<sup>37</sup> Second, at

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prime minister, Erdoğan suggested that the single most important figure who influenced and inspired him was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. For him, "Master [üstad] Necip Fazıl was a school to hundreds of youngsters in his lifetime and he still is a school to hundreds of thousands today." See "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın büyük üstad Necip Fazıl Kısakürek ile olan tüm anıları." Erdoğan delivered a speech at the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Awards organized by a media outlet close to his government, where he talked extensively about Kısakürek and his legacy. See "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Üstat Necip Fazıl son nefesini verinceye kadar statüko ve kalemlerimizin hedefi olmuştu," NTV, 21 December 2018, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/son-dakikacumhurbaskani-erdogan-ustat-necip-fazil-son-nefesini-verinceye-kadar,kZ4R2LitZECaWbTu6dWQQ>. Erdoğan has commemorated the date of Kısakürek's death every year by citing from his lines or passages. The minister of health, Fahrettin Koca, whose popularity in Turkey increased tremendously because of the unfortunate outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, joined Erdoğan last year by sharing a Twitter post on the same day, saying, "Necip Fazıl was an intellectual and literary pioneer who raised generations. What he referred to as *Büyük Doğu* was in fact a renaissance [*yeniden doğuştu*]." See Dr. Fahrettin Koca (@drfahrettinkoca), "NECİP FAZIL, fikir ve sanatta çığır açıcı, nesillerin hazırlayıcısıydı," Twitter, 25 May 2020, <https://twitter.com/drfahrettinkoca/status/1265015124756238336>. Appreciating Kısakürek's legacy was almost a race for current or former AKP politicians, including former President Abdullah Gül and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. See for instance, "Demokrasiyle Yüzleşmedeki Başarı Üstad'ın Sayesindedir," Anadolu Ajansı, 22 May 2013, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur-sanat/demokrasiyle-yuzlesmedeki-basari-ustadin-sayesindedir/243919>; and Ahmet Davutoğlu (@Ahmet\_Davutoglu), "Fikir çilesini şiir diline nakış gibi işleyen üstad Necip Fazıl Kısakürek'i 38," Twitter, 25 May 2021, [https://twitter.com/Ahmet\\_Davutoglu/status/1397262570210402304](https://twitter.com/Ahmet_Davutoglu/status/1397262570210402304). In addition to mainstream politicians and intellectuals, Kısakürek inspired radical groups such as the Islamic Great East Raiders (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncıları, IBDA), who did not refrain from appealing to violence.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Revival in Turkey," *International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (1952): 38–48. See also Uriel Heyd, "Islam in Modern Turkey," *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 34, no. 3–4 (1947): 299–308; Lewis V. Thomas, "Turkish Islam," *Muslim World* 44, no. 3–4 (1954): 181–85; and Paul Stirling, "Religious Change in Republican Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 4 (1958): 395–408.

<sup>37</sup> Among the policies and reforms carried out by the RPP to that end were appointing of a prime minister who had an Islamist background, opening religious middle schools, instituting a theology faculty at Ankara University,

the international level, the Cold War context enabled Islamist and nationalist movements to speak out against the perceived threat of communist spread.<sup>38</sup> At times, from the 1940s to the 1980s, actors from these movements, including Kısakürek, were tried and sentenced due to their alleged endorsements of violent activities or assaults on the founding principles of the republic.<sup>39</sup> Yet, the political and intellectual activities of Islamists and nationalists were mostly tolerated and sometimes even supported by subsequent governments during this time period, to the extent that they helped counter leftist ideologies.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, starting in the 1940s, Islam was instrumentalized in Turkey for politicians' vote-maximization strategies and state security concerns. Islamists and religious conservatives, including Kısakürek, found an opportunity to flourish in this milieu and extended their support to right-wing politicians—expecting them to uphold their self-declared cause of reviving Islam and fighting communism. Representing nationalist and religious sentiments as antidotes to left-wing ideologies was the main strategy in this effort to draw support from the political elite. Kısakürek, in this regard, expressed this strategy in a 1962 speech he delivered at a private club in Istanbul entitled “Communism is Coming!”:

No force could carry out the anti-communist struggle but Islam, the true religion. Neither philosophy, nor recrement nationalism [*posa milliyetçiliği*], nor economic doctrines antagonistic to Communism. . . . For these are either empty speculations without any dynamic basis in real life or psychological penchants that do not denote a system or an ideology. Although communism is a system of darkness, of nihilism, and of suicide, it is a thoroughly dynamic system after all. It can only be confronted with a similar dynamic system, only with Islam which is the most excellent of systems [*sistemlerin sistemi*]; whereas secular doctrines could not have the right to stand against it.<sup>41</sup>

This remark, reflected in other outlets of the conservative press in early Cold War Turkey as well, was foremost a call for those in positions of power to give rein to the Islamic revivalist movement.<sup>42</sup> Dramatizing the strength of communism in Turkey, as the title indicates, Kısakürek sought the justification he might need to press his ideological agenda vis-à-vis state officials and politicians. The anti-communist setting in early Cold War Turkey was an opportune environment for Kısakürek to vilify, even demonize, secularism and Westernism, as well as the RPP as the embodiment of these ideals, by holding them

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and closing down village institutes (“*köy enstitüleri*”) that were known for their secular, pro-Western curricula. For a detailed account of the trajectory of Turkey in the 1940s and 1950s, see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004): 206–40; Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010): 262–310; and Mete Kaan Kaynar, ed., *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2015). It is possible that the RPP strategy might have encouraged the Democrat Party to be more tolerant toward Islam and to have a close relationship with religious groups and communities during the party's reign from 1950 to 1960.

<sup>38</sup> Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); Stéphanie Roulin, Giles Scott-Smith, and Luc Van Dongen, *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Kısakürek's first prison sentence, for example, was for charges of assaulting the memory of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in a piece he published in *Büyük Doğu* in 1947. Again, in 1953, he was tried for his alleged involvement in the assassination of Ahmet Emin Yalman, a liberal journalist Kısakürek sometimes targeted in his writings. Kısakürek was tried and sentenced for his writings several times before his death in 1983. For his prison memories, see Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Cinnet Mustatili* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977).

<sup>40</sup> As early as December 1945, for instance, the left-wing newspaper *Tan* was raided by a violent protest movement allegedly backed by state officials. Cangül Örnek, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı: Antikomünizm ve Amerikan Etkisi* (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 2015); Behlül Özkan, “Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye Müesses Nizamı ile Siyasal İslam'ın Kutsal İttifakı,” in *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni: Ordu, Sermaye, ABD, İslamizasyon*, ed. Tolga Gürakar and Behlül Özkan (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 47–48.

<sup>42</sup> Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 326.



accountable for the advent of leftist ideologies. Moreover, the supposed leftist threat favored his attempts to reconcile nationalist and Islamic sensibilities to arrive at *mukaddesatçılık* as a new ideological position.

### The Politicization of the Secular-Religious Divide

Kısakürek's association of communism with the agents and supporters of the Western-oriented modernization process was a milestone in the development of *mukaddesatçılık*. Not unlike nationalists, nativists, and Islamists in other parts of the world, Kısakürek purported that communism was a hazardous product of the advent of secular Western modernity at the expense of the faith. The emergence of ideological positions in the context of the Cold War in Turkey helped Kısakürek to relate communism to secular modernization. In this milieu, the existing tension between secular republicans and religious conservatives in Turkey was not exactly replaced by a universal left-right distinction; rather, the former overlapped with the latter. As a group of Kemalist intellectuals associated the republican reforms and Atatürk's modernizing vision with left-leaning anti-imperialism, the RPP reorganized itself as a center-left party with a social democratic program. This ideological shift in Kemalist intellectuals and politicians further united nationalists, Islamists, and conservatives, including Kısakürek, against the RPP and secularism, which came to be seen as socialism or communism under a different guise. These Cold War developments gave Kısakürek leverage to identify secularism with the political left, which had been the chief enemy in the Turkish political landscape since the early years of the Cold War.

In associating communism with secularism and modernization, Kısakürek negated the agents of the Turkish modernization process who were, in his own words, "generations of unbelievers, rootless and characterless imitators who have oppressed Islam from outside the circle of faith for a hundred years with all their supporters [outside Turkey]."<sup>43</sup> In his *sui generis* style, Kısakürek referred to, first, modernizing reformers and like-minded intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries; and second the founders of the republic who accelerated the modernization process, and adherents of a worldview based on the founding principles of the republic, that is, the Kemalists. For Kısakürek, agents of Turkish modernization acted as part of the political community and claimed to rejuvenate Turkey with their reformist and modernist policies and ideas. Characterizing them as "false heroes" (*sahte kahramanlar*), Kısakürek argued that modernist reformers were "the agents of hatred who emerged within ourselves from our own flesh and blood," who sought the cure for the ills of the country by denying the Islamic roots of Turkish identity and imitating the West.<sup>44</sup> Kısakürek further maintained that these "agents of hatred" had been actively supported by Western imperialism, the international Jewish community, and freemasonry—all of which he demonized conspicuously in his writings.<sup>45</sup>

In response to the discourse of modernization in the mid-20th century, Kısakürek constructed a historical account of the Turkish modernization process that was central to the formation of a Muslim Turkish political identity for people with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities who felt alienated by the Western-oriented political identity offered by the republican regime. This alternative modernization narrative rested on an existential secular-religious divide and presented secular modernizers as the oppressors and religious conservatives as the oppressed.<sup>46</sup> Thereby, century-long intellectual contestations on

<sup>43</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976), 190.

<sup>44</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Sahte Kahramanlar* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977), 46.

<sup>45</sup> See for instance, Marc David Baer, "An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 4 (2013): 523–55; and Tanıl Bora, "Narrating the Enemy: Image and Perception of the 'Communists' among the Radical Right," in *Turkey in Turmoil: Social Change and Political Radicalization during the 1960s*, ed. Berna Pekesen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 137–51.

<sup>46</sup> See Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Son Devrin Din Mazlumları* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976); and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Tarih Boyunca Büyük Mazlumlar* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977).

modernization in Turkey were reduced to an existential divide between indigenous Muslim Turkish identity on one side, and sell-out appendages of Western imperialism on the other. Featuring an essential clash between secular and Islamic worldviews akin to the Kulturkampf of late 19th-century Germany, Kısakürek's alternative historical account aimed to debase secularism and amplified consolidation of *mukaddesatçılık*.

### Merging Turkish Nationalism with Islam

The aforementioned anti-communist speech of Kısakürek was also a recommendation to nationalists to reconcile under the umbrella of Islam and create a unified conservative-nationalist bloc against the left in Turkey. Already in the mid-20th century, there were nationalist and anti-communist associations within which nationalists, conservatives, and Islamists collaborated, including Kısakürek himself.<sup>47</sup> The Cold War context forced these groups to cooperate against left-wing groups and the perceived communist threat. Although the use of nationalist themes by Islamic-oriented intellectuals might have been instrumental at the onset of the Cold War, in this process, Kısakürek and the like-minded intellectuals acquired a more nationalist outlook, and managed to infuse an Islamic tone into the Turkish nationalist movement.

Kısakürek's narrative on the constitution of Muslim Turkish identity hardly referred to the pre-Islamic Turkish history that Kısakürek associated with primitive social and political order and cultural backwardness. Pre-Islamic Turkish people were supposed to be energetic and warlike, yet they were unable to develop a proper and complex literature.<sup>48</sup> As such, pre-Islamic Turkish history appeared as a period of immaturity to the emergent Turkish nation, almost akin to a prehistoric era. Against arguments for conceptions of Turkishness by secular and ethnic or racial nationalists without direct references to Islam, Kısakürek put forth that "if one is to talk about Turkishness, it is necessary to know that a Turk is a Turk only after he became a Muslim."<sup>49</sup> Kısakürek was particularly careful to highlight the pro-Islamic potential in certain variants of the Turkish nationalist movement at the time he delivered the 1962 speech quoted above, and rejected nationalism's secular variants by disparaging them as "recrement nationalism" (*posa milliyetçiliği*). He suggested that secular nationalists conceived Turkishness along exclusively ethnic or racial lines, which was supposed to denote the recrement (*posa*) of Turkish identity. For him, what gave Turkishness its "juice," that is, essence (*öz*, keeping to his metaphor), was Islam. To solidify this metaphor Kısakürek registered his historical narrative, in which Islam brought dignity and civilized manners to the primitive nomadic Turks of the Central Asian steppes back in the 9th and 10th centuries. The Turks, after submitting themselves to Islam, immediately took up the cause of Islamic world domination with their dynamic combatant force.<sup>50</sup> In this narrative, Muslim Turks since the high Middle Ages have been the carrier of the banner of Islam, and eventually the leader of the Muslim world with the acquisition of the caliphate by the Ottoman Empire in the early 16th century.

Alas, Kısakürek maintained, Islam's last caliph center has become the focal point of its demise. Modernization movements and the eventual abolition of the caliphate in 1924 sealed this process. In Kısakürek's words, "everything was ruined here [in Turkey] and that ruined the whole Islamic world; now everything has to be regenerated here so that it can be regenerated elsewhere."<sup>51</sup> Kısakürek, in fact, stretched the so-called Ottoman Islamic decline back

<sup>47</sup> See Murat Kılıç, "Allah, Vatan, Soy, Milli Mukaddesat": *Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016); and Ertuğrul Meşe, *Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri: Türk Sağında Antikomünizmin İnşası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Tanrıkulundan Dinlediklerim* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1984), 100–1.

<sup>49</sup> Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları: Arınma Çağında İslam* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1978), 161–62.

to the 16th and 17th centuries when, for him, bigotry and fanaticism within the intellectual elite of Ottoman society led to the rejection of any technical and scientific development that did not fit into the framework of the Islamic shari‘a.<sup>52</sup> The only way to reverse the decline was to capture the true meaning of Islam, which Kısakürek himself claimed to do. Ottoman political elite since the Tanzimat edict of 1839, instead, had amplified the process of decline by resorting to carrying out reforms to Westernize Ottoman polity and society—therefore ruining everything for the Turks and for other Muslims. Although, according to Kısakürek, the Westernizing reforms had proved detrimental, they pointed out that true national rejuvenation was possible through the revival of Islam. Kısakürek’s narrative was an all-out attack on secular strands of Turkish nationalism offered by Kemalism and the ethnic and racial nationalists of the early to the mid-20th century. It also appealed to irredentist and imperialist aspirations among Turkish nationalists by trying to convince them that it was the logical implication of the course of history that the sun of Islam should rise again where it had once set.<sup>53</sup>

Kısakürek had reasons for spending so much energy bringing Turkish nationalism to the cause of Islam in the mid-20th century. At the time, nationalism was still commonly associated with secular worldviews such as Kemalism, which claimed to create a modern Turkish nation out of subjects of a traditional empire, and pan-Turkism, which tended to define nationality along ethnic or racial lines.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, both Kemalist and pan-Turkist nationalisms did not exclude Muslimness altogether from their conceptions of the nation. From the deportation of Armenians in Anatolia in 1915 to the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923, the late Ottoman and early republican political elite, whom Kısakürek associated with a hostile attitude toward Islam, arguably created a homogenous Muslim Turkish population in Anatolia. Despite their secularizing reforms, Muslimness was covertly included in the definition of Turkishness by the modernizing elite.<sup>55</sup> Silencing the past of the non-Muslim population of Anatolia as well as their contributions to Ottoman Anatolian history as part of the official history narrative were other aspects of this covert association of Turkishness and Muslimness. Although homogenization of the Anatolian population and the official association of Turkishness and Muslimness were arguably conditions allowing for the possibility of Kısakürek’s notion of Muslim Turkish national identity, he actively engaged in an intellectual struggle to represent Kemalist and pan-Turkist nationalisms as anti-Islamic for the sake of consistency in his narrative, which was based on a strict secular-religious duality.<sup>56</sup>

### The Conception of Islam in Kısakürek’s *Mukaddesatçılık*

Finally, the third intended recipient of Kısakürek’s 1962 speech was his usual audience, namely people with Islamic sensibilities. The latter did not need to hear about Islam’s potential to resist communism to maintain their allegiances to religion. However, for Kısakürek’s purposes, these people with Islamic sensibilities were lacking the necessary motivation and

<sup>52</sup> Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çaremiz*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 319–20.

<sup>54</sup> Aytürk, “Nationalism and Islam.”

<sup>55</sup> See Hale Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923–1945* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that the official historical narrative of the republican regime was as inconsistent and problematic as Kısakürek’s. The newly found republic declared itself as an independent nation–state that had no links with the Ottoman Empire, while adopting its political and social institutions. In its attempt to detach itself from its Ottoman past and to create a secular nation, the regime also highlighted pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic Turkish history, while, as described, identifying with Turkishness and Muslimness. These inconsistencies arguably served Kısakürek’s desire to find supporters for his own narrative. For a detailed analysis of the early republican narrative of Turkish history, see Murat Ergin, *Is the Turk a White Man? Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

mobilization to (re)assert Islam as “the most excellent of systems.” According to Kısakürek, earlier Muslim generations had been mere spectators of the decline and eventual demise of Turkish Islamic civilization over the last four hundred years. By failing to grasp the dynamic nature of Islam, he maintained, passive Muslim generations “have oppressed Islam from inside the circle of faith” by arresting the material and spiritual expansion of the Islamic community and hindering its ability to flourish.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Kısakürek invited the younger generations in particular to take a more active stance in the revival of Islam by restoring values and institutions based on Islamic faith, which had once elevated Turkish Islamic civilization to the level of a world empire. Kısakürek’s *mukaddesatçılık*, as such, shared with the Islamist revivalist movement the call for political mobilization and activity as well as the contempt for earlier Muslim generations, who allegedly had a deformed and defunct faith in Islam.

Nevertheless, Kısakürek’s tendency to revivalism was limited by the particular conception of Islam that his *mukaddesatçılık* featured. Kısakürek acknowledged that religion necessitated renewal (*tecdid*) every once in while through removal of *bid’ah* (harmful or unnecessary innovation in the realm of religion, *bidat* in Turkish). Renewal did not mean for Kısakürek amending the system of religious principles through *ijtihād*, that is, interpretation of primary Islamic sources to arrive at new conclusions that were not found in shari’a. Kısakürek unequivocally rejected the possibility of *ijtihād* with justifications that manifested his conception of tradition.<sup>58</sup> Kısakürek identified those who exercised *ijtihāds* as reformists (*reformacılar*) whether they embraced the idea of reform or not. For him, reformists were no less dangerous than earlier Muslim generations in “oppressing Islam from inside the circle of faith.” He targeted two new groups who had claimed authority on Islamic knowledge: graduates of Islamic institutes and divinity schools founded by the state; and Muslim intellectuals outside Turkey who influenced Turkish Islamism increasingly during and after the 1960s.<sup>59</sup> These new technicians of Islamic knowledge often took the Qur’an and, to varying degrees, sunna as the primary sources of Islamic knowledge production. In doing so, they challenged the legitimacy of traditional authorities, the elders of Sunni orthodoxy and shaykhs of Naqshbandiyya, and argued for the right of each and every Muslim to interpret primary sources by employing historical and rational methods such as hermeneutics to arrive at new rules and prescriptions for various social settings or to create new political programs. Kısakürek, on the other hand, was concerned with protecting the status of traditional authorities over Islamic knowledge. As a known adherent of the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi order, he prioritized revelation and mystical intuition over reason and rational methods of interpretation.<sup>60</sup> Kısakürek’s writings against non-Turkish Islamist intellectuals

<sup>57</sup> Kısakürek, *İdeoclaya Örgüsü*, 191; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1985), 97–98.

<sup>58</sup> Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Kısakürek persistently criticized both groups for their alleged misconception of Islam and degenerating effect on the faith in different writings, most notably in *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları* (Deviant Branches of the Right Path). The book elucidates Kısakürek’s charges against non-Turkish Islamists, including Qutb, Maududi, and Muhammad Hamidullah, as well as new generations of ‘ulama’ who graduated from religious schools of the republic. Note that traditionalists shared the same discontent with the state-founded Islamic higher education institutions, notably the divinity school in Ankara. These institutions had eclectic curricula, including social science classes in addition to classical Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), hadith, and *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis). For many traditionalists like Kısakürek, these schools raised reform-minded modernist religious personnel to destroy Islam from within—which was purportedly the project of the state establishment. See Seda Baykal, “Faith and Reason in Higher Education: Social Scientific Study of Islam at Ankara University School of Divinity” (MA thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2019); and Philip Dorroll, *Islamic Theology in the Turkish Republic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, “Binding,” 75. Sufism at the outset offers a spiritual and mystical experience of Islam as opposed to material or formal understandings and practices of Islam, which people usually associated with orthodoxy. As a Sufi movement, unlike many others, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya that Kısakürek was deeply attached to was known for its members’ strong emphasis on the material aspect of Islam, that is, the shari’a. During the 19th

as well as the graduates of Islamic institutes and theology faculties were a traditionalist reflex to the extent that the latter posed a threat to the status of traditional Islamic authorities by freely interpreting Islamic sources of knowledge.

Moreover, Kısakürek's rebuke of new interpretations of Islam aimed to preserve the supposed purity of Islam from the possible influence of external ideational forces, notably competing political ideologies in the context of the Cold War. The foremost target of this concern over purity was socialistic interpretations of Islam. Presumably inspired by Marxist socialists in the Cold War context, Islamic intellectual circles beginning in the 1960s were increasingly interested in the idea of social justice. People, especially the youth, with Islamist sensibilities in Turkey became familiar with the idea that primary Islamic sources of knowledge, the Qur'an and sunna, could be read and interpreted to derive new principles for social and political processes—for instance, upholding the cause of social justice that had hitherto been the concern of the left—mostly through the writings of Islamist intellectuals outside Turkey.<sup>61</sup> Kısakürek saw this new wave of Islamism that opened Islamic sources to interpretation for the cause of social justice as an effort to find a rapprochement between Islam and socialism.<sup>62</sup> He treated tendencies to merge Islam and other political ideologies with a strictly rejective mentality, because he believed that Islam alone stood as a perfect ideology (“the most excellent of systems”), commanding all aspects of life.<sup>63</sup> Kısakürek was convinced that Islam was a total and dynamic system, and that the political system based on Islamic ideology did not need any reference to other ideologies, which could only lead to deformation of the faith.

All in all, against the backdrop of the Cold War and the Turkish political landscape, *mukaddesatçılık* was, at the outset, an anti-communist ideology constructed alongside the exigencies of early Cold War Turkey. Kısakürek played a crucial role in shaping Turkish anti-communism as an Islam-based movement against not only Western ideologies but also different trends within the global Islamic intellectual space. Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* aimed to draw the boundaries of Islam by rejecting representatives of modern Islamic thought and the idea of international Islamism—in the context of the declining appeal of secular nationalism throughout the Islamic world and the rising popularity of Muslim internationalist movements such as the Ikhwan al-Muslimin and Jamaat-e-Islami. Instead, *mukaddesatçılık* drew on a traditionalist conception of Islam that was fused with Turkish nationalist themes to speak to social sectors and intellectual circles that felt alienated by Turkish modernization and disempowered by its outcomes. It became the ideology of their discontent as well as their will-to-power.<sup>64</sup> Kısakürek, in formulating *mukaddesatçılık*, not only brought these sectors together by reconciling elements of religious conservatism, Islamist revivalism, and

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century, the Khalidiyya had become one of the most dominant religious groups in the Ottoman Empire, exploiting the opportunity created by the sidelining of the Bektashi order with the abolishment of the Janissary corps. See Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*. Although the republican policies banishing the Sufi tariqas, seminaries, and lodges in the 1920s led to dissociation or marginalization of many Sufi orders, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya managed to survive underground. The unofficial lodges of the order became a magnet for individuals with Islamic sensibilities. Starting in the 1950s, the Khalidiyya played a crucial role in the reawakening of Islam in republican Turkey. See Şerif Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes,” *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 145–65.

<sup>61</sup> For one of the most influential of these publications see Seyyid Kutub, *İslam'da Sosyal Adalet*, trans. Yaşar Tunagür and Adnan Mansur (Istanbul: Çağaloğlu Yayınları, 1964). *İslam'da Sosyal Adalet* (Social Justice in Islam) was the first ever translation of a book by Sayyid Qutb, which was allegedly translated at the request of the Turkish intelligence service to prevent youth with Islamic sensibilities from being drawn toward leftist ideologies. See Özkan, “Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye,” 142–43.

<sup>62</sup> Note that Kısakürek purposefully attributed to non-Turkish Islamists a socialistic outlook, although Qutb and Maududi themselves would never have accepted this. Kısakürek characterized them as socialists to undermine their influence among Turkish Muslims and emphasize that his version of Islam was pure—although he himself arguably merged Islam with another ideology, namely nationalism, which Qutb, for instance, found alien to Islam.

<sup>63</sup> Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü*, 96–98.

<sup>64</sup> Fethi Açıkel, “Kutsal Mazlumluğun Psikopatolojisi,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 70 (1996): 153–98.



nationalism, he also interwove this ideological struggle with existing sentiments of alienation and resentment.

### Kısakürek's *Mukaddesatçılık* as an Ideology of Ressentiment

Although he had been a member of the secular republican elite until his thirties, Kısakürek admirably captured the sense of alienation among people with Islamic sensibilities. The latter found in Kısakürek's raging voice, especially in his poems, the refined expression of resentment against anyone who was supposedly responsible for the sufferings of Muslim Turks. In one of his most popular poems, "Sakarya Ballad" (*Sakarya Türküsü*), Kısakürek reflected both the sense of alienation and the quest for retribution. Addressing the Muslim Turk, one of the most-cited lines of the poem reads, "You are a stranger in your homeland, a pariah in your own country" (*Öz yurdunda garipsin, öz vatanında parya*). The line powerfully expressed Islamists' perception of losing the ground beneath their feet during the process of modernization. The carefully employed wording captured the sense shared by people with Islamic sensibilities that their country was being taken over by an alien force, reducing them to the status of pariahs. Better still, Kısakürek finished the poem with another oft-cited line reflecting a moment of expected salvation. Likening the pious Muslim Turk to the Sakarya River of central Anatolia, he wrote, "You have crawled face down for so long, stand up Sakarya" (*Yüzüstü çok süründün ayağa kalk Sakarya*). Addressing mainly young people from the lower middle class who aspired to upward mobility through higher education, Kısakürek's usual audience, he referred to their Muslim identity as the cause of their suffering the sense of alienation and disempowerment.<sup>65</sup> In so doing, Kısakürek diverted the socioeconomic problems of his audience into an identitarian struggle, and channeled their rage with his own ideological struggle.<sup>66</sup> He called upon people with Islamic sensibilities to regain their self-confidence and reclaim their country, which was supposedly being taken away from them. These emotive emphases nourished the sense of resentment among the youth and the popular masses and helped Kısakürek infuse his audience with *mukaddesatçı* ideas.

Following Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, resentment has become an analytical concept used to understand various social movements, political developments, and ideologies.<sup>67</sup> Notably, Max Scheler has described resentment as a characteristic of modern society in which equality is cherished as a value and an ideal without ever being satisfied due to existing economic and political power hierarchies.<sup>68</sup> Three characteristics of resentment should be emphasized to connect it to Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçı* ideology. First, in their relationship to the external world, resentful subjects egocentrically conceive their needs and aspirations as rights. According to Menno Ter Braak, "the distance between that right to everything and the factual possession of little is experienced more as an injustice," which appears as a necessary condition for resentment.<sup>69</sup> Second, the feeling of injustice or unjust

<sup>65</sup> Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 181.

<sup>66</sup> For a similar note, see Zafer Yılmaz, "The AKP and the Spirit of the 'New' Turkey: Imagined Victim, Reactionary Mood, and Resentful Sovereign," *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 3 (2017): 487–88.

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 390–410; Scheler, *Ressentiment*; Didier Fassin, "On Resentment and Ressentiment: The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions," *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 3 (2013): 249–67; and Michael Ure, "Resentment/Ressentiment," *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 599–613. Recently, resentment has increasingly been associated with perversion of democracy and the advent of populist and far-right regimes. See Nicolas Demertzis, "Emotions and Populism," in *Emotions, Politics and Society*, ed. S. Thompson, S. Clarke, and P. Hoggett (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 103–22; Robert van Krieken, "Menno Ter Braak on Democracy, Populism and Fascism: Ressentiment and Its Vicissitudes," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019): 87–103; and Casey R. Kelly, "Donald J. Trump and the Rhetoric of Ressentiment," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 106, no. 1 (2020): 2–24.

<sup>68</sup> Van Krieken, "Menno Ter Braak," 94.

<sup>69</sup> Menno ter Braak, "National Socialism as a Doctrine of Rancour (1937)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019): 106.

humiliation leads to growing hatred in those who are unable to act upon the perceived injustice. Instead, resentful subjects exalt their grievance, which becomes the very purpose of their existence.<sup>70</sup> Finally, the chronic resentment against a purportedly privileged person or a group of people responsible for the existing injustice turns into an unrelieved quest for revenge against that person or group who stands as the enemy.<sup>71</sup> Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* reflects all three characteristics of resentment.

Kısakürek was particularly adept at articulating a Muslim's right to everything—the first point in the analysis of resentment above. He referred to, for instance, “the *right* to stand against Communism,” which was supposed to belong to Islam instead of other ideologies, as in his above-quoted anti-communist speech. His writings abound with similar examples of incidents illustrating how the Muslim's rights have been unjustly taken away: “the *right* to comprehend [knowledge of] the West,” instead of Western-minded modernizers of Turkey and their followers; “the *right* to accomplish the Renaissance,” instead of Europeans; or “the *right* to lay claim to Jesus,” instead of Christians.<sup>72</sup> In these instances, Kısakürek liberally compared Islam with other religions (or Muslims with non-Muslims) as well as other political doctrines, worldviews, and identities, without explaining the terms of comparison.

A rather concrete and politically relevant example of Kısakürek's articulation of the Muslim's right to everything was his remark on the status of Cyprus during the heyday of the conflict in the 1960s, when he employed the same righteous claim without any attempt to substantiate his point. For him, despite the simple fact that “the sword of Islam once conquered Cyprus, no one [from the Turkish side during deliberations over the people of the island] could say that [Cyprus] was our soul's right; instead, everyone tried to ground their arguments on some historical facts.”<sup>73</sup> Again, a self-ascribed right (this time to Cyprus) comes before the historical and structural factors leading to the conflict or the island's demographics. Kısakürek suggested that the right attitude regarding the Cyprus question was to claim the island in the name of Islam, because its conquest by the caliphal state in the 7th century sufficed to pronounce it a Muslim possession. He found the inability of Turkish Muslims to make this claim humiliating.

Perhaps, for Kısakürek and other *mukaddesatçı* intellectuals, no other example could better demonstrate the feeling of injustice and humiliation than the case of Ayasofya. For Kısakürek, changing the status of Ayasofya to a museum in 1934 was an appalling decision taken by “a coterie of infidels” who were only ostensibly Turkish (*adı Türk, küfür tip ve zümreleri*). The conversion of Ayasofya into a mosque in the 15th century was the conqueror's (Mehmed II) rightful decision and his single most important legacy; after all, it had been a symbol of Muslim sovereignty over Istanbul and Turkey at large.<sup>74</sup> Ayasofya's new status as a museum was a source of humiliation and alienation, because it was a sign of outright rejection of Ottoman Islamic heritage and Muslim identity, which for *mukaddesatçı* intellectuals were the defining characteristics of Turkey.

Kısakürek's 1965 speech delivered at a meeting of the National Turkish Students Union (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği) addressed the sense of humiliation caused by the decision to convert Ayasofya into a museum. Although his efforts to draw his audience's attention to the status of Ayasofya frequently recurred in his corpus, this speech was exclusively about the issue. He incited the grievance of his audience against the perpetrators of the decision and finished his speech with a prophecy of revenge. Kısakürek maintained that

<sup>70</sup> Fassin, “On Resentment and Resentment,” 252.

<sup>71</sup> Kelly, “Rhetoric of Resentment,” 5.

<sup>72</sup> See Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 47; Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü*, 72; Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çaremiz*, 12; and Kısakürek, *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor*, 26. Emphases are mine.

<sup>73</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1982), 192.

<sup>74</sup> Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 158.

Thus Ayasofya was closed down. This was the gravest treachery against Turkish history, soul, and *mukaddesat*. The coterie or the clique who purported to create the Turkish nation from scratch sold the fatherland of Turks together with Ayasofya and their original and authentic homeland in the skies.

This God-worshipping nation will definitely survive; and therefore, the day of reckoning will come not only in the hereafter but in this world too.<sup>75</sup>

Kısakürek foretold a time when Ayasofya would be wide open for Muslim prayer, made possible by the effort of *mukaddesatçı* Turkish youth. He emphasized the hatred that complemented the sense of resentment to channel feelings of injustice and humiliation that would lead to mobilization of the youth. Until the day he prophesied would arrive, Kısakürek asked the youth to protect and cultivate this hatred against those who were responsible for this supposedly treacherous and humiliating act.

The emphasis on hatred and the accompanying quest for revenge in Kısakürek's writings were the culmination of the sense of resentment in *mukaddesatçılık*. Kısakürek glorified the hatred against perceived enemies of the Islamic cause as the building block of *mukaddesatçı* youth that Kısakürek expected to rise up. The youth of his vision would "stand up for their religion, language, reason, knowledge, honor, country, hatred, and heart" (*Dininin, dilinin, beyninin, ilminin, ırzının, evinin, kininin, kalbinin davacısı bir gençlik*).<sup>76</sup> The juxtaposition of hatred with concepts Kısakürek obviously deemed to be sublime was no coincidence. When directed toward the right target, cultivation of the hatred would motivate the youth toward the revenge that Kısakürek expected. The targets of the *mukaddesatçı* hatred, according to Kısakürek, should be, unsurprisingly, the RPP and other secular and Western-minded groups who were considered enemies of Islam.<sup>77</sup>

Kısakürek's appeal to the sense of resentment to draw popular support for his *mukaddesatçılık* and his formulation of this ideology against the elite ideology of Turkish modernization was quite unique in the context of the mid-20th century. At the time, Turkey was experiencing a rapid urbanization process that was accompanied by political mobilization of the masses and dissemination of different ideologies among newly urbanized people. Conservatism in the mid-20th century still had markedly elitist undertones, defended by intellectuals with elite family backgrounds or an elite education, such as Samiha Ayverdi, Nurettin Topçu, and Mümtaz Turhan, who never aimed to penetrate the hearts and minds of popular masses to propagate their political and ideological concerns. Although Kısakürek himself shared a similar elite background with conservative intellectuals of the time, he addressed the popular masses and translated his own sense of resentment against the intellectual and political elite into an ideological tool for the formation of *mukaddesatçılık*. In so doing, he constructed an Islam-based populist ideology with a dichotomous rendition of (Muslim) people versus the (secular) elite. Formulating *mukaddesatçılık* as an ideology of Muslim Turkish resentment against secularism and modernization-as-Westernization made Kısakürek the harbinger of today's Islamic nationalist populism, as performed by Erdoğan and the politicians around him.

## Conclusion

Recent studies on Turkish politics highlight the formative influence of the Cold War context on the joint rise of Islamic and nationalist sentiments in contemporary Turkey.<sup>78</sup> In this article, I have contended that the Turkish word *mukaddesatçılık* particularly captures the ideology that reconciles Turkish nationalism with elements of different trends in Islamic political

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, *Hitabeler*, 251.

<sup>77</sup> Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü*, 190.

<sup>78</sup> See Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*; and Gürakar and Özkan, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni*.

thought—albeit its rejection of these trends individually. Despite its original anti-communist position, *mukaddesatçılık* first and foremost represents a counter-ideology to the Western-oriented modernization process in Turkey. It rests on a notion of the glorious past of Turkish Islamic civilization, embodied in the rulers and institutions of the Ottoman Empire. The *mukaddesatçı* narrative suggests that internal and external enemies brought this civilization to its demise by plaguing its purported Islamic foundations. Especially blamed are the agents of modernization in late the Ottoman and early republican periods who, in this narrative, transformed an Islam-based world empire into a secular nation-state striving in vain to be accepted by the club of civilized Western states. Accordingly, the history of Turkish modernization is a history of losing the Turkish Islamic soul, identity, and authenticity. Against this purportedly alienating and disempowering process, *mukaddesatçılık* defends the restoration of faith, traditional values, and institutions through an Islamic revival initiated by Turkey.

The works of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek formed the foundation of the *mukaddesatçı* ideology and contributed greatly to its dissemination among those who were discontented with Turkish modernization. His writings, speeches, and poems channeled popular feelings of alienation and injustice into a sense of resentment against agents as well as the political, social, and cultural outcomes of the Western-oriented modernization process. Kısakürek's subversion of the modernist narrative by skillfully appealing to the sentiments of his audience who have regarded him as the *üstad* paved the way for *mukaddesatçı* ideology during and after the Cold War. The success of Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* has become clear with the advent of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkish politics, first as prime minister and then as president, who has expressed his admiration of Kısakürek at every opportunity. *Mukaddesatçı* ideas and ideals continue to influence contemporary Turkish politics by informing the leadership of President Erdoğan as well as the praxis of governments he has led for quite a long time now. Perhaps no example better demonstrates this success than the aftermath of the recent decision to reconvert Ayasofya into a mosque in the summer of 2020. When President Erdoğan announced the decision, his opponents could not do anything but celebrate it, sincerely or not, knowing that the *mukaddesatçı* ideal of restoring the “great” Ottoman Islamic civilization has wide appeal with the popular masses.<sup>79</sup>

The development of *mukaddesatçı* ideology in Turkey has broader implications for both the relationship between Islam and nationalism and the formative power of the Cold War ideological struggles between contemporary right-wing extremism and populism. The case of *mukaddesatçılık* suggests that political ideologies and identities are historical constructions without essential and pure forms. Although nationalism is not inherently or unswervingly a secular ideology, allegiance to Muslim identity is not necessarily consolidated at the expense of national identity. Contextual exigencies may give rise to hybrid political identities in which ethnic nationalist and religious sentiments feed each other—as in the case of Cold War Turkey. The struggle against leftist ideologies in the Cold War context brought together diverse currents of the political right in Turkey to form a unified *mukaddesatçı* bloc, which informs the conservative-nationalist alliance that currently rules the country. An understanding of the historical formation of *mukaddesatçı* ideology has the potential to illuminate the dynamics of contemporary conservative, nationalist, and populist political movements.

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<sup>79</sup> Koru, “Turkey’s Islamist Dream.”