



To my father

IDENTITY VERSUS MORALITY:
CONCEPTIONS OF ISLAM, MODERNITY AND POLITICS IN THE WRITINGS
OF NECIP FAZIL KISAKÜREK AND NURETTİN TOPÇU

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY VERSUS MORALITY: CONCEPTIONS OF ISLAM, MODERNITY AND POLITICS IN THE WRITINGS OF NECIP FAZIL KISAKÜREK AND NURETTİN TOPÇU

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This dissertation analyzes diverging conceptions of Islam in the writings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) and Nurettin Topçu (1909-1975), and ensuing differences in their critiques of Turkish modernization and their views on the relationship between Islam and politics. It proposes an analytical distinction between Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality to identify Kısakürek's and Topçu's competing conceptions of Islam respectively. Based on grounded theory approach, the dissertation suggests that Kısakürek presents Islam as a total ideology in the form of a system of beliefs and rules that encompasses all aspects of life. His conception Islam informs a vision of an alternative Islamic modernity that includes technological developments owned by Muslims, a form of capitalism run by Muslims, and a totalitarian modern state governed by Muslims. Kısakürek thereby represents Muslimness as an alternative way of being in the world that denotes a distinct political identity. Whereas, Topçu conceives of Islam as a framework for morality through which one connects to the transcendental, i.e. God. He characterizes Muslimness as a way of becoming, rather than a being, through leading a moral life. His conception of Islam-as-morality offers

a holistic critique of the notion of modernity that extends to material aspects of modernity including technology and capitalism as well as modern political forms. These differences stemming from Kısakürek's and Topçu's conceptions of Islam have informed, on the one hand, dynamics of Turkish politics since their immediate context in early Cold War, and on the other hand, contemporary debates and divisions within Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey.

Keywords: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu, Islam, identity, morality



ÖZET

KİMLİK VERSUS AHLAK: NECİP FAZIL KISAKÜREK VE NURETTİN TOPÇU YAZILARINDA İSLAM, MODERNİTE VE SİYASET TAHAYYÜLLERİ

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Bu tez, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) ve Nurettin Topçu'nun (1909-1975) yazılarındaki farklı İslam anlayışlarını ve bu farklılıkların Kısakürek ve Topçu'nun Türk modernleşmesine yönelik eleştirilerinde ve İslam ile siyaset arasındaki ilişkiye dair görüşlerindeki yansımalarını analiz etmektedir. Tez, Kısakürek'in ve Topçu'nun İslam anlayışlarını tanımlamak için kimlik-olarak-İslam ve ahlak-olarak-İslam arasında analitik bir ayırım önermektedir. Temellendirilmiş teori yaklaşımından hareketle, tez, Kısakürek'in İslam'ı hayatın tüm yönlerini kapsayan bir inanç ve kurallar sistemi biçiminde bütünsel bir ideoloji olarak sunduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu İslam anlayışına dayanarak, Kısakürek, Müslümanların sahip olduğu teknolojik gelişmeleri, Müslümanlar tarafından yönetilen bir kapitalizm biçimini ve Müslümanlar tarafından idare edilen totaliter bir modern devleti içeren alternatif bir İslami modernite sunar. Kısakürek böylece Müslümanlığı farklı bir siyasi kimliği ifade eden alternatif bir olma biçimi olarak temsil eder. Diğer taraftan Topçu, İslam'ı, kişiyi aşkın olana, yani Tanrı'ya bağlayan bir ahlaki çerçeve olarak görür. Müslümanlığı, ahlaki bir yaşam sürmek yoluyla, bir olma biçiminden ziyade bir oluş yolu olarak nitelendirir. Topçu'nun ahlak-olarak-İslam anlayışı, modernlik kavramının, teknoloji ve kapitalizm

dahil olmak üzere modernitenin maddi yönlerinin yanı sıra modern siyasi biçimlere de uzanan bütüncül bir eleştirisini sunar. Kısakürek ve Topçu'nun İslam anlayışlarından kaynaklanan bu farklılıklar, bir yandan erken Soğuk Savaş döneminden bu yana Türk siyasetinin dinamiklerini, diğer yandan Türkiye'deki İslami entelektüel hareket içindeki güncel tartışmaları ve bölünmeleri şekillendirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu, İslam, kimlik, ahlak



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
ÖZET.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	xi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
I.I. A Short Introduction to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu	11
I.II. Advent of Modernization Paradigm and Its Discontents in Early Cold War	17
I.III. Outline of the Dissertation.....	24
CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	28
II.I. Literature Review	29
II.I.I. Political Thought after the WWII.....	29
II.I.II. Islamic Revival in Early Cold War Turkey.....	33
II.I.III. Intellectual Context of “Revival”: Locating Kısakürek and Topçu within Turkish Intellectual Space	39
II.II. Conception of Islam: An Attempt of an Alternative Classification.....	56
II.III. Methodological Framework: Intellectual History from a Different Perspective	62
II.IV. A Note on the Sources.....	64
CHAPTER III: NAMES, CAUSES, MEANINGS: INTRODUCING NURETTİN TOPÇU AND NECİP FAZIL KISAKÜREK.....	68
III.I. Nurettin Topçu and <i>Hareket</i>	69
III.I.I. Topçu’s Intellectual Baggage and <i>Hareket</i>	77
III.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and <i>Büyük Doğu</i>	87

III.II.I. Kısakürek's <i>Büyük Doğu</i> Enterprise, Its Background, Motivations and Expectations.....	101
III.III. Topçu and Kısakürek Compared	106
III.IV. Concluding Remarks.....	114
CHAPTER IV: DIVERGING CONCEPTIONS OF ISLAM: THE MEANING OF ISLAM AND THE STATUS OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE	119
IV.I. Meanings of Religion and Islam.....	124
IV.I.I. Nurettin Topçu on Religion	126
IV.I.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek on Religion	134
IV.I.III. Topçu and Kısakürek on Sufism	140
IV.II. Epistemology, Sources and the Idea of Change in Islamic Knowledge	147
IV.III. Concluding Remarks.....	156
CHAPTER V: ISLAM IN MODERN CONTEXT: THE WEST, WESTERNIZATION AND MODERNITY	159
V.I. The West (against Islam).....	162
V.II. Westernization and Modernity	176
V.III. Science, Technology and Capitalism.....	187
V.IV. Concluding Remarks	195
CHAPTER VI: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAM “IN THIS WORLD”: POLITICS, STATE AND SOCIETY.....	198
VI.I. Political Significance of Islam: Ideology, Civilization, Morality.....	199
VI.I.I. Kısakürek and Politics in “Ideology of Islam”	201
VI.I.II. Topçu and Moral Framework of Politics.....	208
VI.II. State, Sovereignty and Legitimacy: Politics at the Conceptual Level.	214
VI.II.I. Nurettin Topçu on State: Dual Source of Sovereignty	216
VI.II.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and the Sovereignty of Islam.....	221
VI.III. Politics in Early Cold War Turkey: Kısakürek's and Topçu's Reflections on Political Community	225
VI.III.I Kısakürek and the Consolidation of <i>Mukaddesatçılık</i>	226
VI.III.II. Topçu: Forces of Materialism against Spiritualist Morality	236
VI. IV. Concluding Remarks.....	244
CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION.....	247
REFERENCES.....	257



CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Ayasofya, sealed by the hearts sealed by Allah, will open like the heart of the *mukaddesatçı*¹ 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 avalanche with horror...²

Who silenced the adhan in the minarets of Ayasofya? Was it because the adhan recited in those minarets distributed the name of the Prophet to the skies along with the name of Allah, while it also made those who adhered to the spirits of ancestors think of me [Mehmed II]? The army of a thousand Crusaders could not do this! How did you do? Those who actually did this are now buried under a monument on another hill, as heroes of freedom; they are glorified.³

In July 2020, a presidential decree changed the status of Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia), a monumental 6th century AD Byzantium sanctuary in the heart of Istanbul, from being a museum to a mosque for Muslim prayers.⁴ The first Friday prayer was led by the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the chief religious official in Turkey,

¹ *Mukaddesatçı* is a Turkified word derived from the Arabic root q-d-s, meaning holy or sacred. Without the Turkish suffixes, “*mukaddesat*” is an Arabic word in plural, and refers to things and values that are sacred. Hence, “*mukaddesatçı*”, literally means defender/protector of the holy/sacred things and values, refers to adherents of this worldview denoted by the word “*mukaddesatçılık*”. Note that the word has no proper English equivalent.

² Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Hitabeler* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1985), 165. It was originally from a speech Kısakürek delivered at a meeting of National Turkish Student Association (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, MTTB) in 1965.

³ Nurettin Topçu, *Büyük Fetih* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2018), 88. The passage was from an article first published in the magazine named *Komünizme Karşı Mücadele* in April 1952. The whole article was an addressing as if the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II delivered it.

⁴ Once the main cathedral of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine times, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque by Mehmed II in 1453 and served as the main mosque of the Ottoman Empire with its Turkified name “Ayasofya Camii”. Its status changed into a museum in the 1930’s by a cabinet decree signed by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) himself.

and attended by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan together with thousands of his supporters in and outside the building amid the coronavirus outbreak. It was quite a showdown—ostensibly symbolizing Turkey’s return to its Islamic roots, and Muslim Turks’ salvation from the “yoke” of westernization.⁵ Not merely a message to the world declaring Turkey’s priorities and orientation in the international arena; the recent “re-conversion” of Hagia Sophia was intended to be a sign of victory for the so-called authentic Muslim-Turkish identity against Western-oriented seculars within the country. Although Turkey was never colonized by any imperial power, Islam-inspired critiques of Turkish modernization process perceived westernizing reforms from the 19th century onwards, especially those that were carried out in the first two decades of the Republican regime established in 1923, as practices of “self-colonization”.⁶ The erstwhile status of Ayasofya as a museum rather than a Muslim sanctuary was conceded 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.⁷ After all, domestic repercussions of the

⁵ For an op-ed piece on the issue, see Selim Kuru, “Turkey’s Islamist Dream Finally Becomes a Reality,” *The New York Times* (July 14, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/hagia-sophia-turkey-mosque.html> accessed on August 20, 2020.

⁶ Mücahit Bilici, “American jihad: Representations of Islam in the United States after 9/11,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22, no. 1 (2005), 50-69, 52; and Ahmet Yıldız, “Transformation of Islamic Thought in Turkey since the 1950s,” *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (2007): 39-54, 42. Members of Islamic intelligentsia frequently invoke representation of Kemalism and/or westernization as self-colonialism as well. See Yasin Aktay, “Sunuş” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce, Vol. 6 / İslâmcılık*. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005), 13-25: 20; and Recep Şentürk, “Türkiye’de Sosyoloji: Gelenekleşme, Yerlilik ve Bazı Temel Sorunlar.” (2020). Note that Yasin Aktay, a professor of sociology, is a deputy chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party) 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 İstanbul founded by an association run by the President Erdoğan’s son.

⁷ Started with the 500th anniversary of İstanbul’s conquest in 1513, calls for opening of Ayasofya to Muslim prayers became one of the central themes among religious conservative circles. Yet, the status of Ayasofya as a museum has been a matter of concern not only for religious conservatives but also for nationalists who did not necessarily have Islamic sensibilities. For instance, the renowned Turkist Hüseyin Nihal Atsız (1905-1975) is reported to express his regrets to see Ayasofya as a museum rather than a mosque. Nationalists like Atsız shared with religious conservatives the conviction that the status of Ayasofya was a sign of Turkey’s breached sovereignty rights over its own territories. See Altan, Deliorman, *Tanıdığım Atsız* (İstanbul: Orkun Yayınları, 2000), 90. Emphasizing this mutual

issue have largely revolved around this supposedly primordial westernist/secular and indigenous/religious duality with frequent references to intellectuals of Cold War Turkey.⁸ Unleashed in these debates around Ayasofya were deep-seated resentments among generations that the two quotations presented in the epilogue from Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) and Nurettin Topçu (1909-1975) powerfully expressed.

In this dissertation, I analyze the writings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu whose views on the relationship between Islam and politics have shaped Islam-inspired critiques of Turkish modernization in their immediate context, and continue to inform major debates in contemporary Turkish politics—the case of Ayasofya being only one among many. Kısakürek and Topçu represent the earliest examples of Turkish Muslim intellectuals who have publicly expressed their discontent with the course of Turkish modernization based on their Islamic sensibilities.⁹ They carried out their intellectual activities—that coincided with the onset of the Cold War—through magazines, they independently published from the

resentment is important to understand the common sentiments and cooperation among different factions of the Turkish right during the Cold War, albeit with sporadic conflicts among them.

⁸ Notably, the sermon that the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, delivered during the Friday prayer by leaning on a sword in his hands and by denouncing those who decided to close down Ayasofya for Muslim prayers, i.e. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his associates, seemed to trigger these debates. The sermon was mainly an expression of gratitude to see Ayasofya as a Muslim sanctuary once again with glorification of the memory of Mehmed II (the Conqueror) who converted Ayasofya into a mosque after the conquest and endowed it to Muslims. Erbaş's remark that in Muslim's faith an endowment could not be confiscated and those who transgress this principle would be damned seemingly incited adherents of Atatürk's principles and worldview. Erbaş also referred to conservative intellectuals by citing their lines expressing aspirations to see Ayasofya as a mosque—including one from Kısakürek's Ayasofya speech referred to in the epilogue. For the text of the 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.diyanet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/29715/diyanet-isleri-baskani-erbas-yeniden-ibadete-acilan-ayasofya-i-kebir-cami-i-serifinde-ilk-hutbeyi-irad-etti>. Accessed on 21.06.2021.

⁹ I use the phrase "Islamic sensibilities" as a common denominator of different strands within Islamic intellectual movement. Instead of referring to them conservative, Islamist or else which otherwise have different connotations and uses in the literature I address all these groups "people with Islamic sensibilities". I am going to use the phrase "Islamic sensibilities" throughout the dissertation to characterize a diverse body of intellectual movements, which in differing ways, draw inspiration from the sources of knowledge that they deemed to be "Islamic".

early 1940's to the 1970's. As such, Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* (1943-1978) and Topçu's *Hareket* (1939-1976) emerged as two outlets of the Cold War Islamic thought in Turkey whose longevity and impact were not matched by any other periodical within Turkish Islamic intellectual movement. Their writings are of paramount importance to understand development of Islamic thought in Turkey during the Cold War. Despite substantial number of studies analyzing different aspects of their worldviews both independently and comparatively, I contend that a thorough and adequate reading of Kısakürek's and Topçu's corpora is still needed to spell out their views on the meaning of Islam, its challenged status against modernity and westernization, and its political significance.

Conventional designation of their names into the same corner of Turkish intellectual space and apparent similarities in their intellectual trajectories notwithstanding, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu represent diverging positions on the relationship between Islam and politics.¹⁰ Based on an alternative comparative analysis of their writings offered in this dissertation, I first argue that Kısakürek and Topçu espouse different and competing conceptions of Islam. Kısakürek presents Islam as *the* religion standing for a total ideology in the form of a system of beliefs and rules that encompasses all aspects of life. In line with his conception of Islam, he represents Muslimness as an alternative way of being in the world that denotes a distinct political identity. As opposed to Kısakürek's *Islam-as-identity*, Nurettin Topçu conceives of Islam as a framework for morality through which one connects

¹⁰ Kısakürek and Topçu are often referred to as the forerunners of the so-called Muslim revolt against secular- and Western-oriented Turkish modernization. See for instance Michelangelo Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek : Stories of "Conversion" and Activism in Republican Turkey", *Journal for Islamic Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2014): 98–117; and Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın, "Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity", *The Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (2013): 479–500.

to the transcendental, i.e. God. He thereby characterizes Muslimness as a way of becoming, rather than a being, through leading a moral life. Topçu's conception of *Islam-as-morality* dissociates Islam from prescribed system of rules and approximates it to an individual relationship with the divine where Islam, like other religions and metaphysical doctrines, represents a framework for one's individual journey.¹¹

Second, I further argue that these distinct conceptions of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality ensue dramatic divergences in overall worldviews of Kısakürek and Topçu who stand for opposing positions in the development of Islamic political identity and thought in Turkey. Kısakürek, with his conception of Islam-as-identity, represents a political attitude advocating vindication of those who conform the imagined Muslim political identity.¹² He identifies Islam a distinct ideology based on principles laid out in Islamic sources that would constitute the condition of possibility for modern-day revival of Islam. His political attitude offers an alternative Islamic modernity that includes technological developments owned by Muslims, a form of capitalism run by Muslims, and a totalitarian modern state governed by Muslims. Whereas, Topçu offers a holistic critique of the notion of modernity from the perspective of his conception of Islam-as-morality. His critique extends to material aspects of modernity including technology and capitalism as well as modern

¹¹ The distinction between Kısakürek and Topçu in terms of their conceptions of Islam could have been labelled in different terms as well. Based on my discussion in the subsequent chapters, one may suggest using, for example, "Islam-as-ideology" or "Islam-as-sharia" to characterize Kısakürek's conception, and "Islam-as-truth" or "Islam-as-experience" to characterize Topçu's conception. Since I would like to emphasize the political significance of this distinction, I use identity and morality to better reflect Kısakürek's and Topçu's understanding of political significance of Islam itself.

¹² For a similar interpretation of conception of Islam-as-identity with an application to contemporary polarization in Turkish Islamic political thought see Halil Ibrahim Yenigün, "The New Antinomies of the Islamic Movement in Post-Gezi Turkey: Islamism vs. Muslimism", *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 2017): 229–50.

political forms. Topçu identifies modernity as a process in which one's relationship with the divine is severely curbed as the so-called excesses of modern technology and capitalism diverge individuals from leading a spiritual and moral life. Therefore, as much as he raises his voice against modernization-as-westernization, Topçu is equally critical of the notion of Islamic modernity and representation of Muslimness as a modern political identity. Moreover, Topçu conceives political significance of Islam in terms of Islam's role in providing a sense of morality in political processes, instead of reified rules and prescriptions that would apply as principles of politics. These differences stemming from their conceptions of Islam have informed, on the one hand, dynamics of Turkish politics since the immediate context of Kısakürek and Topçu, and on the other hand, contemporary debates and divisions within Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey.

It is difficult to make sense of these nuances and to recognize their implications without taking into account Cold War context as a site in which secular-religious duality emerged concomitantly with the political discourse of modernization. Secular-religious duality, supposing a clear line that separates secular and religion-based worldviews, has been the common currency in scholarly analyses on Turkish society and politics since at least the 1990's.¹³ It became so hegemonic that politicians, pundits and scholars alike often took it as a natural outcome of Turkish modernization since its inception in the early 19th century; and attempt to explain the dynamics of the whole process as well as Turkish politics at large through

¹³ While a myriad of examples of the hegemonic secular-religious duality existed in literature, it is important to refer to 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 1980's onward from political scientific, sociological and anthropological perspectives. Their work contributed immensely to the establishment of secular-religious duality in public intellectual space, and laid out a framework for scholarly analyses that have been prevalent for decades.

contestations between these two worldviews. It is for this reason that major political and intellectual contestations and divisions in Turkey, as in the case of Ayasofya incidence, were understood in terms of this duality. Assuming a particular form of religiosity which was supposedly rooted in pre-modern and pre-urban peoples of Anatolia, exponents of duality usually explain the rise of religiosity and religious nationalism as the unfolding of this ostensibly primordial religious identity, and as its politicization in modern context. As such, they neglect the process within which Muslim identity acquired political significance through intellectual and political efforts based on a particular conception of Islam. Finally, the narrative of duality implies that alternative conceptions of Islam are conducive to a single mode of politics; hence, it is inattentive to otherwise fundamental differences among those who are casually characterized as conservative, nationalist, pious, or Islamist without any serious attempt to distinguish these concepts.¹⁴

As opposed to the narrative of duality, nonetheless, recent studies in revisionist history problematized understanding of Turkish modernization history from the perspective of religious-secular divide.¹⁵ Moreover, analyses of Turkish politics in Cold War years also challenge the narrative of duality.¹⁶ Following the footsteps of

¹⁴ The narrative of duality obscures and trivializes the complexity of Turkish intellectual and political spaces. It designates Western-minded political groups including republican nationalists (*ulusalcı* in Turkish), liberal and social democrats as well as leftists of various sorts on the secular side, while conservative nationalists, religious conservatives and Islamists are supposed to be 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.

¹⁵ See for instance Butrus Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century (1826 - 1876)*, *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 (September 2018): 1542–1603.

¹⁶ See for instance, Cangül Örnek, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı: Antikomünizm ve Amerikan Etkisi* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2015); and Behlül Özkan, "Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye Müesseses

growing scholarly interest in the Cold War period as a founding moment for today's political developments, I focus on Cold War Turkey to understand the political discourse that shapes dynamics of contemporary Turkish politics by giving way to the hegemony of secular-religious duality.¹⁷ In so doing, I aim to show (I) emerging alternative conceptions of Islam in Cold War Turkey and their ideological and political implications; (II) inadequacy of secular religious duality in making sense of these alternatives, their impact on the development of religiosity, as well as Islamic political thought and identity; (III) competing intellectual efforts to shape religiosity; (IV) problems of taking Islam for granted as a political identity of certain kind; and (V) how Islam-as-identity reconstructed Muslimness for Anatolian people as a

Nizamı ile Siyasal İslam'ın Kutsal İttifakı," in *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni: Ordu, Sermaye, ABD, İslamizasyon*, ed. Tolga Gürakar and Behlül Özkan (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2020).

¹⁷ Proliferating number of studies revisit the Cold War era from different perspectives. See for instance; Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 1, Origins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 2, Crises and Detente* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 3, Endings* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Odd Arne Westad, *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (Routledge, 2013); Ron Theodore Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Stéphanie Roulin, Giles Scott-Smith, and Luc Van Dongen, eds., *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Alexander Anievas and Richard Saull, 'Reassessing the Cold War and the Far-Right: Fascist Legacies and the Making of the Liberal International Order after 1945', *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (September 2020): 370–95; Gilles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (Psychology Press, 2003); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Nils Gilman, "The Cold War as Intellectual Force Field", *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 2 (August 2016): 507–23; Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (Granta Books, 2000); Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (Psychology Press, 2004); Richard Shorten, "The Cold War as Comparative Political Thought", *Cold War History* (February 2018): 1–24; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (University of California Press, 2003); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); Nathan J. Citino, "The Middle East and the Cold War", *Cold War History* 19, no. 3 (3 July 2019): 441–56; and Ian Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010). Most of these studies liberated the subject matter from the confines of international relations and bring it to the purview of political science, sociology, cultural studies and intellectual history. Parallel to these developments in the global scholarship, the tendency to bring the Cold War under scholarly scrutiny to understand contemporary Turkish politics is growing. See Çağdaş Üngör and Cangül Örnek, eds., *Turkey in the Cold War: Ideology and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*; and Tolga Gürakar and Behlül Özkan, eds., *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni: Ordu, Sermaye, ABD, İslamizasyon* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2020).

political identity against purportedly secular and westernized identity that founders of the republic offered.

I contend that secular-religious duality rested on a particular conception of religion that Necip Fazıl Kısakürek embraced and Nurettin Topçu disregarded. Hence, in this context, Kısakürek appears as an archetypal representative of the process in which Muslimness was reconstructed as a political identity in contradistinction to an imagined secular political identity. Since he perfectly fits in with the framework of secular-religious duality, he is, in retrospect, considered a mere exemplary figure who skillfully articulates a Muslim revolt against purportedly secular Turkish modernization.¹⁸ Thus, his intellectual efforts to enact the duality and to create a Muslim political identity have not been analyzed critically. Nurettin Topçu, on the other hand, does not fit in with the framework of the duality; and at times, his ideas subvert it. Yet, due mainly to the political camp he addressed himself in the context of the Cold War, his ideas are selectively read through the glance of this framework.¹⁹ Topçu, while having espoused an Islamic outlook in his writings, stands as a critical voice against conventional Muslim intellectual response to the

¹⁸ See 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.

¹⁹ A conspicuous example in this selective reading of Topçu was the case of Ayasofya. Topçu touched upon the status of Ayasofya in two instances. One was the article he wrote as it came out of Mehmed II where Topçu unequivocally expressed his discontent with the status of Ayasofya as a museum rather than a mosque. This article was published in relatively early years of Topçu’s career when he frequented nationalist and conservative anti-communist association. The second instance was an article that was first published later, in 1971, entitled “İslam’ı Sömüren Siyaset” (Politics That Exploits Islam). There, Topçu vehemently criticized instrumentalization of the status of Ayasofya by Islam-based intellectuals and politicians. Addressing most probably Necmettin Erbakan, the shining leader of Milli Görüş movement at the time, Topçu suggested that “One of these [Islamist] leaders, who said that he would bring the caliph, open Ayasofya, and even convene the assembly in Ayasofya, is committing an unprecedented exploitation of Islam in our time. ... What does it even mean to open Ayasofya and convene the assembly there? What would change if St. Pierre were converted into a mosque or a parliament? So long as there raise no heads ready to sacrifice themselves with the love of the country...” See Nurettin Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan / Mevlana ve Tasavvuf* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2013), 112.

discourse of modernization, essentialization of secular-religious divide, and construction of Muslimness as a political identity.

Conception of Islam-as-identity has been prevalent since the mid-20th century within an otherwise diverse field of Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey.²⁰ Mobilization of a Muslim political identity based on this conception foremost gave rise to a political movement whose single most important fruit in Turkish politics have been the advent of the AK Party as the representative of the so-called Turkish-Muslim political identity. Seen from today's perspective, the party's hegemonic position in Turkish politics in general and Islam-based political movement in particular has bolstered the appeal of understanding the dynamics of Turkish politics within the framework of secular-religious duality. This, however, veils internal debates in Islamic intellectual movement on the conception of Islam in modern context and its role in political processes. A close scrutiny of these debates reveal emerging positions subverting the notion of Muslimness as a distinct political identity, and understanding Turkish politics within the framework of secular-religious duality.²¹ I contend that these internal debates in Islamic intellectual movement should be understood as manifestations of different conceptions of Islam that may be traced back to the mid-20th century. It is for this reason that I compare and contrast Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu through proposing an alternative analytical division between identity and morality in conceptions of Islam. A critical

²⁰ For an attempt to map out diverse trends in Islamic political thought in Turkey by attending the internal intellectual contestations see Alev Çınar, "Islamism vs. Islamic Conservatism: Civilizationism as a Constitutive Principle of Conservative Thought in Turkey" (Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, 14 October 2020).

²¹ Two important examples in this sense are Muslim feminist movement and anti-capitalist Muslims. Note that especially proponents of an anti-capitalist and socialistic position in Islamic intellectual movement often draw on Nurettin Topçu's ideas.

comparative reading of Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings reveals that the secular-religious duality emerged in a specific context during the early Cold War Turkey, that it was not at all a natural outcome of Turkish modernization, and that it was the fruit of Muslim intellectual efforts which was disputed by disaccording Muslim intellectuals.

I.I. A Short Introduction to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu are intellectuals of a unique context informed by (I) a chaotic transition from a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire, which happened to be the caliphal center of Islam, to a secular nation-state; (II) a process of rapid modernization and top-down implementation of laicism accompanied by political, social and cultural change; and (III) Cold War with its ideological tensions between the left and the right as well as its discourse of modernization. Both Kısakürek and Topçu received modern secular education in Turkey and in Europe, and were influenced by Western spiritualist, anti-positivist, and anti-Enlightenment thought. They socialized within Turkish nationalist-conservative circles of the early 20th century and developed their own critiques of Turkish modernization. Finally, they espoused their own Islam-inspired worldviews under the influence of Turkish Sufi Islam. Seen from the perspective of secular-religious duality, Kısakürek and Topçu appear to be in the same camp of Turkish political space and are conventionally referred to side-by-side in popular intellectual reflections and scholarly works on Turkish politics and political thought. They are remembered together as founding figures in Islamic revival against Kemalism, and

secular and western-oriented modernization.²² Juxtaposition of their names is not without any sensible reason given that the two are among the most influential Islam-inspired critiques of western-oriented modernization process in Turkey. Furthermore, there are curious parallels in their life trajectories in addition to their ostensible intellectual affinity.

Nurettin Topçu was born into a family of Erzurum origin in 1909 in Istanbul. He spent early years of his life there and received a decent elementary and secondary education. He was one of the first students sent to Europe for higher education by newly found Turkish Republic. He completed his studies in France in University of Strasbourg and Sorbonne University with distinctive success and received a Ph.D. degree in philosophy. Topçu met Maurice Blondel, Henri Bergson and Louis Massignon, and became familiarized with anti-positivist, intuitionist and mystical thought during his studies in France. Upon returning to Turkey, he started teaching philosophy, morals and sociology in several high schools. Meanwhile Topçu met Abdülaziz Bekkine (1895-1952), a Naqshbandi²³ sheikh, and became a disciple of him. What brought popularity and esteem to Topçu among religious conservatives in

²² For a recent book from a Muslim intellectual who claimed the legacies of both Kısakürek and Topçu see Mehmet Doğan, *İki Yol Açıcı: Nureddin Topçu ve Necip Fazıl* (İstanbul: Yazar Yayınları, 2016).

²³ Naqshbandiyya is a Sufi order (tariqa) originated in Transoxiana in the 14th century. It is by now the most dominant Sufi order in Turkey (and probably the whole Muslim World), known with its members' strict adherence to Sunni orthodoxy. See Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); and Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*. Especially since the 19th century, different Naqshbandi branches in Turkey have sought establishing connections with political agents and authorities. See Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*. Turkish Naqshbandiyya has been politically active and promoted a state-centric and accommodationist political stance. Among the people who were either members of the order or established links with the order's sheikhs were the former PM and the founder of Milli Görüş movement Necmettin Erbakan, the former PM and the eighth president of Turkey Turgut Özal, former PM Ahmet Davutoğlu, and the tenth president of Turkey Abdullah Gül. See Birol A. Yeşilada, "The Virtue Party", *Turkish Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 2002): 62–81; and Şerif Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes", *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (January 2005): 145–65.

Turkey was the magazine he began publishing shortly after his return. Inspired by Blondel's philosophy of action, *Hareket* (Action) was the first ever magazine that raised a critique against western-oriented modernization process in Turkey in early phases of Cold War which was published from 1939 to 1976, albeit discontinuously.

Topçu's *Hareket* was soon followed by other magazines that took their mission to defend Islamic values, practices and institutions against Kemalist modernization, and to raise Islamic consciousness among younger generations. One of them was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* (The Great East), published between 1943 and 1978, whose popularity has not been levelled by any other conservative or Islamist magazine perhaps in the history of Turkey. Commonalities between Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek are not limited to the period their lifespan covered, and supposed missions of the magazines they published. Like Topçu, Kısakürek was born in Istanbul in 1904 to a notable family of Kahramanmaraş origin. He completed his primary and secondary education in notable schools of Istanbul. Kısakürek was sent to France to complete his higher education in philosophy as well. However, he did not succeed in pursuing his studies and keeping his scholarship, and had to return Turkey after a year. In the meantime, Kısakürek met Henri Bergson and became familiar with the ideas of French nationalists and Catholicists.²⁴ Again, similar to Topçu, he initiated to Naqshbandiyya after his encounter with another sheikh, Abdülhakim Arvasi (1865-1943). Following his initiation to Sufi Islam, Kısakürek who was once an ardent supporter of Kemalist reforms became more and more hostile to Kemalism and westernization. He was known to be an audacious man of letters and his pen entered Islam's service after his "conversion" through his poems,

²⁴ Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl", 102.

plays, stories, novels as well as intellectual pieces most of which were published first in his *Büyük Doğu*.

Kısakürek and Topçu are among the most prolific and influential Muslim intellectuals of Cold War Turkey. Although they expressed their ideas against the backdrop of the Cold War, the influence of Kısakürek and Topçu is by no means limited to that context. Both are masters to generations of intellectuals and politicians, and have had enduring legacies in different intellectual circles, magazines, associations and think tanks. Today, different magazines issue special editions, and universities and NGO's organize panels and symposia to discuss their ideas. Moreover, there are numerous elementary and high schools in Turkey named after Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu. Current government officials and bureaucrats assumed their mission to introduce Kısakürek and Topçu and have their books read as “national and indigenous” intellectuals. Both Kısakürek and Topçu have written dozens of books—most of which published posthumously, that are still in publication and in high demand. That the youth is especially interested in their writings shows that the two will continue to influence Turkish political and intellectual space.

Scholars have been well aware of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's influence on contemporary political actors including notably president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.²⁵ In early years of his tenure as the prime minister, Erdoğan suggested that the single most important figure who influenced and inspired him the most was Necip Fazıl

²⁵ See Sean R. Singer, “Erdoğan's Muse: The School of Necip Fazıl Kısakurek”, *World Affairs* 176, no. 4 (December 2013): 81–88; Fırat Mollaer, *Tekno Muhafazakarlığın Eleştirisi: Politik Denemeler* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 144; and Svante E. Cornell, “Erbakan, Kısakürek, and the Mainstreaming of Extremism in Turkey”, *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 23 (June 2018): 5–32.

Kısakürek.²⁶ 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”.²⁷ Erdoğan commemorated Kısakürek’s death anniversary 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 the outbreak of the 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*’].”²⁸ 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.²⁹ Last but not the least; his impact was not appreciated only among politics but also within intellectual circles. Apart from a certain particular cluster, Muslim intellectuals in Turkey tied their genealogy to Kısakürek and his *Büyük Doğu* magazine.³⁰ His lines and ideas continue to influence contemporary

²⁶ Cornell, “Erbakan, Kısakürek”.

²⁷ See “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’ın büyük üstad Necip Fazıl Kısakürek ile olan tüm anıları”, (Yeni Şafak, 23 August 2020), <https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-buyuk-ustad-necip-fazil-kisakurek-ile-olan-tum-anilari-3554247>. Erdoğan delivered a speech at the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Awards organized by a media outlet close to his government where he extensively talked about Kısakürek and his legacy. See “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Üstat Necip Fazıl son nefesini verinceye kadar statüko ve kalemşorlarının hedefi olmuştu” (NTV, 21 December 2018) <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/son-dakikacumhurbaskani-erdogan-ustad-necip-fazil-son-nefesini-verinceye-kadar,kZ4R2LItZECaWbTuI6dWQQ>.

²⁸ See Fahrettin Koca, “NECİP FAZIL, fikir ve sanatta çılgır açıcı, nesillerin hazırlayıcısıydı. Büyük Doğu dediği, Yeniden Doğuştu. Kendi içinde, cemiyet gibi çalkantılı birey fikrini o getirdi. Konularından biri de fanilikti. Kim göçmemiş, kimin geçen dakikaları geri dönebilmiştir? RAHMETLE ANIYORUZ”, Tweet, @drfahrettinkoca (blog), 25 May 2020, <https://twitter.com/drfahtettinkoca/status/1265015124756238336>.

²⁹ See for instance “Demokrasiyle Yüzleşmedeki Başarı Üstad’ın Sayesindedir”, 22 May 2013, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur-sanat/demokrasiyle-yuzlesmedeki-basari-ustadin-sayesindedir/243919>; and Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Fikir çilesini şiir diline nakış gibi işleyen üstat Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’i 38. vefat yıldönümünde rahmetle anıyorum. Mekanı cennet, ruhu şad olsun.” Tweet, @Ahmet_Davutoglu (blog), 25 May 2021, https://twitter.com/Ahmet_Davutoglu/status/1397262570210402304.

³⁰ This is true for a very diverse body of intellectuals espousing very different positions and political agendas. 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). In addition to mainstream politicians and intellectuals, Kısakürek inspired radical

right-wing politicians, intellectuals and popular masses whose ideological orientations range from ultra-nationalism to Islamism.

References to Nurettin Topçu by contemporary political actors and intellectuals are indeed rare when compared to the case of Kısakürek; yet, Topçu is still a highly respected intellectual among Islamic-conservative and nationalist circles. Although followers of his worldview represent small intellectual circles notably around Dergah circle and, to a lesser extent, within Turkish Hearts,³¹ broader conservative segments of politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals generally regard Topçu very highly.³² Among them was president Erdoğan who occasionally referred to Topçu. In a speech he delivered at the inauguration of a youth association run by his son in 2018, Erdoğan suggested, “It is Nurettin Topçu’s patriotic consciousness that rendered his legacy alive after 43 years of his death. Our real struggle is to maintain [Topçu’s] character, and his historical and national consciousness.”³³ His prestigious position in the eyes of Erdoğan notwithstanding, Topçu’s legacy was influential among critics and adversaries of his government as well. His ideas are especially influential among those who feature an equitable social and political order against the marriage of neoliberalism and Islam epitomized by Erdoğan’s government. One of them was Ayhan Bilgen who, in a recent interview, argued that Topçu’s “Sufi, indigenous and

groups such as Islamic Great East Raiders (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncıları, IBDA) which did not refrain from appealing to violence.

³¹ Dergah is both a literary, cultural and political magazine and a publishing house run by the same group. It is led by İsmail Kara who is a well-known conservative intellectual and historian famous for his studies in late Ottoman and republican era Islamic thought. Kara edited the corpus of Nurettin Topçu for Dergah Yayınları and published a biography and a bibliography of Topçu. See İsmail Kara, *Nurettin Topçu: Hayatı ve Bibliyografyası* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2017).

³² Topçu’s influence is felt especially within education bureaucracy. See for instance “‘Nurettin Topçu Günleri’ Başladı.” (5 April 2016), <http://istanbul.meb.gov.tr/www/nurettin-topcu-gunleri-basladi/icerik/1087>

³³ Erdoğan: “Gençliğine değer vermeyen bir devlet ayakta kalamaz”, (21 October 2018), <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/99260/-gencligine-deger-vermeyen-bir-devlet-ayakta-kalamaz->

revolutionary” philosophy could be a solution to Turkey’s domestic problems around contestations between secular and religious identities as well as ethnic and sectarian divisions.³⁴ Note that Bilgen was the former chairperson of Islam-based human rights association Mazlumder, and later joined the left-wing Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi).³⁵

Evidently, Erdoğan and Bilgen feature different aspects of Topçu’s worldviews that could be only partially understood from the established frameworks to understand Turkish political and intellectual spaces. Behind these frameworks are a particular political discourse around Cold War ideological tensions and a particular social scientific discourse developed mainly around modernization theory. Kısakürek and Topçu appear on the same camp of Turkish political and intellectual spaces whose axis of division or differentiation was drawn by these discourses. Remained within the limits of this discursive frame we fail to identify and understand peculiarities of different thought strands and different intellectuals—which impoverishes our imagination of Turkish intellectual history and political thought.

I.II. Advent of Modernization Paradigm and Its Discontents in Early Cold War

Not only in Turkey but also in other Muslim-majority countries was Cold War a period of transformation in conceptions of Islam, revision in the relationship between

³⁴ See Ayhan Bilgen, “Yeni bir muhalefet tarzı değişimin önünü açabilir”, interview by Aytunç Erkin, 27 January 2021, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/yazarlar/aytunc-erkin/yeni-bir-muhalefet-tarzi-degisimin-onunu-acabilir-6229887/>.

³⁵ Bilgen was elected MP in 2015 and later became the co-mayor of Kars from the ranks of Peoples’ Democratic Party in 2019. However, he was charged and arrested for his alleged involvement in terrorist activity in 2020. He was removed from his position as a result, and replaced by a trustee appointed by the government.

religion and politics, and emergence of new forms of political imaginations. In this context, intellectual and political spaces in Turkey were shaped by (I) a political discourse informed by ideological tensions of the Cold War and (II) the advent of modernization theory. Right after the end of the WWII, Turkey sided with the US-led democracies and officially took an anti-communist stance. Intellectuals with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities found opportunity to expand their activity in this milieu. Already in the very early years of the Cold War, nationalist and anti-communist associations were founded within which nationalists, conservatives and Islamists collaborated including Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu.³⁶ Hence, Cold War context forced these intellectuals to cooperate against left ideologies and the perceived communist threat.

Recent studies on Cold War history reveal that there existed covert alliances between political elites in US-led democracies and religious and nationalistic movements against Soviet Union at the global level, and against left-leaning social movements at domestic levels.³⁷ Turkey was not at all an exception where supposedly Kemalist state machinery mostly tolerated and sometimes even supported religious conservative and nationalist movements, organizations and intellectuals to the extent that they created a front against left ideologies.³⁸ To draw support from the political elite, a great majority of Cold War Muslim intellectuals including Kısakürek

³⁶ 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). Note that Islamic-oriented intellectuals probably prefer pursuing activity under a nationalist guise to protect themselves from possible purges by the laicist state. See Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

³⁷ See Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*; Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich*; Roulin, Scott-Smith, and Van Dongen, *Transnational Anti-Communism*; and Anievas and Saull, “Reassessing the Cold War”.

³⁸ See Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*; and Özkan, “Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye”.

represent religious sentiments as antidotes to left. As part of this strategy, for instance, Kısakürek and like-minded intellectuals emphasize that rightfully acquired earning and property are legitimate in Islam, and no one could force anybody to give away his/her legitimate acquisition for the sake of equality. They thereby legitimate Muslim capitalist activity on the one hand, and disregard movements for social justice and equality on the other hand. Particular threat for their stance is left leaning or socialistic interpretations of Islam enunciated most vocally by Nurettin Topçu in the Turkish context. Although the latter shares the hostility towards communism with other Turkish Muslim intellectuals, Topçu has equal distaste with capitalism as well as Muslim capitalist activity. However, his Islam-inspired ideas on social justice and equality have been largely dismissed by religious conservative and nationalist circles. The divergence of Topçu and the major trend of Muslim intellectual position in the Cold War represented by Kısakürek, I contend, stems from their conceptions of Islam that stood for different positions vis-à-vis the discourse of modernization.

Development of Islamic political thought immensely influenced by the advent of modernization theory in the early Cold War. Theorists of modernization constructed a dichotomy between traditional and modern societies—designating a binary opposition between the secular (modern) and the religious (traditional).³⁹ By emphasizing secularization as a key dimension of modernization, the theory challenged the status of Islam in modern social and political processes. In their response to the discourse of modernization, Cold War Muslim intellectuals rejected the singular vision of modernity offered by modernization theory while sharing the

³⁹ Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*; and J. C. D. Clark, “Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of A ‘Grand Narrative’”, *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (March 2012): 161–94.

secular-religious binary largely.⁴⁰ Turkey represented a unique case for theorists of modernization for the country had already been following the steps to modernization including the enforcement of French-inspired “*laïcité*” from above to secularize the public sphere.⁴¹ Therefore, Turkish political and intellectual space was all too ready for the political discourse of modernization with its vision of secular-religious binary. In this milieu, in an attempt to understand and explain dynamics of Turkish society and politics, the renowned Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin lays out an analytical framework that designates religiosity as an integral analytical component of understanding the relationship between the elite and popular sectors from the Ottoman Empire through republican era.⁴² Since the 1990’s, it has become the prevalent framework to explain dynamics of Turkish society and politics, and is often reduced to an essential cleavage between the secular center and the religious periphery.⁴³ Resting on this discourse, exponents of the emergent Turkish-Muslim

⁴⁰ Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). Adalet uses the French word *laïcité* to emphasize the source of inspiration from France where the separation of religion and state has been strictly implemented to eradicate all visible religious signs in political processes. Secularism in especially Anglo-American context purportedly represents a milder form of separating religion and politics where religious symbols and language are visible in politics. The difference in conception and implementation of the separation of religion and politics as such has been a matter of dispute in Turkey for a long time. See for instance, Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Here, I am not directly interested in the official conception and implementation of the principle of separation of religion and politics. Therefore, throughout the dissertation, I use secularism instead of *laïcité* to refer to a worldview or a certain mentality suggesting that religion has no part in modern social and political processes.

⁴² See Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?” *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (Winter 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 (August 2018): 503–22.

⁴³ Reification of the analytical division between secular and religious sectors of society without any critical glance impoverished the Turkish politics literature. Moreover, the identitarian instrumentalization of this otherwise analytical divide by Islamic-oriented politicians and intellectuals further overshadowed its value. See Aytürk, İlker. “Post-post Kemalizm: Yeni Bir Paradigmayı Beklerken.” *Birikim* 319 (2015): 34–48; and Gürakar and Özkan, *Türkiye’nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni*.

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.⁴⁴

At the global scale, the major trend in Islamic intellectual movement vis-à-vis the discourse of modernization was to argue for an alternative, an Islamic, modernity along with a new conception of Muslimness as an alternative way of being in the world. Muslim intellectuals mostly maintained the notion of multiple civilizations (and modernities) along with a compartmentalized vision of the world along racial and civilizational lines. Although this vision was in a way a continuation of late imperial-era discourse on civilization, the Cold War rise of civilizational thinking was a novelty in its essentialization of cultural and religious differences supported by the idea that different cultures and societies might have their own paths to civilization. I contend that this intellectual response and the concomitant process in which Muslimness has become a political identity rely on a conception of Islam-as-identity represented by Kısakürek. Hence, the evolution and establishment of this particular conception of Islam and the eventual politicization of Muslim identity was contingent upon the global power structures in the process that had started in the late imperial era, and culminated in the Cold War.

In their conception of Islam-as-identity, Kısakürek and many other Cold War Muslim intellectuals joined a global process of the racialization of Muslim identity and the construction of an essentialist narrative of Islamic civilization in contradistinction to modern Western civilization. Development of the new Muslim identity and the concomitant conception of a unique and singular Islamic civilization

⁴⁴ For a recent study criticizing this discourse see Agah Hazır, “Narratives on Religion-State Relations in Turkey: Continuities and Discontinuities”, *Turkish Studies* 21, no. 4 (August 2020): 557–77.

was a response to the 19th-century colonialist and orientalist conceptions of Islam. Muslim intellectual reactions to colonialism and orientalism, as Cemil Aydın observes, “counterintuitively contributed to a rigid Orientalist conception of Muslims as essentially different from the rest of humanity.”⁴⁵ In their response to imperial-era compartmentalization of the world along civilizational and racial lines, Muslim intellectuals appropriated the vision of essentially distinct Muslim and Western identities.⁴⁶ Most Turkish Muslim intellectuals of the early Cold War, including Kısakürek, inherit the late imperial-era conception of racialized Muslimness. More strikingly, based on this conception, they mold a distinct Turkish-Muslim political identity against the purportedly westernized identity that modernizing founders of the republic offered. In other words, they refashion this otherwise global discourse on Muslim identity to a local political contestation in their Islam-inspired resistance to modernization-as-westernization.

On the other hand, Nurettin Topçu, who stepped forth as another influential critic of western-oriented modernization process in Cold War Turkey, offers an alternative response to the discourse of modernization. As opposed to the exponents of Islam-as-identity, Topçu does not put forth an alternative vision of modernity for Muslims. On the contrary, technological developments, capitalism and industrialization, for him, have had detrimental consequences for Islam that he conceived of as a way of leading a moral life. He suggests that Muslims were not immune to the problems stemming from material aspects of modernity simply by virtue of being Muslim—

⁴⁵ Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 10-11.

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam* (Sheffield, UK and Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing Limited, 2011).

which, for him, does not mean abiding by certain set of rules that supposedly differentiate Muslims from other peoples. As such, Muslimness does not denote an identity in Topçu's conception. His position, however, remained marginal within the discursive field of modernization that endorsed economic developmentalism and technological advancements. Moreover, the late Cold War rise of civilizational thinking gave way to Islam-as-identity. In this milieu, Topçu's critical remarks did not resonate even among people with Islamic sensibilities; and his voice was later subsumed in the major trend in Cold War Islamic intellectual movement within the discourse based on secular-religious duality.

The analysis of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's and Nurettin Topçu's writings I offer in this dissertation intend to show not only the complexity of Islam-inspired intellectual movements but also the inadequacy of secular-religious duality as an analytical tool to recognize and appreciate this complexity. To undertake this task in this dissertation, I propose using conception of Islam as an analytical tool, and trying to make sense of Kısakürek's and Topçu's political ideas from this perspective. Based on a grounded approach, I will explicate conception of Islam as an analytical tool by focusing on Kısakürek's and Topçu's views about (I) the meaning of Islam, (II) its status in modern context and against other doctrines of truth, (III) and its significance in practical terms—which will reveal Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality as two distinct positions. Analytical use of conception of Islam challenges modernist dichotomy between secular and religious positions where religious affiliation is assumed to reveal a particular way of self-understanding for Muslims that is fundamentally different from what is supposed to be the secular. Moreover, in this dichotomous vision, while the secular is elevated to a position eligible to be inquired

through analytical tools of social sciences, the religious is deemed monolithic. I argue that analysis of conceptions of Islam between Kısakürek and Topçu in particular, and among Muslim intellectuals in general, opens up opportunities to challenge this vision by showing the extent to which Muslims diverge in the way they designate themselves in the world by conceiving Islam in fundamentally different ways.

I.III. Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation has five main chapters. In the second chapter following the Introduction, first, I present and critically discuss the existing literature in three parts: (I) political thought during the Cold War at the global level; (II) Cold War Turkey and the Islamic revival in its early stages; and (III) the intellectual aspect of Islamic revival with a focus on studies concerning Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu. While the first two parts provides the historical background, the third part reveals the shortcomings of the literature on the relationship between Islam and politics in general and on Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu in particular. Then, informed by these existing shortcomings, I explain the conceptual framework I am using in this dissertation to read Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings from an alternative perspective. Finally, I deal with the issue of methodology by discussing insights that I draw from intellectual history, conceptual history and comparative political theory in my analysis of Kısakürek's and Topçu's ideas.

In the third chapter ("Names, Causes, Meanings: Introducing Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek"), I introduce the protagonists of my study. There are obvious personal differences, in addition to intellectual ones, between Kısakürek and Topçu

that informed their ideas and, more significantly, how they communicated them with their audiences. Omitting personal details about them would impair understanding their ideas and their intellectual/ideological efforts. With these concerns in mind, I present two separate biographies for Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek respectively, focusing more on the formation of their worldviews and intellectual baggage. In these sub-sections, I try to explain reasons and stories behind the names of their magazines since both have been associated with them. My aim is to understand their intellectual/ideological campaigns, or “causes,” by looking at the names of the magazines, introductory articles they wrote as well as their life stories. In fact, the title of this chapter is inspired by Kısakürek’s introductory articles in *Büyük Doğu* which he compiled in a section to his best-selling *İdeolocya Örgüsü* (Web of Ideology) under the title “*Adımız, Manamız, Davamız*” (Our Names, Our Meanings, Our Causes). In the last section of this chapter, I compare personalities of the two and depict their reflections on each other as appeared in their own articles, autobiographies and biographies.

The fourth chapter (“Diverging Conceptions of Islam: The Meaning of Islam and the Status of Islamic Knowledge”) is the core chapter of this dissertation where I present my first argument which states, based on empirical findings, that the main difference between Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s conceptions of Islam is rooted in their diverging views on the basis of religion. Kısakürek takes rules and principles of Islamic sharia through which Muslims, by virtue of abiding by them, supposedly acquire a distinct identity. Topçu, on the other hand argues that religious principles must not be reified. He sees the basis of religion in the mystical individual experience of religion for which religious sources offer moral and spiritual guidance. I start the chapter by an

historical account for the development of Islam-as-identity as well as its alternatives. Then, in the subsequent sections, I develop my main argument by presenting Kısakürek's and Topçu's direct considerations (definitions) of religion and Islam through which I explain the distinctions between Kısakürek's Islam-as-identity and Topçu's Islam-as-morality. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss Kısakürek's and Topçu's references to sources of knowledge related to Islam, their use and whether and to what extent they saw these sources open to interpretation and change—i.e. their positions vis-à-vis reforming Islam.

The discussion on these differences in the fourth chapter constitute the basis of my second argument indicating that Kısakürek's Islam-as-identity and Topçu's Islam-as-morality further inform their diverging views of Western civilization, modernity and the political significance of Islam. Hence, in the fifth chapter ("Islam in Modern Context: The West, Westernization and Modernity"), I discuss the theme of modernity in relation to Islam in the writings of Kısakürek and Topçu. To the extent that they identify social, political and cultural transformations that modernity has brought along with the West, the discussion in this chapter will revolve around the West and westernization. I first present their reflections on the West and the constitution of modern Western identity. Then I discuss Kısakürek's and Topçu's approach to westernization and their conceptions of modernity—if they ever had one! Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I elaborate on Kısakürek's and Topçu's visions of modernization in relation to science, technology and material development.

The final chapter before the conclusion (“Chapter VI: The Significance of Islam ‘in This World’: Politics, State and Society”) is about the political significance of Islam. I begin the chapter by showing how Kısakürek’s Islam-as-identity and Topçu’s Islam-as-morality informed their conceptions of politics respectively. Then, I move on to discuss their views on core political concepts such as the state, sovereignty, authority and legitimacy in relation to their conceptions of Islam and of politics. In the last section of this chapter I present Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s reflections on Turkish politics and society by elaborating on their visions of political community, i.e. nation, and their positions on the emerging secular-religious duality in the context of the early Cold War Turkey.

CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter locates the dissertation in existing literature, and offers a conceptual framework to understand the thought of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and of Nurettin Topçu in their context. In what follows, first, I present a tripartite literature review that will cover both the contextual background and findings of existing literature that may help making sense of Kısakürek's and Topçu's ideas. Respective sections of the literature review proceed from the general to the specific, and could be thought of layers. The first layer discusses political thought in the aftermath of WWII at the global level. The second layer elaborates on Turkey's position within the global Cold War context with a special emphasis on rising nationalistic and religious movements. Finally, the third layer presents findings of existing literature on intellectual activity of the early Cold War nationalist and conservative circles with a focus on Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu. Towards the end of this section, I discuss gaps and shortcomings of the literature in making sense of similarities and differences between Kısakürek and Topçu that this dissertation intends to uncover by developing a new conceptual framework. Hence, in the second part of this chapter, I introduce and explain what I mean by conception of Islam and how I utilize it as a new framework to read Kısakürek and Topçu. Lastly, I discuss my methodological orientation in this dissertation that integrates established approaches in intellectual

history with inspirations from emerging Comparative Political Theory literature and insights from anthropological perspectives.

II.I. Literature Review

I divide the literature review section into three major parts. First, I discuss the venture of political thought after the WWII at the global level. Second, I introduce an old body of literature on “Islamic revival” in Turkey right after WWII. These two parts constitute the basis of the contextual background of my actual discussion in the main chapters of the dissertation. Lastly, I explore what existing literature offers on the intellectual context of what is referred to in literature as Islamic revival in Turkey in post-WWII era. This part enables me to situate my arguments within existing studies on Islamic political thought in Turkey, and to present how my dissertation contributes to these studies.

II.I.I. Political Thought after the WWII

One of my aspirations in this dissertation is to study the writings Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek *qua* political thought. Thus, a short discussion on the state of affairs in political thinking throughout the world must be present in order to situate Topçu’s and Kısakürek’s political ideas in their historical, political and intellectual contexts. There are several connected points that affected political thinking in the world after WWII. First among these is the advent of liberalism in the West as a constitutive ideology against the so-called totalitarian ideologies of the right and the left. On the one hand, promoting liberalism and/or liberal democracy as the authentic Western forms of political thinking and practicing is in line with the post-war tendency to condemn Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism for the destruction the war has

caused. On the other hand, refashioning liberalism as part of Western, hence modern/civilized, identity was instrumental to the “containment policy” of the United States against perceived communist threat both within the West and especially in the so-called third world countries.⁴⁷

Post-WWII era has witnessed an insurmountable rise of liberalism in the terrain of political thought in the West—though signs of this had been observed already between two world wars. Duncan Bell suggests that the advent of liberalism had started at a time when competing (non-liberal) ideologies of the right and the left had been gaining ground in the interwar period:

As representative forms of political order came under sustained fire, intellectuals propagated an all-encompassing narrative that simultaneously pushed the historical origins of liberalism back in time while vastly expanding its spatial reach. For the first time, it was widely presented as either the most authentic ideological tradition of the West (a pre-1945 storyline) or its constitutive ideology (a view popular after 1945). This story began to coalesce during the 1930s, in a context of radical anxiety about the fate of liberalism. This was an era where, as Mussolini proclaimed, “all the political experiments of our day are anti-liberal.”⁴⁸

The first step towards representing liberalism as the “right path” in Western political thought and practice was, then, a kind of defense mechanism against the extremes of other ideologies. After WWII and with the beginning of Cold War, advocates of liberalism took an offensive approach to solidify the position of this ideology in the West and to promote it elsewhere as the “right path”. Liberalism and liberal democracy gained an unquestionable status as the main pillars of the Western

⁴⁷ Melynn P. Leffler, “The emergence of an American grand strategy, 1945-1952”, in M. P. Leffler and O. A. Westad eds, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 1, Origins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67-89.

⁴⁸ Duncan Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (December, 2014): 682–715, 699. It is important to emphasize here that both Topçu and Kısakürek were at Europe for higher education in the heydays of this anti-liberal storm.

political identity against communism on the ideological and intellectual fronts of the Cold War.⁴⁹

The advent of liberalism in the Western, especially Anglo-American, intellectual circles, and political theory in particular, went hand in hand with the development of modernization theory in the early 1950's.⁵⁰ Theorists of modernization emphasize different aspects and processes that are supposed to be key to nations' paths towards modernity including rationalization through spread of education, urbanization, and industrialization. The common theme that cut across all these different views on modernization is the idea that liberal democracy with secular political institutions is the eventual destination of modernization process.⁵¹ Nils Gilman points out, "We can see that liberalism was, in effect, a synonym for the American form of modernity. As Robert Bellah put it, liberalism was 'the primary ideology of modernization'—and therefore the desired end point of human sociopolitical evolution."⁵² The American model, political liberalism blended with secularism and capitalist developmentalism, marketed all around the world right after WWII, and Turkey was among the first cases that the model was experimented.⁵³ The United States assumed its mission to promote liberal capitalism in countries that gained independence with decolonization process against the possibility that these countries could slide into the alternative path to modernization, i.e. the Soviet model socialism.

⁴⁹ Philip Green, "Cold War Liberalism," *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 4 (December, 1979): 591-596, 591.

⁵⁰ For critical reviews of modernization literature, see Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*; Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*; and David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Zehra F. Arat, "Democracy and Economic Development: Modernization Theory Revisited," *Comparative Politics* 21, no. 1 (October, 1988): 21-36, 21.

⁵² Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 19.

⁵³ Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*. See also Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, (New York: Free Press, 1958).

In addition to intensifying rivalry between the USA and the USSR, or alternatively between liberalism/capitalism and communism/socialism, decolonization process created new alternatives for the so-called developing countries. The ideological pervasiveness of liberalism in the West finds its equivalent in nationalism in the non-Western world.⁵⁴ That is to say that, from the right to the left of the political spectrum, political thought in the non-Western world marked by one variety of nationalism. Differences and cleavages between various forms of nationalism are usually missed in the studies on nationalism. For one thing, the US-promoted political liberalism and capitalist developmentalism was in line with secular nationalism that is “based on the idea that the legitimacy of the state was rooted in the will of the people, divorced from any religious sanction”.⁵⁵ However, while secular nationalism was a double-edged sword as its left-leaning form would easily give way to anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism, its insistence on superseding religion’s role in politics and in organizing society never went uncontested.

Muslim-majority countries are the most conspicuous examples of the challenge of religious nationalism against secular nationalism.⁵⁶ Informed by Muslim intellectual response to the political discourse of modernization, people with Islamic sensibilities

⁵⁴ This is the process that Benedict Anderson once described as the third (and the last?) wave of nationalism. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 113-140.

⁵⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

⁵⁶ The term religious nationalism may seem a juxtaposition of the two otherwise distinct concepts—religious denomination and national affiliation. True that, some strands of religious movements reject any link between religion and nationalism, and students of nationalism often incline to define nationalism in contradistinction to religion or religious movements. However, it is obvious today that religious sentiments and nationalism may shape one’s political attachment and identity equally well. See Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?*; and Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

in Muslim-majority countries had advanced the idea that religion is the most essential part of the national, i.e. political, identity—if it does not constitute *the* political identity. Bernard Lewis observes in 1976 a “return of Islam” which had been underway already before the end of WWII: “As the nationalist movement has become genuinely popular, so it has become less national and more religious”.⁵⁷ It is no coincidence that some very important Islamist organizations have been founded around this time; Ikhwan al-Muslimin in Egypt in 1928, Jamaa-e-Islami in Pakistan in 1941, Fada’iyan-e Islam in Iran in 1946 and Hizb al-Tahrir in Palestine in 1953. Despite differences in political agendas and activities as well as variation in degrees of their nationalism and/or internationalism, foundation of these organizations more or less around the 1940’s seems to prove Lewis’s point about the “return”. The impact of this “post-colonial Islamism” had been felt in Turkey through translations of the writings of ideologues of this movement such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Abul A’la Maududi (1903-1979) especially during the 1960’s and 1970’s, and led to the bifurcation of fundamentalist Islamists from religious conservatives. Yet, already before the arrival of post-colonial Islamism, there had been a religious revival in Turkey going on, and its agents were Islam-inspired critiques of Turkish modernization.

II.I.II. Islamic Revival in Early Cold War Turkey

Almost simultaneously with the rise of post-colonial Islamism all around the Islamic World, a nationalist-conservative discourse espousing Islam as the main component of the political identity of Turkish people became more and more visible. Emergence of this nationalist-conservative discourse accompanied the growing popularity and

⁵⁷ Bernard Lewis, “The Return of Islam,” *Commentary* 61, no. 1 (January, 1976): 39–51, 44.

visibility of Islam in almost all the aspects of social life. Existing literature points out several factors arguably accounting for the revival of Islam in early Cold War Turkey. One of them is the supposed easing of the Republican People's Party's (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) strict secularist attitude after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death in 1938.⁵⁸ Second, the change in CHP's attitude towards religion, especially in the 1940's, could as well be understood as a tactical move in the transition to multi-party democracy. Competitive politics made Islam a vector in the Turkish political space and forced then-ruling CHP to drop its erstwhile secularist attitude of the single-party period to make sure that pious electorates would not shy away from the party. Third, rapid transformation of Turkey's demographic structure from the 1950's on bolstered up the instrumentalization of Islam in Turkey for politicians' vote-maximization strategies. Accelerating immigration from countryside to urban centers also rendered Islam more visible in the public space. Last but not the least, the advent of the Cold War and Turkey's strategic decision to side with the so-called democracy front and NATO against communism was key factor in the growing nationalist-conservative movement and the revival of Islam.⁵⁹

Scholarly gaze immediately noticed the change in Turkish society, perhaps starting with Uriel Heydt's "Islam in Modern Turkey" article of 1947. The article describes the status of religion before and after the republican reforms of 1920's and 1930's and CHP's approaches to religion. Towards the end, however, Heydt points out that

⁵⁸ This observation by contemporaneous scholars is interesting for it challenged religious conservative tendency to narrate specifically the (İsmet) İnönü era (1938-1950) as the period in which practice of religion was under pressure.

⁵⁹ For detailed account of trajectory of Turkey in the 1940's and the 1950's, see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004): 206-240; Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2010): 262-310; and Mete Kaan Kaynar, ed., *Türkiye'nin 1950'li Yılları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015).

while the secularizing policies went on in towns quite effective among upper class urbanized people; Islam was still rooted in the countryside and among those who had been estranged by the process of secularization in towns. With the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Heydt argues, secularizing policies had slackened and the CHP's approach to religion showed signs of moderation—which, accordingly, led to the revival of religion in Turkey in the 1940's.⁶⁰

Within a few years, Heydt observes the early signs of Islamic revival in Turkey, the status of religion underwent profound changes. Towards the end of the 1940's religious education was introduced in the middle schools. In 1949, the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University was established whose mission was to provide a modern higher religious education with courses on social sciences, comparative religion and the history of religion along with classical Islamic sciences in its curriculum. Middle schools for preachers and prayer leaders (*İmam-Hatip Okulları*) were opened in different cities soon after. One of the first moves of the new government of Democrat Party (DP) after its electoral victory in May 1950 was to re-introduce Arabic call for prayer in mosques. Apart from the government policies, observers like Lewis Thomas, Bernard Lewis and Howard Reed report increasing religious activity among different sectors of Turkish society.

These early observations of the Islamic revival in Turkey are marked by strong modernist and Orientalist biases, not surprisingly. Their accounts are mostly based on the binary distinctions of high versus low or rural versus urban Islam. In his 1952 article, Lewis Thomas notes that Islam has always been an effective force in the

⁶⁰ Uriel Heydt, "Islam in Modern Turkey," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 34, no. 3–4 (July, 1947): 299–308, 307–8.

countryside and the recently increasing visibility of religious activity is an offshoot of this “peasant Islam” which “[does] not constitute a pronounced new trend, [is] not a great danger to the State, and certainly [does] not mean that Turkey is involved in pan-Muslim reaction”.⁶¹ Again, in a 1952 article, Bernard Lewis reports that in Turkey

Mosque attendance has risen considerably. Inscribed Arabic texts hang on the walls in cafes, shops, taxis, and in the markets, and vast numbers of them are offered for sale in the streets. Religious books and pamphlets are being written and published on an ever-increasing scale.⁶²

Unlike Thomas’s shallow account for the revival of Islam, Lewis attributes this revival to a number of factors. Accordingly, apart from the peasantry that has always been religious, members of the religious orders, shopkeepers and artisans at towns, and the residues of the old clergy are the agents of the rehabilitation of Islam in Turkish society. Howard Reed’s 1954 article is in line with Lewis’s arguments in explaining the growing religious activity. All three scholars agree that recent changes in Turkey stem from the prevalence of religious sentiments among popular masses, which only could find the opportunity to be expressed more openly with the change in the official attitudes of post-WWII governments toward religion.

Despite all its flaws and reductionism, this old literature rightly points out the fact that Islam became a determinant of Turkish politics with the transition to multi-party democracy. Reed, for instance, suggests that

In their search for votes, all parties, but the Democrats in particular, turned to Turkey’s oft-forgotten man and his family — the peasant majority of Turkey. ... They began to realize anew that Islam had much

⁶¹ Lewis V. Thomas, “Recent Developments in Turkish Islam,” *Middle East Journal* 6, no. 1 (Winter, 1952): 22-40, 40.

⁶² Bernard Lewis, “Islamic Revival in Turkey,” *International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (January, 1952): 38-48, 42.

more vital and traditional respect and force in village life than they had assumed, and that their would-be peasant supporters cherished it.⁶³

It would be wrong to attribute the growing visibility of religion only to the influence of the population in countryside. Islam has been a powerful force even in the most developed cities that remains “beneath the surface” during the single-party period. For instance, right after the transition to multi-party democracy, religious associations have mushroomed and became the most frequent association type in just a decade in all over Turkey.⁶⁴

Although the literature I have discussed so far is dated, growing number of studies on Islam in Turkey especially after the 1980’s hardly moved beyond their modernist outlook. Moreover, the pervasiveness of sociological explanations to account for the rise of religious and nationalistic movements at the expense of the politics behind this rise in Cold War Turkey had not changed until very recently.⁶⁵ Notably, the literature that draws on center-periphery framework of Şerif Mardin and its variants resting on the secular-religious duality missed the constitutive role of Cold War politics in Turkey in rising popularity of Islamic and nationalistic ideas and organizations.⁶⁶ Hence, in addition to the role of political competition, the Cold War ideological tensions gave rise to Islamic popular and intellectual movements. Already before the end of WWII, communism was perceived as a threat by officials and among nationalist and conservative circles. Islam, being presented as the key

⁶³ Howard A. Reed, “Revival of İslam in Secular Turkey,” *Middle East Journal* 8, no. 3 (Summer, 1954): 267-282, 271.

⁶⁴ Ahmet Yücekök, *Türkiye’de Örgütlenmiş Dinin Sosyo-Ekonomik Tabanı*, (Ankara: Sevinç Matbaası, 1971). Especially chapters 3 and 4.

⁶⁵ For an oft-cited and rather recent account of the rise of Islamic movements that missed this dimension see M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ Tolga Gürakar, “Merkez-Çevre Paradigması Türkiye’nin Siyasetini Açıklamanın Anahtarı Olabilir Mi?” in *Türkiye’nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni: Ordu, Sermaye, ABD, İslamizasyon*, ed. Tolga Gürakar and Behlül Özkan (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2020), 25–46.

ingredient of the Turkish national identity, was suggested as a remedy for the spread of communism and leftist activities especially among the youth in religious and nationalist conservative press.⁶⁷ These claims reinforced the ongoing Islamic revival and, at the same time, opened new fronts to attack Kemalism and secularizing reforms for they allegedly created a moral vacuum for the Turkish youth that was now filled by communism, atheism and positivism. This nationalist-conservative anti-communism shaped in flesh and bones after Turkey definitely joined the North Atlantic camp of the Cold War against Soviet Russia.

Anti-communist tendencies of nationalist and religious conservative circles were supported and utilized by the Turkish government officials.⁶⁸ Turkey allied with the West against the Soviet Union immediately after the WWII and became a central country in the US Cold War policies right from the beginning. As part of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, Turkey received monetary and technological support along with expertise from the US to promote socio-economic development in line with the US concerns over containing communist threats to Turkey.⁶⁹ Nationalist-conservative anti-communism was highly instrumental in this context to prevent the spread of communism among popular masses. It is no coincidence that prominent members of nationalist-conservative intelligentsia founded Associations for Fighting Communism (Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri) in the early 1950's.⁷⁰ Hence, the Cold War anti-communism has shaped Turkish conservative and nationalist thought largely. However, the covert cooperation between the US experts, Turkish government officials and conservative intellectuals against communism does not

⁶⁷ Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 326.

⁶⁸ Özkan, "Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye".

⁶⁹ Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*, 6.

⁷⁰ Meşe, *Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri*.

necessarily mean that the latter wholeheartedly supported the US cause. Cold War conservative thought was marked by an inner tension between a dislike for the US-type liberalism and modernism on the one hand and a (stronger) dislike for communism on the other.

II.I.III. Intellectual Context of “Revival”: Locating Kısakürek and Topçu within Turkish Intellectual Space

As pointed out, both nationalist and religious conservative thought in Turkey developed against the backdrop of the intellectual and political climate of early Cold War in the late 1940's and 1950's. In the West, liberalism was making its way to be the legitimate form of political thinking and practice; and remnants of the interwar political experiences were strictly suppressed. The intellectual competition in the West, then, was between liberals and leftists of different sorts—conservatives were already incorporated into the ranks of liberalism and non-leftist anti-liberalism was already ruled out.⁷¹ The development of Cold War politics and of political thought in Turkey was rather complicated. Turkey made its choice very clear between the emerging superpowers of the new bi-polar world order towards the end of the WWII, and sided with the US-led democracy camp. The two earliest outcomes of this choice was the trial of far-right ultra-nationalists, known as “Racism-Turanism Trials” in 1944-45,⁷² and the transition to multi-party democracy in 1945 that ended two-decade-long autocratic single party rule in Turkey. Thus, Turkey initially intended to

⁷¹ Though the recent rise of far right (and/or “alt-right”) movements in Western Europe and the US suggests that anti-liberal forces were not eliminated but only suppressed or forced to cooperate with liberal-conservative order. See Anievas and Saull, “Reassessing the Cold War”.

⁷² Forty-seven exponents of Turkism who espoused racist ideas and supported the axis powers during the WWII were taken into custody and tried for their allegedly dangerous ideas threatening national unity and political order. For more information on the impact of the trials and on Turkish racism in general see İlker Aytürk, “The Racist Critics of Atatürk and Kemalism, from the 1930s to the 1960s”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 2 (April 2011): 308–35.

follow the suit in the West by attempting to consolidate a liberal democratic political space. Priorities of Turkish political elite, however, soon changed in the face of a perceived communist threat that was exacerbated by a historical Russophobia in Turkey.⁷³ The state machinery took suppressive measures against possible appeal of communism or the left in general, among educated youth and growing working class population because of industrialization and urbanization.⁷⁴ An anti-communist coalition emerged right in the very early years of the Cold War between the political elite, and intellectual and political groups espousing anti-communist views. A key component of this anti-communist coalition was Muslim intellectual activity which was compatible with neither Western type liberal-conservatism nor leftist ideologies, and nor secular nationalism.

Muslim intellectual activity in the republican period developed mostly around periodicals and magazines that began publication well before the end of WWII and the subsequent transition to multi-party democracy in Turkey. Nurettin Topçu's *Hareket* (1939) and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* (1943) were among the very first of the magazines that continued to be published with sporadic intervals until the 1970's. Both *Hareket* and *Büyük Doğu* remained to be one-person dominated magazines reflecting Topçu's and Kısakürek's worldviews respectively. Profound distaste for communism was in fact one of the most conspicuous commonalities between these worldviews in the context of the Cold War. Hence, existing literature abounds with examples highlighting anti-communism in Topçu's

⁷³ Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 30.

⁷⁴ As early as December 1945 the left-wing newspaper *Tan* was raided in a violent protest movement allegedly backed by state officials. It was followed by persecutions of left-wing intellectuals throughout the late 1940's including the removal of prominent leftist academics from the Faculty of Languages and History-Geography of Ankara University in 1948. See Fatih Yaşlı. *Antikomünizm, Ülkücü Hareket, Türkiye: Türkiye ve Soğuk Savaş* (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2019).

and Kısakürek's writings.⁷⁵ As important and valuable as it is to show an important common theme between Kısakürek and Topçu on the one hand, and their positions within Cold War alignments in Turkish political and intellectual spaces on the other hand, anti-communism as an analytical tool is rather insufficient to understand the contours of Topçu's and Kısakürek's worldviews. It points out only a single aspect of their writings which otherwise encompass a very broad and rich body of topics.

Moreover, an analysis focusing on anti-communist themes in the writings of Muslim intellectuals must not take the meaning of the concept for granted, and should provide details of the kind of communism these intellectuals opposed. Did anti-communism stand for being against the Soviet Union and the possible threat it posed for Turkey's independence? Was it a philosophical antagonism against Marxism or historical materialism? Alternatively, did it mean hostility to communitarian or socialist economic and political orders? Which aspect or meaning of anti-communism did anti-communist intellectuals featured? In the case of Kısakürek and Topçu, for example, we see that they parted ways in terms of the kind of anti-communism they espoused. We can safely say that Kısakürek reflected all three meanings. Topçu, while sharing an anti-Soviet stance, arguably opposed materialist philosophy behind communism only, and called for a socialistic economic and political order. Thus, even in this narrow anti-communism approach, there should be more nuanced analysis to understand Kısakürek and Topçu in particular and the whole body of anti-communist intellectuals in general.

⁷⁵ Meşe, *Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri*; 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.

A more conventional approach to Kısakürek and Topçu based on their positions within the ideological division of the Cold War locates them within the Turkish right. Drawing on the left-right distinction, this approach offers a more comprehensive reading of Kısakürek and Topçu. However, the term “Turkish right” is highly nebulous and often obscures differences between factions and individual intellectuals in terms of their motives, projects and actions. Turkish right conventionally includes as varied groups as nationalist-Kemalists, pan-Turkists, Ottomanists, religious conservatives and, albeit controversially, Islamists. Studies usually associate Kısakürek and Topçu with one or another of the groups within the Turkish right—and they do so often without clear a conceptualization of differences between different groups and convincing justifications in locating Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s positions. Therefore, I continue reviewing this body of literature by explicating Turkish right with its different branches. This gives a more nuanced understanding of Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s positions within Turkish intellectual space.

Although it is commonsensical to suggest that Turkish right is composed of different groups that have different political and intellectual attitudes, studies that attempt to conceptualize these differences are very scarce. Tanıl Bora appears to be the one of the few scholars who attends to differences and divisions within the Turkish right by offering conceptual definitions for each distinct attitude. In one of his influential works, Bora identifies three main outlooks within the Turkish right, namely nationalism, conservatism, and Islam; and he offers further sub-categories for each of these three. He introduces these main outlooks as phases of the Turkish right, analogous to three states of matter in physics—maintaining that there could be transitions between them, and the same individual intellectuals may reflect multiple

phases in different places and times.⁷⁶ Both the analogy and the classification are useful in that they indicate the dynamic structure of Turkish intellectual space and offer analytical differentiation between Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities at the same time. It is a matter of concern for the overall approach of Bora's classification, however, that the significance of Cold War anti-communism seems to be overestimated. This is especially true for his designation of Islamism within the right, as Islamism has different variants some of which arguably do not conform the left-right distinction.⁷⁷

On the other hand, Bora's apt differentiation of Islamism and conservatism as two distinct attitudes is highly significant. A great majority of scholars on Islam in Turkey as well as representatives of Islamic intellectual movement easily disregard analytical distinctions between different intellectual attitudes whose common denominator is having Islamic sensibilities. These accounts often use Islamism to refer to the whole Islamic intellectual movement whose adherents, they purported, had to use cover terms like nationalist, conservative or *mukaddesatçı* in the face of hardships in defining oneself an Islamist or an Islamic nationalist in a strictly laicist country. Representatives of this approach both within and outside the academia rest on an essentialist version of secular-religious duality that conceives of Islamic intellectual movement as a monolithic entity. Hence, all kinds of Islam-inspired worldviews including that of Kısakürek and of Topçu were brought together under the umbrella of Islamism without any analytical explanation.

⁷⁶ Tanıl Bora, *Türk Sağının Üç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, İslamcılık*. (İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 1998), 8.

⁷⁷ For different attitudes within contemporary Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey, see Alev Çınar, "Final Report" *The Production, Dynamics and Key Concepts of Current Islamic Political Thought in Turkey: Civilization, Justice and Order*. (TUBITAK [Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Association] 1001 Grant: Project No. 115K283, 2018).

İsmail Kara's three-volume anthology of Islamism in Turkey exemplifies the approach that amasses a broad body of Turkish Muslim intellectuals since the late Ottoman period. Kara devotes the third volume to the so-called Islamists of the republican era, including Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu along with Eşref Edip Fergan (1882-1971), Sezai Karakoç (b. 1933), Hayrettin Karaman (b. 1934) and İsmet Özel (b. 1944). Kara explains his rationale in calling all these intellectuals "Islamist" by suggesting

Many people whom we [Kara] see no harm in labelling as 'Islamist' were known as 'conservative nationalist' in their own times, and they themselves carried out their struggle within this framework. (I am not sure if I have to remind that the word Islamism became legitimate and tenable only in the 70's).⁷⁸

It is evident from the rest of his presentation in the beginning of the book that Kara is aware of the differences between the kind of Islam espoused by late Ottoman intellectuals, those whom he defines as republican Islamists, and non-Turkish Islamists of the mid-20th century who influenced Turkish Islamism increasingly after the 1960's. Yet, he does not explain what differentiates these distinct attitudes let alone offering a conceptualization of their differences.

A similar approach inattentive to diverging positions within Islamic intellectual movements is observed in 2013 article of Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın about the roots, content and impact of Kısakürek's and Topçu's Occidentalist ideas. They argue, for instance, that

For the development of Islamism in Turkey, the writings of Kısakürek and Topçu were essential and occurred prior to the translations of Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Mawdudi into the Turkish language in the 1970s.

⁷⁸ İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi 3: Metinler / Kisiler* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1998), 6.

Their writings represent an Islamism that is more familiar with French intellectual life of the interwar era than any classical Islamic texts.⁷⁹

In addition to the inattentiveness to deep distinctions between the kind of Islamism triggered by the translations and the worldviews of Kısakürek and Topçu, they emphasize the impact of interwar French thought on them without showing how this impact operated to inform their supposedly Islamist positions. In other words, it is not clear why Kısakürek and Topçu were supposed to be Islamists if French intellectual culture influenced and inspired them more than Islamic sources of knowledge did.⁸⁰ The main problem of this approach, I think, is that it takes Islam for granted in its analysis of Topçu, Kısakürek and other Turkish Muslim intellectuals. Existing studies like the ones I have just introduced often neglect the necessary discussion of the relationship of intellectuals they analyzed with Islam itself. To tackle the problem, it is useful, necessary even, to construct ideal-typical attitudes within Islamic intellectual movement by answering such questions as: what is the place or weight of Islam in his/her 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?

Seen from this perspective, 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 Qur'an and Sunnah, and involves a different mode of political thinking than most

⁷⁹ Duran and Aydın, 480.

⁸⁰ Duran maintains a similar approach in his dissertation on Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's political thought aiming to demonstrate the impact of Kemalist interregnum on Islamic political thought in Turkey. See Burhanettin Duran, "Transformation of Islamist Political Thought in Turkey from the Empire to the Early Republic (1980-1960): Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's Political Ideas," Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, (Ankara: Bilkent University, 2001).

republican-era critiques of Turkish modernization with Islamic sensibilities.⁸¹

Islamist ideology is based on interpretations of Islamic sources of knowledge to derive new political forms. Young Ottomans, for instance, are seen as proto-Islamists as they tried to derive justifications for a constitutional regime and a parliament from Islamic sources.⁸² The Young Ottomans example illustrates three basic tenets of Islamism: 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 re-interpreted, to offer new political forms or to justify the demands to change them. Although it is possible to argue that what Young Ottomans did is only to legitimize their political demands arguably inspired by Western political forms, this tripartite novelty in their approach to Islam was inherited by the 20th century Islamists.⁸³

Comparing and contrasting this ideal-type Islamism with worldviews of Muslim intellectuals in early Cold War Turkey would reveal the contours of their thought. In the late Ottoman period, the project of Islamism and the fate of the state were tightly coupled. That is, Islamism was one way of salvation for the state that Ottoman Islamists were living in. Late Ottoman Islamism was a “pan-” ideology, almost a

⁸¹ For a similar conceptualization of Islamism, see Çinar, ‘Islamism vs. Islamic Conservatism’.

⁸² Young Ottomans interpreted classical Islamic notions such as *şura* (council) and *meşveret* (consultation) arguing that they form the ground for a constitutional regime. See Serif Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962); and Ismail Kara, *İslâmcıların Siyasî Görüşleri*, (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1994). The system of “velayet-i fakih” in Iran is a rather recent example of such interpretation of classical Islamic legal doctrines on government. See Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*. Translated by Hamid Algar. (Alhoda UK, 2005).

⁸³ Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Islamist Revivalism and Western Ideologies”, *History Workshop Journal* 32, no. 1 (October 1991): 44–53, 47.

variation of nationalism.⁸⁴ It was both an attempt to define the boundaries of political community and a response to encroachments on Islam and Muslim-populated lands.⁸⁵ As the Empire, with the sultan-caliph being its head, assumed the protection of all Muslims the two meanings of pan-Islam/Islamism were not in conflict. However, we come to the 1950's, we see the emergence of numerous independent sovereign nation-states all around the Muslim-populated areas of the world. Among Islam-inspired Turkish intellectuals of the time, political visions that challenged the nation-state world order or expressed a desire to establish a transnational political unity among Muslims were very rare. Taking the political community as the whole umma seemed either not tenable anymore or undesirable for them. Thus, they attempted to reconfigure the notion of national identity with a unique synthesis of ethnic or cultural Turkishness and Muslimhood—illustrated best, perhaps in the phrase “*Tanrı Dağı kadar Türk, Hira Dağı kadar Müslüman*” (As Turk as Khan Tengri, as Muslim as Jabal Al-Nour) uttered by Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti (1917-1983).

Although a new wave of Islamism emerged in the 1960's in Turkey which enunciated transnational aspirations in the form of a political unity among Muslims irrespective of national and sectarian differences,⁸⁶ Turkish Muslim intellectuals with

⁸⁴ Adeeb Khalid, “Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and Its Uses”, in E. Özdalga (ed.), *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 203-226: 203.

⁸⁵ Colonization of Muslim's lands by the Western powers was not the only concern of Islamists. Perhaps more important was the Western claims to represent the single and universal civilization that deny any role to Islam in the making of this civilization. See Aydin, *Muslim World*.

⁸⁶ Two factors facilitated the emergence of this transnational Islamism in Turkey. First was the greater number of publications covered news from other parts of the Muslim world. Second, a movement of translations accompanied this growing interest in the Muslim World from Islamist intellectuals in different Muslim-majority countries. One magazine stood out among others in the dissemination of Islamist publications. It was *Hilal* owned Salih Özcan (1929-2015), a very interesting figure having ties with religious conservative circles and religious orders in Turkey as well as Islamist movements outside Turkey and the Saudi family. Özcan was the mediator between and the Muslim World League (better known as *Rabita*, founded by the Saudi crown prince Faisal) and

conservative and nationalist outlooks 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 adequate as it was different from the late Ottoman Islamism and the kind of Islamism emerged mostly through the impact of translations. True that, these intellectuals shared the first tenet of Islamism—the building bloc 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. Their main concern was to preserve and improve (Ottoman- or Turkish-Islamic) culture and morality.

Conservatism might characterize the general attitude of Turkish Muslim intellectuals in early Cold War; yet, it does not define their worldviews in a comprehensive manner for it is still a too broad category in which very different attitudes could be included. Tanıl Bora identifies five different tendencies within the broad body of Turkish conservatism: (I) “cultural conservatism”, (II) “Islamism as conservatism”, (III) “nationalist conservatism”, (IV) “conservative revolution”, and (V) “liberal conservatism”.⁸⁷ He treats those intellectuals who take Islam or Islamic sensibilities as primary factor in their political ideas within the category of “Islamism as conservatism”. The naming of this category implies that Bora designates Islamism within the umbrella of conservatism. However, as I hinted above, Islamism and Islam-based conservatism are two distinct ideological attitudes, i.e. there exists an Islamist ideology independently and differently from conservatism. Thus, I think, we

Turkish Muslim intellectuals. See, Behlül Özkan, “The Cold War-Era Origins of Islamism in Turkey and Its Rise to Power”, *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 22 (November 2017): 41–57.

⁸⁷ Tanıl Bora, “Muhafazakârlığın Değişimi ve Türk Muhafazakârlığında Bazı Yol İzleri” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no: 74, (1997): 6-31.

need a different label to define these Islam-inspired conservative intellectuals in early Cold War Turkey.

There is a particular Turkish word that most of these intellectuals used to refer to their ideological outlook in the context of the early Cold War: *mukaddesatçılık*. I contend that *mukaddesatçılık* adequately captures the gist of this peculiar ideological position that reconciles diverse trends within Islamic intellectual movement on the one hand, and Turkish nationalism on the other hand. Resting on a notion of glorious past of Turkish-Islamic civilization, *mukaddesatçılık* suggests that the history of Turkish modernization was a history of losing Turkish-Islamic soul, identity and authenticity; it has been a process of alienation. Against this perceived betrayal to Turkish-Islamic identity, *mukaddesatçılık* defends restoration of values, institutions and practices that are deemed to be sacred (*mukaddes*). Among the major representatives of *mukaddesatçılık* are Samiha Ayverdi (1905-1993), Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, Sezai Karakoç, Mehmet Şevket Eygi (1933-2019) and Kadir Mısıroğlu (1933-2019)—along with Necip Fazıl Kısakürek as the most vocal representative of *mukaddesatçılık*, and the first person to articulate and popularize this word in the early Cold War Turkey for this nascent ideological position. *Mukaddesatçılar* are inspired by scholars or Islamists of the late Ottoman period such as İsmail Hakkı İzmirli (1869-1946), Kamil Miras (1874-1957), Said Nursi (1878-1960), Şerafettin Yaltkaya (1879-1947), Eşref Edip Fergan and Ahmet Hamdi Akseki (1887-1951). Furthermore, they had ties with republican-era ulema and Sufi sheikhs such as Ömer Nasuhi Bilmen (1883-1971), Mustafa Kurucu (1887-1960), Ömer Rıza Doğrul (1893-1952), Abdülaziz Bekkine, Mehmet Zahit Kotku (1897-1980), Mahmut Sami

Ramazanoğlu (1892-1984), Ali Ulvi Kurucu (1922-2002) and Tahir Büyükkörükçi (1925-2011).

Mukaddesatçılık immediately became dominant in the Turkish political scene in the heydays of the Cold War, and maintained influence on generations of right-wing politicians to this day—informing nationalist-conservative alliance currently in power. It represents the strongest current in Muslim intellectual response to the discourse of modernization in Turkey. In their response to this discourse, *mukaddesatçılar* reconstruct Muslimness as a political identity through which the secular-religious divide acquired political significance. Based on this discursive response, they interpret major contestations in Turkish political space and, retrospectively, dynamics of the whole history of Turkish modernization since the 19th century as a tug-of-war between the so-called secular- and Western-minded modernizers and those who have Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities. *Mukaddesatçı* response to modernization fits very well in the discursive field informed by modernization theory with its dichotomous understanding of secularity and religiosity. Its construction of Muslimness as an essentially distinct way of being in the world constituted by traditional institutions and practices of an imagined Islamic civilization appears as a natural outcome of the development of modern Islamic political thought especially with the global rise of identity politics and civilization talks after the 1980's.

In addition to contextual factors that rendered *mukaddesatçılık* reigned supreme in Cold War Turkey, there are a number of reasons related to the development of this kind of an understanding of Islam/Islamic knowledge. For one thing, this overly

traditionalist understanding was one strong current among late Ottoman ulema, epitomized by Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954) for instance, whose influence continued shaping conceptions of Islam in the republican period. After the transition to republic, reformist/renewalist wing of late Ottoman Islamism has almost vanished, as some of them fled the country, some “converted” to Kemalism and some dropped their earlier aspirations and joined the rank of *mukaddesatçılar*.⁸⁸ Especially with passing away of the last generation of Ottoman Islamic scholars in the 1940’s and 1950’s, there remained almost no one to ably carry out critical studies or produce ideas in the realm of religion or religious sciences. Besides, by the end of the Ottoman period, Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, standing for a rather orthodox, literalist, and traditionalist Islam, had already become the strongest and most prevalent religious order which shaped public religiosity by and large.⁸⁹ Remained organized beneath the surface during the single-party period, Naqshbandi-Khalidi sheikhs filled the vacuum of religious authority in early Cold War Turkey—thereby facilitated the advent of *mukaddesatçılık* as a restorationist ideology that strictly opposed free interpretation of Islamic sources of knowledge and the idea of reform in Islam. Alternatives to *mukaddesatçı* conceptions of Islam were marginalized, and even vilified, for being agents or stooges of modernization.⁹⁰

Among the targets of *mukaddesatçı* criticism is a particular cluster of conservative intellectuals who were close of Kemalism with respect to the overall direction of

⁸⁸ For the transformation of Islam-inspired political thought during and after the transition from the empire to the republic see İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslam*, Vol. 1 and 2, (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2017).

⁸⁹ Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*; and Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism”.

⁹⁰ Particularly targeted in this sense were the cadres of the Divinity School of Ankara University, and the emerging transnational Islamists. See Kara, *Türkiye’de İslamcılık Düşüncesi*; and Bedri Gencer, “Şeriatçılıktan Medeniyetçiliğe İslamcılık: Bir İslamcılık Tipolojisine Doğru”, in *Türkiye’de İslamcılık Düşüncesi ve Hareketi: Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, ed. İsmail Kara and Asım Öz (İstanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2013).

social change that is seen necessary for Turkey's political, cultural and economic development, yet were critical of its radical secularism and its treatment of Islam.⁹¹ These conservatives tend to see Turkey as part of the West, and they support westernization process as necessary and inevitable.⁹² To this end, some of them did not refrain from reforming Islam in accordance with Turkey's modernization process.⁹³ Nazım İrem identifies some of the intellectuals who remained within the boundaries of Kemalism but still had different understandings of national identity, progress, modernization and culture as "conservative modernists".⁹⁴ This sub-group includes Ahmed Ağaoğlu (1869-1939), İsmayıl Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (1886-1978), Mustafa Şekip Tunç (1886-1958), Peyami Safa (1899-1961) and Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974). Another sub-group within Turkish conservatism, which largely overlaps with İrem's "conservative modernists", are Anatolianist or Anatolian-nationalist, including Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884-1958), Mükrimin Halil Yınanç (1898-1961), Remzi Oğuz Arık (1899-1954), Hilmi Ziya Ülken and Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu (1901-1974). They base their notion of national identity on Anatolian soil and with varying degrees define nation with Anatolian-Turkish-Islamic identity.

Nurettin Topçu is a peculiar case within the universe of Turkish conservatism having ties and intellectual affinity with *mukaddesatçılar* on the one hand, and conservative modernists and Anatolian nationalists on the other hand. Acknowledging his peculiarity, Tanıl Bora defines "conservative revolution" as a separate tendency

⁹¹ Celal Nazım İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism: Birth of A Nationalist Quest for Cultural Renewal", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2002): 87–112, 108; and Duran, "Transformation of Islamist Political Thought", 11.

⁹² Devrim Sezer, "The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity in Turkish Communitarian Thought: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Peyami Safa on Europe and Modernity", *History of European Ideas* 36, no. 4 (December 2010): 427–37. See also, Mümtaz Turhan, *Garplılaştırmanın Neresindeyiz?* (İstanbul: Yağmur Yayınevi, 1972).

⁹³ Remzi Demir, *Türkiye'de Yeni Din Algısının Doğuşu (1839-1938)* (İstanbul: Lotus Yayınevi, 2019).

⁹⁴ İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism".

within Turkish conservatism exemplified only by Nurettin Topçu. Bora highlights a number of features characteristic to Topçu's thought: his anti-capitalistic and egalitarian tendencies that approximates his thought to the left-leaning ideologies; his rejection of modernization, industrialization and mechanization; his glorification of revolt inspired by Bergson's idea of *élan vital*; his calls for a "revolution" in the name of rejuvenating the nation; and his idea of a "spiritual" war of independence.⁹⁵ In addition to Bora, Süleyman Seyfi Ögün's monographic work on Topçu, focusing mainly on the notion of Anatolian nationalism in his writings, elaborates on similar features Topçu's thought. Ögün makes important observations regarding Topçu's position within the development of nationalist thought in Turkey as well as the place of Islam in Topçu's Anatolian nationalism and the relevance of his critique of capitalism and his socialistic ideas for his notion of nationalism.⁹⁶ Both Bora and Ögün underline the unique stance of Topçu within broader Turkish conservatism, and hint at his exceptionality within the framework of secular-religious duality—though, without telling it explicitly. Alas, their analyses remain at this general level, overlooking the reasons why Topçu could not be understood in terms of secular-religious duality.

On the other hand, Fırat Mollaer notices that Topçu diverged from other Islam-inspired critics of Turkish modernization, notably from *mukaddesatçılar*, by representing an alternative conception of Islam. In his monographic work on Nurettin Topçu, Mollaer adequately identifies Topçu's conception as a revolt against "Islam-as-identity" (*kimlik İslamı*)—a concept I also use in a slightly different manner to

⁹⁵ Bora, *Türk Sağının Üç Hali*, 91.

⁹⁶ Süleyman Seyfi Ögün, *Türkiye'de Cemaatçi Milliyetçilik ve Nurettin Topçu* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1992).

define Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's conception of Islam.⁹⁷ He also writes on Kısakürek where he discusses his position vis-à-vis modernity and associates it with what he calls "techno-conservatism"—defined as an aspiration to capitalistic development in realms of economy and technology while retaining conservative and traditionalist views on social, cultural and political processes.⁹⁸ Although his observations are apt, one wonders, after reading Mollaer's works, how Kısakürek's conception of Islam informed his "techno-conservative" position, or alternatively, how Topçu's revolt against Islam-as-identity connects to his reflections on modernity, social change and on politics at large.

Without explaining analytical distinctions between different conceptions of Islam based on fully-fledged conceptualization, it is not clear what indeed connects Topçu and Kısakürek, and what differentiates them. It is indeed the absence of a critical discussion what Islam stands for Topçu, and for Kısakürek as well, in the existing literature I have reviewed. I identify two main problems here. First, a great number of scholarly analyses on Topçu and Kısakürek register to the framework of secular-religious duality that operates through certain presumptions. The most prevalent among these presumptions is about the ontological status of Islam that is rarely discussed and often taken for granted. Accordingly, Islam is supposed to have a particular meaning determined by its main sources of knowledge and the tradition within which these sources have been interpreted. It is common in academic works that Muslimness in the setting of a modern society denotes a political identity informed by these particular meaning of Islam. True that, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek

⁹⁷ Fırat Mollaer, *Anadolu Sosyalizmine Bir Katkı: Nurettin Topçu Üzerine Yazılar* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2016); and Fırat Mollaer, "Kimlik İslâmına Karşı: Nurettin Topçu Düşüncesi Üzerine Notlar", *Temaşa Erciyes Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Dergisi*, no. 4 (January 2016): 49–60.

⁹⁸ Mollaer, *Tekno-Muhafazakarlığın Eleştirisi*.

might represent a perfect fit for this particular conception of Islam; however, an adequate reading of even Kısakürek still needs problematizing this conception of Islam, and the secular-religious duality in general, to understand how this particular conception have come about and what role Kısakürek played in this historical process. Instead, scholars often follow these presumptions to make a case for the supposedly primordial cleavage between secular and religious identities.

Furthermore, Nurettin Topçu poses an anomalous case within Turkish conservatism for his thought does not fit in with the presumptions secular-religious duality. On the one hand, he remains closer to *mukaddesatçılar* with his position within Turkish political space as he put forth a critique of Kemalism from a perspective that placed Islamic sensibilities in its center. On the other hand, he features religion as a framework for a moral life that was only supportive to social institutions, instead of dictating their functions and operations. His notion of religion is open to change, even to reform, which estranged *mukaddesatçı* circles from his ideas. In this sense, he stood closer to conservative modernists who could not be designated within the religious side of the duality.

Second, most of the academic works on Kısakürek and Topçu focus excessively on the position of these intellectuals within the broader intellectual space by emphasizing which Western school of thought or intellectual Kısakürek's or Topçu's ideas have affinity with. This approach overshadows their own representation of Kısakürek and Topçu as the prominent members of Islam-inspired revolt against Turkish modernization, and downplays the significance of Islam in Kısakürek's and Topçu's ideas. The reliance on established concepts of political thought and intellectual history, such as conservatism, left-right or secular-religious dichotomies,

might be justified as they give an analytical depth in discussing ideas of Kısakürek and Topçu from the perspective these disciplines. However, I argue, these concepts may remain inadequate in making sense of both similarities and differences between Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldviews. Therefore, I am going to offer an alternative concept to read Kısakürek and Topçu in this dissertation that attends to nuances between their worldviews which, as I argue, have significant implications for both the contemporary dynamics in Turkish politics in general and the fragmentation of Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey in particular. Based on my readings of Kısakürek and Topçu, these nuances between Kısakürek and Topçu are rooted in their conceptions of Islam. Hence, in this dissertation, I use conception of Islam to discuss Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldviews by developing it to an analytical tool through sets of questions concerning not only the intellectuals' understanding of Islam or his/her relationship with it in his/her writings but also Islam's effect on his/her political ideas or its uses in his/her worldview.

II.II. Conception of Islam: An Attempt of an Alternative Classification

Sociologists, anthropologists and other scholars working on either Islam or Muslim peoples attempt to conceptualize Islam itself—that is, making Islam a scholarly meaningful and legitimate concept.⁹⁹ While their efforts are helpful in categorizing and naming alternative conceptions of Islam, here I am not concerned with defining Islam per se or constructing a scholarly concept out of it. Instead, my concern is to analyze Kısakürek's and Topçu's definitions of Islam, their considerations on its nature, on the authentic form of its practice, the way they interpreted it; in short, their overall relationship with it in their writings.

⁹⁹ For a comprehensive review of different conceptualizations of Islam see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Although studies on Muslim intellectuals reveal different conceptions of Islam among intellectuals they analyze, there is, to my knowledge, no systematic attempt to understand possible reasons of these differences. In other words, the necessity to conceptualize the conception of Islam often escapes the attention of scholars. At the very best, studies on Muslim intellectuals point out differences in terms of interpretations of religious principles. These different interpretations are usually classified according to some criteria that are either nationality/ethnicity/culture or attitudes vis-a-vis modernity/West/secularism. The result would be some such shorthand labels as “modern Islam”, “liberal Islam” or “Turkish Islam”.¹⁰⁰ These classifications are often misleading; and even the representative individuals who are attributed such labels seldom embrace these for they are external to debates within Islamic intellectual movements. However, what I try to construct here with term “conception” has a more complex meaning than interpretation or analysis of the sources of Islamic knowledge.

My problem is to understand the relationship between Islam and the intellectual as a person/believer/Muslim in a deeper and more holistic way. If, as I argue, Topçu and Kısakürek had different conceptions of Islam; then, religion had different meanings to them, not only the sources of knowledge they appealed to but also the way they made use of them were different. Thus, it means more than the possibility that they look at the same Islamic principle and derive different meanings out of it. Rather,

¹⁰⁰ See for instance Marc F. Plattner and Larry Jay Diamond, “What Is Liberal Islam?” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 18–18; Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); M. Hakan Yavuz, “Is There a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (October 2004): 213–32.

based on their conceptions of Islam, the way they designated themselves in this world will be different. They conceive of and interact with “the other” will be different. Eventually, these differences would translate into their political thinking.

In order to analyze the conception of Islam in the writings of Kısakürek and Topçu, I devise four sets of questions. Given the lack of a useful and comprehensive conceptual framework, I follow a grounded approach based on my reading of Kısakürek and Topçu, and formulate these sets of questions that aim to encompass whole aspects of the ways they discuss Islam as well as the ways they related it to other aspects of their thought. The first set of questions is about the ontological status of Islam: what is the meaning of religion? What is the meaning of Islam? Is Islam the only (true) religion? What constitutes the core of Islam? Is it rules and principles (sharia) that enables believers to live within a divinely ordained framework or is it the spiritual experience that connects individual believers to the divine being? Does this core open to change or is it immutable and unchangeable? The second set of questions follows from the first and elaborates on the relationship between Islamic knowledge and the sources of knowledge in Islam: what are the sources of Islam and Islamic knowledge? Who has the authority to appeal to these sources and interpret them? Are these sources or their legitimate interpretations open to change? Does Islam need change? What Islamic sources do our authors make use of in their writings? How do they use them? These two sets of questions will constitute the backbone of the conception of Islam on which I draw in my analysis to discuss the implications of the answers to the remaining two sets of questions.

The third set of questions is concerned with the status of Islam vis-à-vis modernity. To the extent that modernity was associated with the advent of the idea of modern Western civilization, and the status of Islam was challenged mainly by Western Orientalist claims to universality, Topçu and Kısakürek reflected extensively on the West, Western civilization, and East/West or Islam/West dichotomy. To understand their critique of modernization-as-westernization I ask: what is the relationship between Islam and West(ern) other? In what ways did the West affect the status of Islam? What should be the Islamic response to the modern Western civilization? Could there be an Islamic modernity distinct from Western modernity? How should Islam adjust to the modern context? By answering these questions, I will discuss Topçu's and Kısakürek's ideas on Turkish modernization, westernization and modernity.

Finally, the fourth set of questions is related to the significance of Islam in practical terms: does Islam cover the whole life from personal affairs to public issues? Is it a total system or ideology that governs everything under the sun? Does it denote a civilization with sui generis institutions that is essentially different from other traditions? Is there any domain/sphere that is external/independent/non-related to Islam? Answers to these questions in the writings of Topçu and Kısakürek helped me to elaborate on their views on politics, Turkish society and the state in relation to their conceptions of Islam.

In posing these questions and seeking answers to them, nonetheless, I am aware that Islam, or their conceptions of Islam, would not be the sole explanatory factor for Kısakürek's and Topçu's ideas on these themes—after all, they were not ideal-type

Islamists. Rather, I would like to understand whether their answers to the above-listed questions have any relevance for the themes concerning modernization and politics in their writings. In order to do this, I asked these questions to my sources and organized the chapters in this way. Existing literature, as I have reviewed here, does not offer comprehensive and organized explanations related to the sets of questions I pose to understand conception of Islam. Therefore, by following a grounded approach, that is, based on the answers to these questions from my own sources, I have put forward an analytical distinction between identity and morality.

I think that the distinction between identity and morality captures and spells out the answers of Kısakürek and Topçu to the four sets of questions I put forward regarding conception of Islam, especially those related to the political significance of Islam. Kısakürek's Islam-as-identity has a monolithic understanding of religion that is equated to Islam. Islam as *the* religion is a religion ordained by Allah, conveyed by the messenger, and the meaning and boundaries of which are determined by rules and principles collected in certain sources. Accordingly, these sources are immutable and infallible sources of knowledge. There can be no change in Islamic knowledge and in Islam itself, only these sources are revived and their message is restored from time to time. In this vision, religion has no other purpose than itself. The purpose of Muslims is to live the religion in this way, to ensure that it is lived in this way, and to vindicate those who live in this way. There is an existential difference between Muslims, that is, those who practice religion as the sources that are deemed legitimate prescribe, and non-Muslims. Islam therefore appears as a source of identity. It is Islam, whose meaning and boundaries are specified in the sources, which gives Muslims their identity.

Topçu's Islam-as-morality finds the meaning of religion in the individual mystical relationship with God. Religion, in this sense, provides the framework for individual believers to establish personal connection with the divine through laying out general moral principles. In this scheme, Islam appears as one among other religious traditions that guide believers into a spiritual and moral life. Apart from the general moral principles that are to be founded within primary religious sources of knowledge, Islam-as-morality does not acknowledge any fixed system of rules and prescriptions as the basis of religion. In doing so, it detaches sharia from the essence of religion and interprets the former as a historically and socially contingent legal framework that is open to change. Translated into politics of Islam, Topçu's conception offers a form of secularism in the sense that political field appears to be partially autonomous given the absence of specific rules that bind practice of politics.

There are very few studies in literature that is attentive to the distinctions between Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality, or other distinctions between different Muslim intellectuals, so clearly to systematize or identify it. With this study and the distinction I have made here, I aim to analytically discuss and empirically support a well-known argument; namely, we need to talk about "Islams", not just one Islam.¹⁰¹ Although this proposition has already been in circulation, it is not properly grounded. I argue that it is not possible to support this argument with the current categories and frameworks because they fall short in categorizing different conceptions of Islam based on sources. I think that the most important contribution of this study is to reveal different conceptions of Islam through a conceptual framework and make a

¹⁰¹ For a powerful defense of this argument, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).

case to analyze and categorize worldviews that are lumped sum as Islamic, religious and/or conservative.

II.III. Methodological Framework: Intellectual History from a Different Perspective

In this dissertation, I take the Cold War context as a constitutive site within which new political ideas, alignments, and conceptions emerged, or the existing ones transformed. More importantly, the context of the Cold War informed the articulation of these ideas and conceptions including the conception of Islam. Hence, the approach I follow here take the context as the “ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally recognizable meanings, in a society of *that* kind, it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate”.¹⁰² This point by Quentin Skinner acknowledges that an intellectual does not live in a vacuum, and that s/he is responsive to his/her political, social, and cultural environment in terms of both the content of his/her ideas and the way s/he communicates them with the audience. Following these insights from the Cambridge School of intellectual history, I try to understand the meaning of texts produced by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu within their own context—that of the early Cold War Turkey, and analyze them through this perspective.

Implicit in its justifications, emphasis on the context also recognizes the intellectual as a person. If we are to understand ideas, utterances and arguments of an intellectual as a person by taking into account all the dynamics that might be related to the intended meaning of his/her text; then, we need to acknowledge also that there might

¹⁰² Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3-53, 49.

be extra-contextual factors operated in the constitution of the intellectual as a person.¹⁰³ In addition to the role of different sources of inspiration that influenced Kısakürek's and Topçu's thought, there are certainly personal and psychological factors that, I think, has to be taken into consideration in the analysis of Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings, in addition to the overall evaluation of their positions within Turkish intellectual space. Since my aim is to understand the significance of Islam, I need to know other sources of inspiration for them, and be able to reveal when they appealed to these sources separately or in different combinations under particular contexts. Moreover, as in the case of Kısakürek and Topçu, personal and psychological differences altered the ways in which they expressed a particular idea in a particular context. A sober intellectual historical analysis has to account for personal and psychological background of their ideas. Thus, I devoted a whole chapter to present contextualized intellectual biographies of Kısakürek and Topçu that will help me making sense of their discussions on Islam, modernity and politics in the subsequent chapters.

Furthermore, contextualization in intellectual history implies the necessity to understand concepts in their own contexts—that is conceptual contextualization.¹⁰⁴ One particular strand within intellectual history takes this implication to argue for a concept-centered approach within the discipline. Conceptual history, or *Begriffsgeschichte* as its founders in German intellectual history tradition identify it,

¹⁰³ Peter E. Gordon, "What Is Intellectual History? A Frankly Partisan Introduction to a Frequently Misunderstood Field" (The Harvard Colloquium for Intellectual History, Cambridge, MA, 2013). Available at:

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/pgordon/files/what_is_intell_history_pgordon_mar2012.pdf.

Accessed on 8 July 2021

¹⁰⁴ Adrian Little, "Contextualizing Concepts: The Methodology of Comparative Political Theory", *The Review of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018): 87–113.

enables us to pay the due attention to the socio-historical context and ideas at the same time by taking concepts instead of intellectuals as the unit of analysis.¹⁰⁵

Although I do not follow a concept-centered approach, as my unit is the intellectual himself/herself, I still draw on insights from conceptual history literature for conceptual historians' emphasis on contextual differences and on the importance of attending to conceptual nuances. In addition to conceptual history, Comparative Political Theory literature challenges established analytical and conceptual tools of political theory and intellectual history, and calls for using locally relevant concepts as analytical tools in the analysis of political ideas.¹⁰⁶ The two bodies of literature inspired me to question established tools and concepts of intellectual history and to make use of concepts as they appear in my own research on Kısakürek and Topçu. Elevating these locally relevant concepts to an analytical level opens up a possibility to resolve the dilemma between the universal and the local.

II.IV. A Note on the Sources

Most of the writings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu were first published in magazines and newspapers. These writings were later collected into

¹⁰⁵ See for instance Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Martin Burke and Melvin Richter, *Why Concepts Matter: Translating Social and Political Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For a recent comprehensive discussion on the significance of conceptual contextualization with a focus on Ottoman-Turkish history see, Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History: Challenges and Prospects", *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14, no. 1, (2019), 93-114.

¹⁰⁶ Comparative Political Theory is an emerging field within the discipline of political theory that arose out of a concern to expand the canon of political theory by including non-Western texts of political knowledge and analyze them in their own terms as sources of political theorizing. See Roxanne L. Euben, "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism", *The Journal of Politics* 59, no. 1 (February, 1997): 28-55; and Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory", *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 2004): 249-57, 253. For the newly published handbook of the field see Leigh K. Jenco, Murad Idris, and Megan C. Thomas, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). For an article focusing on the merits of using locally-relevant concepts in inquiries on political thought see Leigh K. Jenco, "Recentering Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality", *Cultural Critique* 79, no. 1 (November 2011): 27-59.

books and published often posthumously. Kısakürek, being a well-known man of letters since the 1920's, have published poetry books, plays and novels, in addition to his political writings. The latter often appeared in his *Büyük Doğu* and in various newspapers first, then, together with his speeches, were collected into books usually by himself. Kısakürek established a publication house named after his magazine (Büyük Doğu Yayınları, BDY) in 1973 and all his works have been published by this publication house since then. After his death, the BDY have been run by Kısakürek's children and continued publishing his works, including his writings which otherwise remained scattered in magazines and newspapers as an attempt to complete the entire Kısakürek corpus. In addition to his poems, plays, novels and short stories, the corpus includes political/ideological writings, historical studies, autobiographical books, conference speeches and apologies. In total, the corpus consists of about one hundred books about half of which is his non-fiction political, historical or autobiographical works. Since the corpus includes all of Kısakürek's pieces, I rely on the books published by the BDY.

Nurettin Topçu was a philosopher and teacher, and engaged more on themes that remain within the purview of philosophy, humanities and social sciences. His first published work was his Ph.D. dissertation published in 1934 in Paris, in French—translated into Turkish as late as 1990. Among his early publications were textbooks on philosophy, logic, morals, sociology and psychology at the level of secondary education. Topçu wrote two fiction books: *Taşralı*, a collection of short stories; and *Reha*, a novel. Apart from the textbooks and fictions, Topçu's books were collections of his writings in his *Hareket* and various other magazines and newspapers. Like Kısakürek, Topçu established a publication house named after his magazine (Hareket

Yayınları) and most of his books were published by this publication house in his lifetime. However, unlike BDY, Hareket Yayınları did not survive long. After his death, Topçu's followers established another publication house (Dergâh Yayınları) and started publishing Topçu's previously published books as well as his unpublished works in new collections. Dergah Yayınları published 21 books of Topçu—two fiction, five textbooks and the rest are political and philosophical books. Again, since these books cover the whole Topçu corpus I rely on these books in this dissertation.

Nevertheless, my choice of relying on books published by BDY and Dergah has some drawbacks. Although I have little concern about alterations in the content of essays or articles that make up the books, I should note that organization of the books, i.e. which articles or essays are to be included in a given book and which are to be omitted, is in the discretion of editors of these publication houses. Therefore, it happens sometimes that one piece of writing which appeared in older editions was discarded in a new edition without any notice. Likewise, sometimes there could be different versions of the same piece (published in different places in the author's lifetime) and one version is preferred over the other(s) by editors.¹⁰⁷

Yet again, another problem with relying on books is specific to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek this time. The books of Nurettin Topçu published by Dergah designate, for each essay or article, where and when that piece has been published before. There

¹⁰⁷ This can turn into a controversy among followers of Kısakürek and Topçu. For example, Lütfi Bergen, a follower of Topçu, touched upon this problem in a symposium on Nurettin Topçu. See Lütfi Bergen, "Nurettin Topçu'nun Yarınki Türkiye'si", in C. Gündoğdu, M. Z. İşcan, M. Cengiz eds. *Nurettin Topçu Sempozyumu, 15-16 Nisan 2016, Erzurum: Tebliğler* (Erzurum: Erzurum Büyükşehir Belediyesi ve Atatürk Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2016), 229–307.

is unfortunately no such information in Kısakürek's books.¹⁰⁸ Thus, contextual analysis for Topçu's texts is very easy, whereas it is not possible for Kısakürek's texts since identifying different places these texts had been published and comparing versions are highly difficult. This difficulty might be another source of concern given an important difference between Topçu and Kısakürek: while Topçu seems more consistent in his ideas and worldview, Kısakürek exhibits high level of oscillation in his political inclination. It would be helpful to see the extent to which these oscillations were reflected on the ideas in Kısakürek's texts. For this reason, it is in fact essential to know the original dates and places of his writings.

¹⁰⁸ See Ismail Kara, "İdeolocya Örgüsü Nasıl Ele Alınabilir?" in A. Öz, I. Kara, A. Ertuğrul eds. *Necip Fazıl Kitabı: Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, (İstanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 293–308.

CHAPTER III: NAMES, CAUSES, MEANINGS: INTRODUCING NURETTİN TOPÇU AND NECİP FAZIL KISAKÜREK

This chapter aims to explore the intellectual baggage of Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, possible effects of live events they have been involved in, and their motivations and expectations in their intellectual efforts. The analysis of their personalities, their trajectories in life and their intellectual backgrounds I offer in this chapter is not merely customarily located in the dissertation. My discussion in this chapter is integral to my main arguments concerning divergent ways of Islam-as-morality and Islam-as-identity that will unfold in the subsequent chapter. Moreover, this introductory chapter on Topçu and Kısakürek provides a basis of my critique towards scholarly frameworks based on secular-religious duality. In this chapter, I will argue that differences between Topçu's and Kısakürek's intellectual trajectories as well as their legacies today lie in their position along the secular-religious divide as the source major polarization in Turkish society and politics since the early Cold War to this day. Kısakürek played a constitutive role in the establishment of the secular-religious divide. Following his ideological transformation in the 1930's and the 1940's, he became a self-designated representative of the religious side of this divide, and hence his popularity grew as the polarization intensified. Topçu's position, on the other hand, remained rather ambivalent within this division, for he articulated ideas that were inadmissible to either side of the secular-religious divide.

In what follows, after presenting biographies of Topçu and Kısakürek, I inquire on the stories behind their magazines that are associated with their names and represented the earliest examples of Islam-inspired critique of Turkish modernization. I show that Topçu's and Kısakürek's intellectual baggage respectively reflected in the names of their magazines. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I provide a comparative analysis of their intellectual personas including their personal reflections on each other.

III.I. Nurettin Topçu and *Hareket*

It is a generic misfortune in Turkish intellectual history that serious biographical works of academic worth for intellectuals are missing. This is notably true for right-wing intellectuals whose exiting biographies, usually prepared by their followers, are hardly different from hagiographies and seldom move beyond glorifying the memory of the concerned intellectual. Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek are not exceptions. Few works on Topçu and Kısakürek in the literature offer short biographies of each, largely depending on Topçu's and Kısakürek's own accounts and narratives of his followers. Either way existing accounts on Topçu's and Kısakürek's lives are partial—leaving no other option than relying on Topçu and Kısakürek or their followers to illuminate their lives. In Topçu's case, the problem is even greater for he did not write about himself or his encounters much. He neither left any autobiographical note nor did he reveal his personal experiences in the pieces he wrote for people he knew personally in his *Millet Mistikleri*. Therefore, I draw on

the biographical information provided in the literature as well as the writings of Topçu's followers to elaborate on his life.¹⁰⁹

Topçu was born in 1909 in Istanbul to a modest family of Erzurum origin. His father was a cattle trader whose fortune fluctuated a lot due to circumstances of the WWI years, but was enough to provide young Nurettin with a decent primary and secondary education. In the early years of his life, Nurettin suffered from a stomach disease that hung on throughout his life until his death at the age of 66. According to one of his biographers, Nurettin was an introverted child—presumably due to his malaise, and preferred busying himself with books rather than socializing and playing with his peers.¹¹⁰ Not surprisingly, this brought him academic success in the elementary school after which Nurettin attended Vefa İdadisi, a prestigious high school in the center of Istanbul. The same year he started high school his father passed away—putting the family in financial troubles. Nevertheless, Nurettin continued his studies, first at Vefa İdadisi and later at İstanbul İdadisi, and graduated from the latter with distinction in 1928. Nurettin's interests in philosophy was said to begin in high school where he took courses from distinguished teachers including Şerafettin Bey (Yaltkaya), the later chairperson of the Directorate of Religious Affairs.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ For biographical works on Topçu, see Muammer Çelik, *Nurettin Topçu ve Bugünkü Türkiye* (İstanbul: Ülke Kitapları, 2000); Lütfü Şehsuvaroğlu, *Nurettin Topçu* (Ankara: Alternatif Yayınları, 2002); Hüseyin Karaman, *Nurettin Topçu* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2010); Ali Osman Gündoğan, "Topçu ve Hareket Felsefesi", *Temaşa Erciyes Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Dergisi*, no. 4 (January 2016): 24–37; İsmail Kara, "Ahlâk Davasına ve Muallimliğe Adanmış Bir Ömür: Nurettin Topçu", *Temaşa Erciyes Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Dergisi*, no. 4 (January 2016): 6–23; Emin Işık, *Nurettin Topçu: Çağdaş Bir Dervişin Dünyası* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2019).

¹¹⁰ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 17.

¹¹¹ Kara, "Ahlâk Davasına", 7.

Topçu spent his childhood in an extraordinary context where the six-century-old Ottoman Empire collapsed following a long decade of wars including the WWI. Within the first two decades of his life he witnessed the occupation of Istanbul as well as larger parts of Anatolia, the national struggle movement that brought an end to the occupation and sealed the boundaries of modern Turkey, the termination of the empire and the foundation of the republican regime, and the subsequent reforms which abolished the caliphate, secularize the public sphere and westernize social and cultural aspects of life. We do not know how exactly young Nurettin Topçu made sense of all these chaotic developments. We can surmise from his familial background that there was nothing particularly tied him to the ancien regime as he was raised in a family of provincial origin whose living did not depend on the state machinery. Therefore, the new regime must have excited young Nurettin, as was the case with the educated youth in those years. Corroborating this opinion, he was reportedly a reader of *İkdam*, a newspaper known for its support for the regime and reforms, and an admirer of the author Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın).¹¹² The only factor that might alienate him from the new regime would be rapid reforms to secularize and westernize the country, given the information provided by Topçu's biographers regarding his personal piety that he acquired from his family. At the time he graduated from high school at the beginning of his 20's, however, there seemed to be no tension between his allegiance to Islam and the ongoing secularization process.

¹¹² Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 24. Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (1874-1957) was a prominent journalist and politician whose career encompassed the second constitutional era, the republican single-party period and the early years of multi-party period. During the early years of the republic, Hüseyin Cahit came at odds with CHP government for his critical writings. Later however he became a member of parliament from the ranks of the party.

The year he received his high school diploma, Nurettin applied to the state's scholarship to pursue higher education abroad. He came successful in the written examination and was entitled to study philosophy in France along with future prominent members of Turkish academia such as of Ziya Somar, Enver Ziya Karal, Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu and Remzi Oğuz Arık. Notably, he developed life-long relationships with the last two. After his arrival to France, Topçu enrolled in a high school in Aix-en-Provence to receive a French high school diploma that would make him eligible to attend the university.¹¹³ In Aix, Topçu had the opportunity to meet Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), the prominent member of spiritualist philosophy school in France and happened to be Topçu's doctoral advisor, via a teacher of him at the high school. Although Topçu was a high school student and Blondel was a university professor, they developed an intellectual relationship and kept in touch throughout the years Topçu spent in France. Thanks to Blondel, Topçu became familiar with a broader circle of French spiritualist philosophers. Notably, Henri Bergson deeply influenced him so much so that he wrote a thesis on Bergson for his associate professorship—though Topçu did not have any personal relationship with Bergson.¹¹⁴

Topçu completed his bachelor education in the philosophy department of Strasbourg University. During his studies, he met French orientalist Louis Massignon (1883-1962), attended his talks and even gave him Turkish lessons. Massignon led young Topçu to elaborate on mystical aspects of Islam through which Topçu discover

¹¹³ His biographies explained that Topçu had to spend one more year in high school in France for the French authorities did not accredit Topçu's high school diploma from Turkey.

¹¹⁴ For his thesis on Bergson, see Nurettin Topçu, *Bergson* (Istanbul: Hareket Yayınları, 1968).

Mansur Al-Hallaj (Hallac-ı Mansur, 858-922) and his approach to Sufism.¹¹⁵

According to one of his biographers, Topçu later told his students that Massignon was the first person who drew his attention to the purportedly detrimental effects of republican reforms and the importance of protecting religious and national authenticity.¹¹⁶ Topçu's reported reflections on his years in France manifest his disillusionment with the process of secularization in Turkey due to his immersion in spiritualist and mystical thought, his encounters with students and professors who were also church members, and his observation regarding the high status of religion among the upper echelons of French society.¹¹⁷ Under the impact of these pro-religious and spiritualist mentality, Topçu wrote his Ph. D. dissertation in the field of moral philosophy under the supervision of Blondel at Sorbonne University. He successfully defended his dissertation in 1934 and became one of the first Turkish students obtained a Ph. D. degree from a modern Western university. Despite insistence of Blondel and others on Topçu to stay in France and continue his career in philosophy there, he preferred returning to Turkey after he completed his dissertation.¹¹⁸

Upon his return, Topçu encountered a disturbing political and intellectual environment in Turkey. He had left the country in the end of the 1920's as a teenager

¹¹⁵ Hallaj was an early Islamic mystic who claimed to be united with God through his mystical experience of Islam. He was executed during the Abbasid caliphate for allegedly committing blasphemy. For further information see Louis Massignon and Louis Gardet, "Al-Halladj", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., accessed online https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-halladj-COM_0256, on 26 July 2021; and Süleyman Uludağ, "Hallac-ı Mansur", in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed online <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hallac-i-mansur>, on 26 July 2021.

¹¹⁶ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 33-4. This is another point corroborating that Topçu did not see any tension between his personal piety and the ongoing secularization process when he was in Turkey. If we reckon that the anecdote about Massignon's intervention to Topçu is true, it is curious to see a Western orientalist's vision of Turkey based on secular-religious duality.

¹¹⁷ Reportedly, one of his closest friends from the University of Strasbourg was a novice in the Catholic Church.

¹¹⁸ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 79.

newly graduated from high school and returned in 1934 with a Ph.D. degree. He was certainly irritated by the rapid westernization in all aspects of political, social and cultural life; the dominance of modernization, positivism and Enlightenment ideas in Turkish intellectual circles; and the status of religion that seemed to be left to a very small intellectual circle and the popular masses. Given his personal piety, his affinity with spiritualism and mysticism, and his experience in France, it is not difficult to imagine his disappointment. Moreover, he must be alienated by the political elite upon seeing the fate of central figures in his life such as Hüseyin Avni Ulaş¹¹⁹ and Mehmet Akif Ersoy¹²⁰ in their political careers. As these people faced absolute exclusion by the political elite, Topçu who felt himself aligned with the worldviews of them took a very adverse attitude.

Topçu's intellectual reservations, in fact, do not suffice to push him into being an adversary of the political elite. After all, there were other Turkish conservative intellectuals who remained critical of materialism and positivism under the influence of spiritualist philosophy like Topçu. Moreover, many of these intellectuals shared

¹¹⁹ Ulaş (1887-1948) was a lawyer and politician of Erzurum origin. He was a friend of Topçu's father and became an uncle for Topçu throughout his life. Topçu had also a short-dated marriage with Ulaş's daughter. Ulaş joined the national struggle movement in 1920 and elected member to the first national assembly that ran the War of Independence. He was one of the major MPs in the so-called second group in the parliament that were in opposition to the dominant group led by Mustafa Kemal. He was not nominated for the second turn of the parliament as a dissenter and pretty much sank into oblivion. Towards the end of his life he made another attempt in politics, without any success, by co-founding one of the first opposition parties (Milli Kalkınma Partisi – National Development Party) after the transition to multi-party politics. For Topçu, Ulaş was a national hero who spent his life in the service of his country. Topçu wrote several articles about him, which were compiled in *Millet Mistikleri*. See Nurettin Topçu. *Millet Mistikleri*. (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2017). For more information on Ulaş, see Muammer Çelik, *Hüseyin Avni Ulaş*, (İstanbul: Erzurum Kitaplığı, 1996).

¹²⁰ Ersoy (1873-1936) was a leading Islamist and poet in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. He joined the national struggle movement and served as a MP in the first national assembly. He is the poet of the lyrics of Turkey's national anthem that he wrote during the War of Independence. After the proclamation of the republic and abolition of the caliphate and consecutive secularizing reforms, he fled the country to Egypt where he lived in a self-imposed exile until he returned to Turkey in 1936 and passed away the same year. Ersoy too was a national hero to Topçu whom he dedicated many articles that were later compiled in a book named *Mehmet Akif*. See, Nurettin Topçu. *Mehmet Akif*. (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2011).

Topçu's conception of Islam as a personal experience with the divine and a moral framework for social life, and acknowledged that Islam as such was an indispensable social institution for the cohesion of Turkish nation.¹²¹ But unlike him, many of these intellectuals such as Hilmi Ziya Ülken, Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, Remzi Oğuz Arık, and so on did not take a strict anti-Kemalist stance, and could find themselves a place within state-controlled academia. Nurettin Topçu could have been one of these conservative intellectuals that the political elite tolerated; yet, he never earned a position within academia for his critique of Kemalism and modernization-as-westernization. In his vocally critical attitude, an important personal factor was perhaps the fate of those who admired such as Ulaş and Ersoy. Moreover, Topçu aspired to be a public intellectual—evident from his magazine project he started as early as 1939 and his activity within nationalist associations—who articulated a critique of modernization in general and Turkish modernization in particular that took Islamic sensibilities as its central component, unlike many other Turkish conservatives of the era. The critical tone in his writings that he never refrained from making public led him being prosecuted and exiled.¹²² This, perhaps, further estranged him from the political establishment and pushed him towards the Islam-based opposition camp in the emerging secular-religious duality in early Cold War Turkey.

Within ten years following his return to Turkey, Topçu served as a high school teacher in Istanbul and few other cities teaching philosophy, sociology, morals, psychology and other related subjects. Meanwhile, in the early 1940's, he was searching for company of a spiritual guide who could bring him the key to the

¹²¹ See, İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism".

¹²² Mollaer, *Anadolu Sosyalizmine Bir Katkı*, 98.

spiritual and mystical experience of Islam he was looking for. A pious friend of him introduced Topçu with several religious scholars and Sufi sheikhs in Istanbul. Although Topçu developed relationships with some of them and continued learning about classical Islamic sciences such as kalam and hadith especially from Celal Ökten, he was not fully satisfied with his encounters.¹²³ After Topçu revealed to his friend that he aspired not an initiation to religious sciences or knowledge of Sufism but a thorough experience of Sufism itself, his friend took him to Abdülaziz Bekkine, a Naqshbandi sheikh based in Fatih district of İstanbul.¹²⁴ Topçu seemed to be satisfied with this meeting and started visiting Bekkine in his house near the İskenderpaşa Mosque where Bekkine offered service as the imam (prayer leader) while clandestinely holding the sheikhdom of this important branch (İskenderpaşa) of Naqshbandiyya.¹²⁵

Topçu's reported remark to his friend about his search for an intimate personal relationship in his Sufi experience of Islam—instead of bookish knowledge of Sufism itself—hints at a significant aspect of his conception of Islam. Implied in this remark was the diverging point of Topçu from other religious conservatives and *mukaddesatçılar* in terms of his relationship with religious and/or spiritual authorities. Topçu was already a pious Muslim right from his childhood, and became familiar with Sufi Islam from his years in France, where he wrote a dissertation focusing on the Sufi experience of Mansur Al-Hallaj from the perspective of the

¹²³ İsmail Kara, "Nurettin Topçu", in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/topcu-nurettin> Accessed on 19.10.2020.

¹²⁴ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 108.

¹²⁵ Bekkine, or Aziz Efendi, was an Istanbul-based Sufi sheikh and a religious official of Kazan origin. He was an adherent of the Khalidi branch of Naqshbandi order. Bekkine was especially interested in preaching Islamic values and in developing Islamic sensibilities among university students. Upon his death, Mehmet Zahid Kotku who influenced so many right-wing politicians including Necmettin Erbakan, Turgut Özal, Recai Kutan, Korkut Özal, Temel Karamollaoğlu and Nevzat Yalçıntaş maintained Bekkine's post at İskenderpaşa.

philosophy of action. What he sought for upon returning to Turkey was apparently someone who could accompany him in experiencing a similar connection with the divine. Hence, invoking the topos of conversion in Topçu's case—that is frequently done in academic works drawing on secular-religious duality, is an inadequate analysis of his thought.¹²⁶ Contrarily, Topçu's initiation to Bekkine did not at all denote an "intra-faith conversion" which radically altered Topçu's life and his worldview.

From the mid 1940's to the end of his life Topçu was based in Istanbul, devoted himself to intellectual activities mostly around nationalist and anti-communist associations—in addition to his teaching service. The most significant fruit of these activities was *Hareket*, the magazine he started publishing in 1939 when he was a teacher in İzmir and continued until the end of his life with sporadic intervals. *Hareket* was the very first periodical with an oppositional stance to Kemalism towards the end of the single-party period. In addition to *Hareket*, Topçu wrote for several Islamic-leaning and nationalist magazines and newspapers including *Büyük Doğu*, *Türk Yurdu*, *Şule*, *Yeni İstanbul*, *Yeni İstiklâl* and *Komünizme Karşı Mücadele*. Having an intellectually active life and leaving a body of ideas stimulating for different strands of Turkish conservatism and nationalism, Topçu passed away in 1975 of a pancreatic cancer at an early age of 66.

III.I.I. Topçu's Intellectual Baggage and *Hareket*

To understand Topçu's intellectual baggage and to make sense of his ideas to be discussed in the rest of this dissertation, analysis of *Hareket* is a key for two reasons.

¹²⁶ See for instance, Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl".

First, Topçu enunciated most of his ideas in this magazine that became a synonym for his life-long intellectual efforts. Second, the name of the magazine is also the name of the philosophical school Topçu was affiliated to. Having a good grasp of this philosophy, i.e. the philosophy of action, will reveal the contours of Topçu's thought and, I believe, will facilitate putting his ideas in their context. Therefore, I will try to discern Topçu's possible motivations and aspirations in publishing *Hareket* and elaborate on the philosophy of action in relation to broader frame of Topçu's thought.

The first issue of *Hareket* (February, 1939) does not have a manifesto-like introductory article that could otherwise explain the purpose of publishing the magazine—which is common to periodicals advocating or espousing a certain worldview. Instead, it starts with an article of Topçu named “Rönesans Hareketleri” (Renaissance Movements) which is very helpful in terms of understanding Topçu's notion of civilization and nationality—yet, it does not straightforwardly explain the worldview on which the magazine relies and why the specific word “hareket” is chosen for its title. This omission is compensated by a seven-page summary of Maurice Blondel's book entitled *Action* (1893), published with the title “Hareket Felsefesi” (Philosophy of Action) which is translated by Topçu himself. Although, as a translation of the excerpts from the book, it does not directly help us understanding the motivations and expectations of Topçu in publishing the magazine, it shows us where to look for to figure out Topçu's inspirations and intellectual baggage.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ For a thorough analysis of Topçu's intellectual inspirations see Mollaer, *Anadolu Sosyalizmine Bir Katkı*.

Maurice Blondel was a leading figure in the early 20th century Catholic and French thought whose work has been at the intersection of philosophy and theology. He was part of spiritualist philosophical tradition in France started perhaps with Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) developed through Maine de Biran (1766-1824) and Emile Boutroux (1845-1921) who was also Blondel's doctoral supervisor. French spiritualist philosophy was further developed by Blondel himself, his contemporary Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and others who created a front against the mainstream philosophy in France. French philosophy throughout the 19th century was dominated by positivistic views, dismissing metaphysics and religion from the realm of philosophy.¹²⁸ The strongest opposition to this trend came from Emile Boutroux with his objection to the extension of deterministic and mechanistic views onto the realm of ethics and morality. In so doing, Boutroux paved the way for the development of spiritualist philosophy in the early 20th century.¹²⁹ Boutroux's followers, notably Bergson and Blondel among others, took up the struggle against positivistic philosophy. While Bergson argued for the significance of intuition as opposed to intellect in the domain of epistemology, Blondel sought to find a place for supernatural religion within the domain of ontology and moral philosophy.

Blondel's main aspiration was to reconcile religion and philosophy without reducing religion to a mere philosophical view and philosophy to a mere theological practice.¹³⁰ He wrote his Ph. D. dissertation at Sorbonne University in 1893 with such concerns and published as a book entitled *L'Action: Essai d'une critique de la*

¹²⁸ Oliva Blanchette, "Maurice Blondel's Philosophy of Action: Translator's Preface" in M. Blondel, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), xviii.

¹²⁹ Mollaer, *Anadolu Sosyalizmine Bir Katkı*, 50.

¹³⁰ Oliva Blanchette, "Why We Need Maurice Blondel", *Communio* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 138–67, 156.

vie et d'une science de la pratique (Action: Essay on A Critique of Life and A Science of Practice) which became the groundwork for his philosophy of action. Inspired by German Idealism, Catholic existentialism and phenomenology, in addition to French spiritualism, Blondel conceives the phenomenon of action as the manifestation of the dynamism of human existence as opposed to abstract philosophical notions of experience and of rationality.¹³¹ However, Blondel understands action in a completely different way than the word's meaning in mundane language. Action in Blondel's sense comprises of both reason and faith; and its philosophical analysis opens up a possibility to overcome the duality of experience and rational speculation on the one hand, and to make a case for philosophical necessity of the supernatural on the other hand.

Blondel's philosophy of action could be seen as an extension of Kantian moral philosophy that takes the problem of freedom or free will as the central element of a morally relevant behavior. Similarly, Blondel conceives of action, more than simply a deed or a behavior, as a self-conscious move by the subject springing from a will to bring about a change. If the subject does not reflect on his/her move then his/hers is not an action but a simple deed.¹³² To the extent that action requires consciousness and reflection, it is in a stark contradistinction to passivity and conformity. Nevertheless, for Blondel, the will that allows the subject for action cannot be purely free for the subject does not act in a world dominated by him/herself alone.¹³³ This is where Blondel's philosophy of action diverges from Kantian moral philosophy.

¹³¹ William L. Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel", *Communio* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 103–37.

¹³² Gregory Sadler, "Maurice Blondel (1861—1949)" in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed online at <https://iep.utm.edu/blondel/#H2>, last access 21.05.2020.

¹³³ Ibid.

Blondel suggests that the subject in any case has to act, to different degrees, by the exigencies of the circumstances around him/her.¹³⁴ Although this does not reduce the subject's deed to passivity or conformity, it certainly poses a challenge to his/her autonomy in the Kantian sense. Blondel objects to such understanding of autonomy as pure and free from all constraints imposed by subject's sociality. Instead of seeing these constraints as obstacles in front of action, Blondel argues that sociality itself provides the subject with a capacity to act. He defines this dependency on subject's social environment as heteronomy that he thinks as a condition for the possibility of subject's autonomy.¹³⁵ Thus, action is an outcome of the interplay between autonomy as the individual subject consciously reflects upon his/her action, and heteronomy as the acting subject is bounded by forces external and transcendent to him/her.

The argument for heteronomy enables Blondel to justify the existence of civil society and to introduce the concept of transcendence into his philosophy of action.

Accordingly, the individual subject always wills to transcend himself/herself to a higher state of being, and action, springing from this will, always aims to reach a transcendental stage. Blondel explains the expansion of action as follows:

Starting with the first exterior expansion of willed action in the body, the organism or the individual life of the human subject, and going on from individual action to social action, or coaction with others, and then to social action as found in the family, in the nation, and in humanity as a whole, all of it leading up to a necessary universal extension of action to the limits of the universe.¹³⁶

Similar to Hegel's philosophical system where social organizations from family to nation are necessary stages in the unfolding of the *Geist*, Blondel conceives them as natural steps for the ever-expanding action. However, Blondel argues, action does

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Blanchette, "Maurice Blondel", 147.

not stop even after it embraces the whole humanity reaching out the limits of the universe. The will to act is infinite; therefore, action necessarily seeks to expand beyond the natural order. For Blondel, this is where philosophical speculation comes to its frontier and we enter the domain of the supernatural.

Since the will (to act) that could be found in the human subject is infinite, it must come from a likewise infinite source. This source cannot be obtained within the subject's bodily existence, nor is it present in subject's natural environment for these are finite beings. There must be a necessary being which Blondel identifies with God (as it is manifested in Catholicism) that endows the human subject with infinite will to act. Hence, each and every action is an episode of God's infinity. Action is a means for the human subject to transcend his/her finiteness and to reach God. In analyzing action as such, Blondel makes his case for two point: (I) the existence of God could be substantiated through philosophical speculation; and (II) action is a product of both God and the agency of human subject. Blondel's attempt to reconcile philosophy and theology (first point) as well as his interpretation of transcendence (second point) received negative reactions by both academic circles of France and the clergy. Faced with a double exclusion, he felt the discomfort of being possibly prosecuted by the Catholic Church for his arguments for Catholicism that was associated with modernism and was disregarded by academic circles for his supposed deformation of philosophy with religious themes and motives.

Topçu's seven-page summary in the first issue of *Hareket* entitled "Hareket Felsefesi" is based on Blondel's book *L'Action* that I tried to summarize above. Topçu most probably aimed to introduce the philosophy of action to the Turkish

reader, and more importantly laid the intellectual/philosophical ground on which his magazine was built. The summary is a bit disorganized, juxtaposing passages and arguments without neat and comprehensible transitions—possibly due to difficulties in summarizing an otherwise long and complex philosophical tract in a few magazine pages. It starts with an explanation of the concept “action” and its centrality in human existence. Accordingly, the meaning of human life lies within its capacity for action that navigates human beings to transcendence—the real purpose of life. Topçu’s summary underscores that the action could not fulfil itself at the individual level and tends to spread throughout the universe. It spreads from the individual to the society with the mediation of the state and then to whole humanity, just to reach the transcendence.¹³⁷ Towards the end of the summary Topçu highlights Blondel’s argument that the action meant uniting with God in this sense. In fact, the action is a “synthesis of God and human”; “Where there is no action, there is no God; there is God where the action exists”.¹³⁸

While Topçu gives the outline of Blondel’s philosophy of action that is very helpful in making sense of his conception of state and political community (nation), he features some elements that were presumably more important from Topçu’s perspective. First, he focuses on the argument that action as the ultimate meaning of human life necessitates a spiritual religious experience. This emphasis suggests that Topçu takes religion as the most significant component of his worldview, and the overall orientation of the magazine *Hareket* would be religious at the outset. Nonetheless, Topçu’s conception of religion and authentic religious experience is

¹³⁷ Nurettin Topçu, “Hareket Felsefesi”, *Hareket* 1, no. 1 (February 1939) appeared in Nurettin Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2018), 21-5.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

radically different from both Blondel's original philosophy of action and the established notions and experiences of religion in the Turkish context. For one thing, Topçu de-centers Christianity in Blondel's philosophy of action and replaces it with Sufi Islam. He finds the true form of religious experience in Sufism mostly implying a parallel between the conception of action as the synthesis of God and the human on the one hand, and Sufi belief of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being, *vahdet-i vücud* in Turkish) on the other. As such, Topçu does not merely reiterate Blondel's arguments; rather he creatively indigenizes the philosophy of action through his reinterpretation of Sufi Islam. On the other hand, Topçu's emphasis on action as the product of individual subject's active participation, self-reflection and consciousness contradicts the established beliefs and practices of Islam in Turkey, as I will elaborate in the next chapter.

Second, Topçu stresses in his summary that spiritual/religious experience is partial when action stays at the individual level and must spread throughout the society under the aegis of the state. Here Topçu follows Blondel in his justification of civil society—albeit with some differences. Topçu has no difficulty relating the argument that the action must spread to society with Islam, by drawing on a commonly held view among Muslims that Islam/religion cannot be lived only at individual level. Many Islamic doctrines share the notion that Islam is a communal religion; therefore, living in accordance with Islamic principles is not possible in an irreligious or unreligious society.¹³⁹ As such, the philosophy of action in Topçu's sense appears as an up-to-date philosophical interpretation of an abstract and fundamental Islamic

¹³⁹ Recalling the distinction of *dar al-Islam* – *dar al-harb* (abode of Islam – abode of war) Islamic thought may be helpful to make sense of Topçu's arguments. In addition, the Qur'anic verse and the principle "emri bil maruf nehyi anil münker" (enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong) is relevant here.

principle. Topçu's stress on these points in the summary possibly indicates that he assumed his responsibility to spread the message required by his allegiance to Islam that he reads through the glance of the philosophy of action, and his magazine could be understood as a manifestation of this "mission". However, there is a further modification in the philosophy of action made by Topçu concerning the notion of community. The latter in Topçu's version does not exactly denote the community of believers conceived in an abstract manner. In Topçu, community—the necessary intermediary for individual's journey to the transcendence, is identified with the nation. Accordingly, it is only a community of people with the same cultural roots, i.e. shared religion, history and relationship with the land/soil, which is none other than nation could navigate individuals to their path towards transcendence. In this sense, religion in Topçu appears to be a socially rooted experience informed by traditions, custom, beliefs and practices that are peculiar to a nation.¹⁴⁰

In configuring his own philosophy of action based on Sufi Islam, Topçu draws inspiration from several other sources. For one thing, his identification of community with the nation and his conception of nation along mainly cultural terms point out his convergence with Anatolian nationalist current in Turkish conservatism started in the years of national struggle with the magazine *Dergah*. Following this current, Topçu aligned with other Anatolian nationalists of his time such as his close friend Remzi Oğuz Arık. Furthermore, Topçu was influenced by socialistic tendencies within spiritualism epitomized in the ideas of Jean Jaurés who interpreted socialism as a moral imperative rather than an outcome of the materialist evolution of history. Topçu likewise advocates for a spiritualist socialism that, he thinks, is the inevitable

¹⁴⁰ Öğün, *Türkiye'de Cemaatçi Milliyetçilik*, 14.

end of his conception of Islam based on his Sufi Islamic version of the philosophy of action.¹⁴¹ Last but not the least, Topçu features the role of the state in the philosophy of action which was absent in Blondel's book. Evident from his references, he is mainly influenced by German idealism and Turkish nationalist thinking in presenting the state as a central element of his take on the philosophy of action.

Thus shaped Topçu's worldview, which he mainly enunciated in Hareket, based on his unique approach to Sufi Islam with inspirations from spiritualist philosophy and Anatolian nationalism. Topçu found in Blondel's philosophy of action in particular and contemporary spiritualism in general an alternative way, a method, to interpret and express mystical experience of Islam in Sufism. Based on his reading of Sufism under these philosophical inspirations Topçu offers a particular conception of Islam and a particular worldview that he thought his conception of Islam implied. By taking Islam as the center of his worldview on the one hand, and drawing inspiration from contemporary philosophical schools in his reading of Islam on the other hand, Topçu subverts the established conceptions of Islam in Turkey. Topçu, unlike the commonly held *mukaddesatçı* conception of Islam, does not see knowledge of the divine in the monopoly of Islam. He does not see Blondel or other European philosophers he was inspired as wretches who could have a chance to be honored by Islam. They are mentors for him in his search for the true religious experience as well as the knowledge of this experience.

Topçu's conception of Islam and his ideas based on it were not received well by the broader Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey and nationalist conservative circles

¹⁴¹ Mollaer, *Anadolu Sosyalizmine Bir Katkı*, 91.

he frequented. In addition to his veneration of Western thinkers and schools of thought as well as his association of Sufi Islam with philosophical currents he was inspired, Topçu irritated Islamic circles with his criticism of contemporary Muslims and institutional Islam in Turkey. Moreover, his advocacy of a spiritual socialism based on his conception of Islam, albeit very different in nature from Marxism, resulted in his exclusion from conservative and nationalist circles.¹⁴² Topçu, like his supervisor Blondel, experienced a double exclusion in the Turkish intellectual space as he was already disregarded by academic circles for his supposedly religious and anti-secular views. Hence, Topçu's ideas were not welcomed by neither camps of the emerging secular-religious duality in Turkey that initially appeared as left-right divide in the context of the Cold War.

III.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and *Büyük Doğu*

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, in contradistinction to Nurettin Topçu's dramatic fate, holds an esteemed position within Turkish right—especially among *mukaddesatçı* circles. He appears to be the person who skillfully articulates many shared notions of Turkish right, and propagates its expectations and resentments. Although the same remark applies to Kısakürek concerning the lack of serious biographical works of academic worth, there is greater number of available sources on Kısakürek's life, albeit impartial, including three autobiographical pieces Kısakürek himself wrote. Moreover, due to his colorful personality, it is possible to obtain information about or reflections on Kısakürek in writings of other intellectuals and authors. Yet, on the other hand, designating the sources and inspirations of Kısakürek's thought is not as

¹⁴² Concerning his solitude, Topçu wrote in a letter to one of students in 1965, "It is as if I have no friends left in the country for which I spent my entire life. It is as if I am alone, in a vacuum and in a different world than those around me." See M. Orhan Okay, *Anadolu'dan Hatıralarla Nurettin Topçu'nun Mektupları* (İstanbul: Cümle, 2015).

straightforward as it was in the case of Topçu. The latter, although did not write much about himself, had a consistent intellectual position in line with the philosophical current he was associated to. Kısakürek's thought lacks such consistency and an identifiable effect of one or another philosophical current. Therefore, I am going to discuss the possible effects on Kısakürek's thought in light of these autobiographical accounts and the direct instances where he manifests his motivations and objectives.

Well reflected in his poems, speeches and writings, Kısakürek have led an extraordinary life with vagaries, ruptures and contradictions. Born in 1904 in Istanbul, he spent his childhood in the mansion of an extended well-to-do family. In one of his autobiographies, *O ve Ben* (Him and Me), Kısakürek tells about his early life in the mansion at great length as an important phase in the development of his character. Kısakürek family is of Kahramanmaraş origin, a town in Southeast Anatolia. Kısakürek's grandfather who reportedly treated his grandson with a tender loving care giving him his first education and religious knowledge was an esteemed Ottoman judge with *legion d'honneur*. The grandfather appears in the book as the most influential person for young Necip Fazıl whereas his grandmother is portrayed as a show pony whose fear of death is beyond normal. Kısakürek's father seems to have frenzies and died at a young age when Necip Fazıl was a teenager. Kısakürek was fond of his mother who appeared to be a modest person in an otherwise extravagant family. Kısakürek, giving detailed examples of the care for him in the family house, maintains that he was treated as a prodigious child. No matter how partial and clouded this self-reflection might be, it is very useful in analyzing his

thought and, more importantly, making sense of his position within Turkish intellectual space.

Necip Fazıl, after receiving primary education in several education institutions including French and American schools, attended the Naval School (*Bahriye Mektebi*). This was actually a high school in modern standards whose graduates were expected to complete their education in the Naval Academy to be a naval officer—though moving onto academy after high school was not compulsory. It was a prestigious school from which numerous intellectuals and literary men received diploma, and impinged on Kısakürek’s personality and intellectual career. In his autobiography, Kısakürek mentioned the communist poet Nazım Hikmet (Ran) and the sixth president of Turkey Fahri Sabit (Korutürk) among those who happened to be in the Naval School at the same period (1916-1919). He points out that his first attempts in poetry took place in this school where he was reportedly attributed the nickname “the poet”. Among his teachers were later president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs Ahmet Hamdi Efendi (Aksekili), poet Yahya Kemal (Beyatlı), Hamdullah Suphi (Tanrıöver) and İbrahim Aşkî (Tanık).¹⁴³ According to his own reflections, he received a diploma from the Naval School and became eligible to attend the university, although he left the school before finishing the final grade. Despite his interests in literature, Necip Fazıl decided to enroll in the philosophy department of İstanbul Darülfünun that he left incomplete to go to France for higher education. During these years in his life, Necip Fazıl became acquainted with important figures of Turkish politics and intelligentsia such as Mustafa Şekip (Tunç),

¹⁴³ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *O ve Ben* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1974), 38. Şerif Mardin points out that on the impact of İbrahim Aşkî Bey is worth mentioning among Necip Fazıl’s teachers in the Naval School. See Mardin, “Cultural Change”, 247.

Peyami Safa, Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu), Falih Rıfkı (Atay), Hasan Âli (Yücel), Ahmet Kutsi (Tecer) and Ahmet Hamdi (Tanpınar). Especially he developed intimate personal relations with Mustafa Şekip and Peyami Safa until the first years of the publication of his *Büyük Doğu*.

Early years of Kısakürek's life witnessed world-historical events such as the WWI, the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the movement of Turkish national struggle and the establishment of the republican regime. No doubt that these developments made an impact on young Necip Fazıl's persona and intellectual world. Interestingly, however, they are not given as much weight as Kısakürek's personal life and dealings, his mood and that of those around him, his inner reckonings and self-questionings. Self-conscious passages in his autobiography manifest that Kısakürek would like to depict himself as an anxious person floundering between his supposed potential to accomplish great things and his self-imposed intellectual solitude. In one of these, he summarizes his early life as

A morbid sensitivity... A stinging imagination... And meanwhile an appalling fear...”, and retrospectively noted that “[e]ven at that age I came to understand that I was a different kind of person with distinct disposition; and a great discrepancy between my sensations and others’ perceptions...”¹⁴⁴

No matter how partial and clouded this self-reflection might be, it illustrates Kısakürek's inner world well where he appeared to be a unique and lonely star of a supposedly deserted cultural and intellectual scene. More striking is that this mood was notwithstanding his acquaintance with important figures of Turkish politics and intelligentsia at a very young age.

¹⁴⁴ Kısakürek, *O ve Ben*, 22.

In 1924, Necip Fazıl took and passed the state's examination for students to go abroad for higher education.¹⁴⁵ Thus commenced his Paris experience, which was going to become an escapade that did not last long and well, after he enrolled in the philosophy department of Sorbonne University. Necip Fazıl remembers his experience in Paris as lost times of his life by confessing his bohemian life and his gambling addiction in different places of his writings. These reflective accounts, however, do not tell us much about the impact of his time in Paris on his intellectual development. Perhaps the fact that this experience ended with failure and the state called him back by cancelling his scholarship affected his own reflections. Nonetheless, we can surmise from his other writings that he was influenced by the school of spiritual philosophy in France and got familiar with Bergson and Blondel. Necip Fazıl was especially impressed by Bergson whom he referred to as the greatest philosopher of the 20th century. Likewise, he refers to Rimbaud and Baudelaire with gratitude whose impact is observable in Necip Fazıl's poetry. Although it is not clear whether these were the impressions he acquired in his Paris years, Necip Fazıl's experience in France altered the course of his intellectual and literary development.¹⁴⁶

Having left incomplete his higher education, Necip Fazıl, upon returning to Turkey, started working in banks to make his living while maintaining his relations with intellectual and literary circles. His articles, essays and poems appeared in prestigious newspapers and magazines—securing his position within the

¹⁴⁵ Kısakürek tells that he entered the exam in English but he was listed among the students who were to be sent to France. See, Kısakürek, *O ve Ben*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Mardin suggests that Necip Fazıl's time in Paris made a great impact on his poetry. Accordingly, Necip Fazıl was "one of the very few Turkish practitioners of literature who wrote what can be described as a scholarly essay on poetics" thanks to the year he spent in Paris. See Mardin, "Cultural Change", 248.

westernizing elite of the newly found republic. He was acknowledged in this elite circle, with his frenzies and sui generis personality, as a promising poet. His loyalty to the founding fathers of the republic and the westernizing reforms, which he was going to abase later, was high. Articles he wrote for several newspapers including *Ulus*, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* and *İkdam* demonstrated his sympathy with the secular republic up until the early 1940's.¹⁴⁷ Necip Fazıl's lifestyle, not unlike his worldview, was nowhere near Islamic standards he would preach in his later life. According to author and translator Mina Urgan who was a member of the same elite circle with Necip Fazıl, he was an amusing character and a decent man of literature who loved overselling himself. Urgan pointed out that Necip Fazıl had a tempered drinking habit, but was incorrigible in his gambling addiction.¹⁴⁸ Evidently, Necip Fazıl was continuing the bohemian mood of his year in Paris in Turkey in the late 1920's and the 1930's.

On the other hand, Necip Fazıl states in his autobiography that he was going through a deep psychological and intellectual crisis amid this bohemian life. Relating this crisis to a quest for creating a meaningful self-narrative in the cultural turmoil of the time, Şerif Mardin argues that this depressing state of mind was prevalent among the early republican intellectuals. According to Mardin, most Turkish intellectuals of the 1920's who seesawed between the old Ottoman imperial identity and the modern national identity that the new regime attempted to infuse became "part of the propaganda apparatus of the Republic" to bear the burden of this intellectual

¹⁴⁷ As late as 1940, Kısakürek published three articles in *İkdam* praising Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü and Hasan Ali Yücel. For another example, see Tanıl Bora. *Cereyanlar: Türkiye'de Siyasi İdeolojiler*. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2017), 133-4.

¹⁴⁸ Mina Urgan. *Bir Dinozorun Anıları*. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 97-99.

dilemma.¹⁴⁹ Evidently, Kısakürek once took the path of his generation too which somehow became no more expedient for him by the 1940's. While building up his literary career, Necip Fazıl diverted himself to spiritualist, intuitionist and mystical thought, thanks to his friendship with Peyami Safa and Mustafa Şekip Tunç, to find a relief in his search for a meaning. Yet, the crisis he felt was worsening in the 1930's—literature, philosophy, friends, alcohol, gambling, none gave solace to him.¹⁵⁰

Amid this melancholy, he tells in his autobiography, a random mysterious man he ran into in the ferry that he took to go from his workplace to home mentioned him about Abdülhakim Arvasi, a Naqshbandi sheikh then based in Eyüp, as the one who could put an end to Necip Fazıl's spiritual search. In 1934, when he was at the age of 30, he met Arvasi in a mosque the latter offered service and gradually became a disciple of Arvasi. Necip Fazıl professes his satisfaction with his initiation to Arvasi: "O His Excellency, my life until I found him was nothing but waiting for him, writhing in the troubles of waiting. I found; and again I didn't realize I found it".¹⁵¹ As he underlines, Necip Fazıl's personal and intellectual transformation after his encounter with Arvasi did not take place swiftly—ebbs and flows between his early lifestyle and Sufism he had just been introduced to lasted for a while. It was during the 1940's that Necip Fazıl submitted wholeheartedly to Sufi Islam and began his writings established him as a *mukaddesatçı* staunchly criticizing Kemalism and westernism.

¹⁴⁹ Mardin, "Cultural Change", 252. Mardin points out that "Turkish intellectuals of Necip Fazıl's generation who saw the contradiction between the adoption of Western humanism and the shallow propagandizing of the Turkish cultural apparatus searched desperately for moorings of their professional status as intellectuals." Ibid, 253.

¹⁵⁰ Kısakürek, *O ve Ben*, 70-2.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 95.

Despite the decade long gradual transformation during which Kısakürek deepened his relation with Arvasi and his Sufi circle while maintaining links with his earlier acquaintants, he laments that his old friends immediately broke with him after his initiation to Sufi Islam. Perhaps drawing on Kısakürek's own reflections, both scholarly studies and popular accounts presented Kısakürek's meeting with Arvasi as a life-changing moment that turned Kısakürek's life upside-down and paved the way for him to be the leading ideologue of Islamic revival in Turkey.¹⁵² However, Kısakürek evidently did not break with his old entourage immediately as Peyami Safa and Mustafa Şekip Tunç as well as those who represented an opposite worldview to the new orientation of Necip Fazıl like Oktay Akbal and Sait Faik Abasıyanık contributed to the early issues of *Büyük Doğu*. Moreover, Kısakürek continued writing in mainstream newspapers until the 1940's which do not reflect the impact of his initiation to Naqshbandi Sufism at all. Neither Kısakürek nor scholars and lay observers pay attention to this discord let alone being able to explain it. Instead, as was in the case of Topçu, the topos of conversion is invoked again in Kısakürek's case. It is important to note the prevalence of this topos stems from its usefulness in terms of the secular-religious duality. Since the duality and analytical frameworks rested on it envisioned secular and religious identities as two fundamentally distinct ways of being in the world, they represent these moments as

¹⁵² See for instance, Mardin, "Cultural Change"; and Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl". It is interesting that not only Kısakürek but also Urgan, as a member of his old entourage, tells that Kısakürek and his old friends cut ties immediately after Kısakürek initiated himself to Sufism—although the unfolding of events suggest otherwise. Urgan's reflections on Kısakürek's transformation are almost grotesque: "Necip Fazıl did not change gradually. Having nothing to do with religion, he suddenly became not just pious, but religious fanatic [*sadece dindar değil, dinci*']". As we heard at the time, the reason for this surprising change was the tic problem: Necip Fazıl had a facial tic. His eyebrows and eyes used to play strangely. To get rid of this formless tic, they advised him to go to a sheikh who is an expert in such matters. Sheikh Efendi read and blew and saved him from his tic for only a week. Here is what happened, it happened within a week. Our bohemian poet Necip Fazıl has suddenly turned into a Super-Guide [*Süper-Mürşit*']". See Urgan, *Bir Dinozorun Anıları*, 97.

life-changing events. Yet, it evidently does not corroborate with the reality in either case.

We do not know for sure what Kısakürek went through between his first meeting with Abdülhakim Arvasi in 1934 and the mid-1940's where he potentiated a critique of Kemalism and Turkish modernization based on *mukaddesatçı* Islam. Yet, it is certain that from the 1940's onward, Kısakürek became an ardent adversary of Turkish modernization/westernization process and CHP which he saw as the embodiment of this process. Only then, the early republican intelligentsia including Necip Fazıl's close friends distanced themselves from him. This was accompanied by a process in which Necip Fazıl was marked by the Kemalist state elite as a dangerous reactionary and prosecuted for his writings after the 1940's.¹⁵³ On the other hand, as an audacious man of letters who broke up 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 the youth with Islamic sensibilities. It seems that the one-sided exclusion he fell into had never been a source of grief; contrarily, he seemed to be proud for divergence of his old entourage from himself as well as for the prosecutions by the state.

With his new ideological outlook Kısakürek aspired to create a youth that would follow the line he drew in his speeches and writings to achieve salvation for Turkey and Islam. His political alignments were also motivated by this aspiration—finding a venue to actualize his political ideals. For that, he made attempts by founding his

¹⁵³ Kısakürek was tried for his writings many times throughout his life and convicted for his alleged provocation of violence and insults on Turkishness or the memory of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He was imprisoned for several times for brief periods. For his prison notes, see Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Cinnet Müstatili* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977).

own Büyük Doğu Society and Büyük Doğu Party without much success. Later he approached to different right-wing parties. As is well known, he extended his support to Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) and his ousted leader Adnan Menderes (1899-1961). Yet, before that, he contacted with Fevzi Çakmak (1876-1950), the chief of general staff during the single-party era and one of the founders of conservative-nationalist Nation Party (Millet Partisi) in 1948. The ideological outlook of the party was much in line with Kısakürek's worldview; however, after it was understood that the real political force that could stand against CHP would be DP, Kısakürek turned his attention to this party and started to publish supportive as well as instructive essays for DP and Menderes.¹⁵⁴ After the party's closure following the 1960 military intervention, Kısakürek started to support Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP) as the inheritor of DP tradition and the main opposition against CHP. Yet again, he changed his views on AP and his leader Süleyman Demirel (1924-2015), and accused him of being a freemason.¹⁵⁵ In the late 1960's, Kısakürek was in a pessimistic mood about high politics until the emergence of the parties of National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş).

Kısakürek saw the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi) and later the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP) as an agent that could finally materialize his political ambitions given the party's Islamic orientation. In the early 1970's, he supported MSP, albeit cautiously for the party leader Necmettin Erbakan's (1926-2011) strong persona could be an obstacle against Kısakürek's suggestions and instructions that were to be followed verbatim. Kısakürek's suspicions were proved right as Erbakan refused Kısakürek's desires to play the role

¹⁵⁴ See Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Benim Gözümde Menderes* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2016).

¹⁵⁵ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 5* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1979), 23-24.

of the sole party ideologue.¹⁵⁶ After MSP formed a coalition with CHP in 1973, Kısakürek burned the bridges behind MSP and started to criticize the party and its cadres severely. As is known, he approached the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) and established links with the party leader Alparslan Türkeş (1917-1997) with the hope that Türkeş and his party would follow his intellectual lead, and that the dynamic youth branch of the party could be the paramilitary force which Kısakürek saw necessary to combat communism and other “destructive” ideologies on the street.¹⁵⁷ During this time, Kısakürek also extended his support to the AP and Demirel once again in the party’s struggle against the CHP.

As far as I can see, in this tumultuous story, Kısakürek’s ideological stance or the contours of his worldview have not changed much. He gave support to political parties he thought doing best against CHP, and approached the parties he thought he could manipulate ideologically. In the end, Kısakürek found himself oscillating between different political parties for none of the leaders accepted his ideological lead without any question. His adversaries have often invoked his political oscillations to cast doubt on the intellectual worth of his ideas. A more popular criticism of Kısakürek points to the discrepancy between his own lifestyle and the Islamic way of life he preached. For many, he was not a dignified intellectual but a mere charlatan who pursued his interests and benefits. In addition, the lack of consistency and an identifiable source or effect of one or another philosophical current overshadows the quality of his political, philosophical and historical writings. It is true that Necip Fazıl Kısakürek did not fit into the role of public intellectual characterized with an ability to steer ideas in a given society and to shape public

¹⁵⁶ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 3* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977), 66-68.

¹⁵⁷ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 4* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1978), 66-69.

sphere through the power of ideas.¹⁵⁸ Contrarily, Kısakürek appealed to the power of sentiments, emotions and rhetoric rather than ideas and reasoning to draw the attention of his audience. He, even in his seemingly the most philosophical writings and speeches, communicated sensations with his audience. Thus, Kısakürek's significance in terms of intellectual history was beyond his unreliable political position, unsubstantial philosophical arguments and inconsistent lifestyle. Still he was able to stir up his audience through his writings thanks to the sharpness of his pen and his success in giving voice to their sentiments.

Although he had been a member of secular republican elite until his 30's, Kısakürek admirably captured the sense of alienation among people with Islamic sensibilities in the process of modernization. The latter found in Kısakürek's raging voice, especially in his poems, a refined expression of discontent with the growing inequalities and dispossession under capitalistic modernization that accelerated in the 1950's. To the extent that modernization was associated with secularization and westernization within the modernization paradigm of the early Cold War, Muslim intellectual response was to channel growing senses of alienation among popular masses to a sense of resentment against Turkish modernization process.¹⁵⁹ Kısakürek represents perhaps the most prominent example of this Muslim intellectual response. In one of his most popular poems, "Sakarya Türküsü", Kısakürek reflects both the sense of alienation and the quest for retribution among Islamic sectors. 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*

¹⁵⁸ Charles Kurzman and Lynn Owens, "The Sociology of Intellectuals", *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2002): 63–90., 71-2.

¹⁵⁹ See Fethi Açıkel, "'Kutsal Mazlumluğun' Psikopatolojisi", *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 70 (Fall 1996): 153–98.

vatanında parya). The line powerfully expresses the perception of losing the ground beneath during the process of modernization. The carefully employed wording captures the sense shared by people with Islamic sensibilities that their country was taken over by an alien force reducing them to the status of pariah.

In addition to his literary skills, Kısakürek's popular appeal rests on his position within Turkish intellectual space as a perfect fit for the emerging secular-religious duality. Two further factors established him as the most prominent example of Islam-inspired critique of Turkish modernization. One was his ability to popularize his own resentments within Turkish intellectual space of his time through using Islamic themes. The second was his conception of Islam-as-identity that was both in line with established notion of religiosity espoused by Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya and useful in creating a political narrative and identity for those who had discontent with the process of modernization-as-westernization. By cutting ties with the westernizing intelligentsia and assuming the role of the ideologue of Islamic revival in Turkey, Kısakürek emerges in the eyes of people with Islamic sensibilities a perfect model of a Muslim intellectual who supposedly know the West and used to be a secularist himself; and yet, still advocated for the cause of Islam. Kısakürek seems to be well aware of this position. By reconstructing Muslimness as a political identity against the supposedly secular and western oriented identity that the republican regime offered, Kısakürek creates political and historical narratives that solidified the secular-religious duality which made sense of political processes in Turkey, and the world at large, based on a strict in-group/out-group duality around religiosity. In so doing, he carves out his place within Turkish intellectual space as the cry of Islamic sectors against the ostensible secularist oppression.

Kısakürek enjoyed this popular appeal to his writings and speeches among people with nationalistic and Islamic sensibilities for most of his life. During the last ten years of his life, however, his status was challenged by new generations of Islamists. Notably with the popularizing transnational Islamist ideas through translations of Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Maududi, Said Hawwa and other Islamists from around the Muslim World, Kısakürek was no longer the only alternative for Islamist youth by the 1970's. Moreover, new generation of people with Islamic sensibilities who began writing their first pieces in Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* split their ways to form their own magazines such as Sezai Karakoç who led *Diriliş*, and Rasim Özdenören, Cahit Zarifoğlu, Erdem Bayazıt, Mehmet Akif İnan, Alaeddin Özdenören ve Ersin Gürdoğan who published *Mavera*.¹⁶⁰ In addition to authors and poems who “came out of Kısakürek's overcoat”, Islamic-leaning university students organized around the MTTB which was once the backyard of Kısakürek started criticizing him over his contact with the ultra-nationalist MHP. While still being respected in many Islamist, conservative and nationalist circles, Kısakürek lost his position of the ideologue of Islamic revival in Turkey in the late 1970's. He often reflected his disappointments with new generations who ostensibly diverted from his path in his writings towards the end of his life. Kısakürek died in 1983 in İstanbul and buried after a funeral attended by thousands of his followers. His disappointments in his later life notwithstanding, he is considered the leading figure of Islamic intellectual movement by *mukaddesatçılar*, nationalist conservatives and, to a limited extent, Islamists due to his position within Turkish intellectual and political spaces shaped by the secular-religious duality.

¹⁶⁰ For Kısakürek's reflections on *Mavera* group, see Kısakürek, *Rapor 4*, 71-73.

III.II.I. Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* Enterprise, Its Background, Motivations and

Expectations

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek is a highly self-conscious person who frequently reflects on himself and his intellectual efforts. This attitude makes it easier to write about his own motivations and expectations in embarking on his ideological campaign associated with his *Büyük Doğu* magazine. However, to obtain intellectual and philosophical influences on his thought is not as straightforward for a number of reasons. For one thing, Kısakürek's writes in an unsystematic manner without giving or even implying any references. He creates the impression on the reader that the points he makes in his writings were all coming out of his head. It is possible to relate this style to the observation I stated earlier that Kısakürek appeals mainly to emotions rather than trying to prove his ideas' intellectual/philosophical validity. Moreover, his egocentric personality had a role in the development of his writing style as well. Second, he consciously refrains from being associated to one or another philosophical school; he in fact rejects philosophy as a discipline of thought in pursuit of the truth. He claims to have found the single source that prescribes the truth, i.e. Islam; and maintains that Islam was his only source for his intellectual efforts.¹⁶¹ Whether or not sources or factors other than Naqshbandi-Khalidi interpretation of Islam is inspired him in constructing his worldview, Kısakürek articulates his ideas in the form of a critique of all existing schools of thought and philosophy from his Islamic perspective.

¹⁶¹ See Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1982).

Kısakürek, before starting his *Büyük Doğu* enterprise, pens a piece named “Ben Buyum” (This Is Who I Am) which is an early manifesto of Kısakürek’s worldview, recollected with detail in *İdeolocya Örgüsü* as well. The article starts with Kısakürek’s remark on the significance of ideologies in the contemporary world (the late 1930’s) and the necessity to establish a firm ideological position on the part of intellectuals. To save the reader from puzzling about his own ideological position, as he writes, Kısakürek openly expresses it:

This is who I am:

- 1- Nationalist-Anatolian (opposite to copy-Europeanism, opposed to European imperialism)...
- 2- Spiritualist (opposite to materialist)...
- 3- Transcendentalist (opposite to rude bigot [“kaba softa”], opposite to non-religious)...
- 4- Personalist – *Keyfiyetçi*¹⁶² (opposite to rampant individual rights, contrary to standard measures)...
- 5- Restrictionist in property (opposite to individualistic big capitalism [“büyük ferdi sermayecilik”]).
- 6- Isolationist - purist in arts, ideas and science (opposite to rootless and sketchy diagnostic systems)...
- 7- Classist [“sınıfçı”] in terms of the privilege of mind and soul (Anti-Democrat)...
- 8- Interventionist around one view (Anti-liberal)...

He immediately adds his position is “anti-communist, anti-fascist, anti-liberal” at the same time—confirming that his worldview is built on through negation of existing doctrines and ideologies. Note that Kısakürek published this telling manifesto before his writings took a more Islamic and anti-Kemalist stance. Still it represents contours of Kısakürek’s ideological outlook that is akin to right-wing authoritarianism.

Similar to the concerns in his “Ben Buyum” article, Kısakürek felt it necessary to start his *Büyük Doğu* campaign with several introductory articles in the first issues of the magazine that reveals Kısakürek’s motivations and expectations in publishing it.

¹⁶² Refers to a person who prioritizes quality (*keyfiyet*) over quantity (*kemmiyet*).

¹⁶³ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Çerçeve I* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2010), 60.

These appear under the “İdeolocya Örgüsü” (Web of Ideology) title on magazine’s first page after the cover and were later compiled in the book *İdeolocya Örgüsü* with the title “Adımız, Davamız, Manamız” (Our Name, Our Cause, Our Meaning). In his idiosyncratic way, Kısakürek explains:

Great East?.. Does it at all denote the phenomenon of birth?..¹⁶⁴ Or is it a signification for the Eastern World?.. It is both the former and the latter, or better yet the latter embedded in the former!.. This name, in the meaning of a birth over a horizon carnationed by the scintillant soul of a cracked seed, embraces the true East with all its external lines and internal vignettes, with the dome and the cypress, the palace and the cupola, the arch and the ruin...¹⁶⁵

Playing with different connotations of the word (“doğu”)—an area of his expertise, Kısakürek indicates that the name of his magazine refers to both the East (which was to be rejuvenated against the West) and the birth or naissance (of a generation that would secure the desired rejuvenation of the East). While it is almost exclusively the first meaning of the word “doğu” that lay people and scholars alike emphasize,¹⁶⁶ Kısakürek’s identification of his campaign with the phenomenon of birth is an important dimension of his intellectual attitude nonetheless. With its first meaning, Kısakürek’s *Büyük Doğu* was an Occidentalist worldview based on a firm conviction of essential distinctions between the West and the East that Kısakürek identifies with Islam. As I discuss in detail in the coming chapters, not only did it serve to justify Kısakürek’s rejection of westernism but it also contributed to the global discursive formation of the Muslim World and today’s civilization talks.

¹⁶⁴ Though the first meaning of the Turkish word “doğu” is the cardinal point that corresponds to the east in English, Kısakürek here turned it into an equivocal word denoting also the phenomenon of birth (“doğuş”) in addition its first meaning. “Doğu” is derived from the root “doğ(mak)” which means to be born, to rise or to spring in Turkish. Hence the semantic origin of the Turkish words corresponding to east, sunrise and birth (“doğu”, “gündoğumu” and “doğuş”/“doğum” respectively) are the same.

¹⁶⁵ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976), 7.

¹⁶⁶ See for instance Aydın and Duran, “Competing Occidentalisms”; and Mardin, “Cultural Change”.

The oft-neglected second meaning of *Büyük Doğu* captures the practical aspirations of Kısakürek even better. Given his proclivity to use medical and biological terms, Kısakürek's use of the birth metaphor may not be surprising after all.¹⁶⁷ References to organs, diseases and biological incidents in political and social analyses are an aspect of organicist conception of society that is commonly held among Romantic conservative thinkers of the post-1789 Europe and evidently shared by Kısakürek too.¹⁶⁸ Hence, the birth metaphor indicates the convergence between Kısakürek's thought and authoritarian, anti-liberal and anti-Enlightenment political thought.

Perhaps more important for my current concern, Kısakürek, by invoking the metaphor of birth, tries to tell us that what he was doing is quite new, miraculous like the birth itself. Through the birth metaphor Kısakürek, on the one hand, establishes the publication of *Büyük Doğu* as an existential event, a matter of life and death for Turkish intellectual and political life;¹⁶⁹ and on the other hand, he presents the magazine as a truly revolutionary enterprise which was not preceded by any ideological/intellectual movements in Ottoman-Turkish history as the birth event brings something totally new into the world.¹⁷⁰

To make sense of Kısakürek's ambition, it is necessary to recall his reflections about himself and his surroundings. In a passage I quoted earlier Kısakürek depicts himself as a unique person with distinct qualities of sensation and apprehension. Kısakürek reflects this self-image onto his intellectual works and notably to his *Büyük Doğu*

¹⁶⁷ Bora, *Cereyanlar*, 442.

¹⁶⁸ Irving M. Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 35-42.

¹⁶⁹ For the use of "birth" as a political metaphor in the same meaning, see Dean Hammer, "Hannah Arendt and Roman Political Thought: The Practice of Theory", *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (February 2002): 124-49, 130.

¹⁷⁰ Note that Kısakürek did not mention Topçu's *Hareket* that began publication years before his *Büyük Doğu*.

enterprise. He believes that he was at the edge of making great intellectual accomplishments that would wake Turkey up from her supposedly centuries-old morbid state. In Kısakürek's own words,

From that time on, I had a Turkey that was sinking in spiritual flames and smoke; and there could be no more cherished goal than to embark on a great worldwide intellectual movement to tell [Turkish people] about [their] life 4-5 centuries ago, as well as [their] agony of that day or today, and to show [them] the way to salvation. I dedicated myself to this cause and launched the *Büyük Doğu* in 1943...¹⁷¹

His ambitions go well beyond the boundaries of Turkey as his work manifested a system that would bring salvation, respectively, to Turkey, the Islamic world and the whole humanity.¹⁷² He believes that he gave a birth, through his magazine, to a generation that would uphold the cause of Islam in Turkey, thereby save the entire East led by the Muslim world against the encroachments of modern Western civilization.

Kısakürek is convinced that he was alone in pursuing these ambitions and taking up the cause of Islam against the laicist state. Later in his life, he bemoans his ideological solitude and professes his disappointments with younger generations he initially hoped to take the torch from his hand in his struggle. Kısakürek constantly reminds that his *Büyük Doğu* was the first voice in Turkish intellectual space raising an Islamic-inspired critique of Kemalism, westernization and secularism. Describing the early 1940's as times when even the mentioning of Allah and morality ("*Allah ve ahlak demenin yasak olduğu günler*"), he states: "In 1943 the first *Büyük Doğu* appeared. This first *Büyük Doğu* produced a weak and stuttering sound. Iceberg

¹⁷¹ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları: Arınma Çağında İslam* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1978), 159.

¹⁷² Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 6.

[*cumudiye*]... That was the age of iceberg. There was no dirt, no cleaning... Everything was frozen.”¹⁷³ For him, the voice of *Büyük Doğu* slowly but stubbornly melted that iceberg with the hope to carve out a diamond generation to actualize Kısakürek’s aspirations. However, in this ostensibly blessed struggle, Kısakürek reports that he received no support from even people who supposedly have Islamic sensibilities.¹⁷⁴ When it is no longer possible for him to maintain that he was the only one who raised an Islam-inspired voice in the 1970’s, Kısakürek addresses the growing Islamic press with disdain. Invoking the metaphor of birth again, he labels new generations of Islamists and their publications as the stillborn children of his ideological struggle.¹⁷⁵ With these disappointments until the end of his life, Kısakürek counted upon several groups including students in the MTTB, the youth branch of MHP (known as “*ülküçüler*”) and, towards the very end of his life, the nascent Islamic Great East Raiders (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncıları, İBDA) movement.

III.III. Topçu and Kısakürek Compared

Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek are casually juxtaposed by laypeople as conservative and/or Islam-inspired critics of Kemalist modernization, and are treated together in several scholarly works. Commonalities between them are obvious mostly because they are on the surface. For one thing, the period of history their lifespans corresponded to is more or less the same. Both were raised during the demise of the Ottoman Empire, developed their worldviews during the early years of

¹⁷³ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çaremiz* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977), 58.

¹⁷⁴ In *Yolumuz Halimiz Çaremiz* Kısakürek writes “Yes, they (religious people with capital) think that zakat is an allocation consisting of putting a blanket on one’s back and a bite of bread in their mouth by calling the hungry and cold on the street!.. They do not know zakat! Zakat is given primarily to the people of jihad in the Islamic cause!..” See Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çaremiz*, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 1* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976), 7-8.

the Republic and harvested the fruits of this process during the early Cold War Turkey. They were among the first generation of intellectuals who appeared on the stage when the storm of single-party period ended. They raised their critique through magazines that were identified with themselves and hit the spot for those who had discomfort with the dominant westernist intellectual space in Turkey. Perhaps, for this reason they were embraced by similar groups with similar worldviews and political attitudes in Turkish political scene that may account for the popular association of Topçu and Kısakürek. Moreover, there are some specific details about their lives that indicate further interesting common points such as their experience in France and their initiation to Sufi sheikhs around more or less the same years. These common points could otherwise justify treating Topçu and Kısakürek in the same intellectual camp. However, I argue, the details beneath the surface hinted in the previous parts of this chapter indicate the inadequacy of this treatment.

Socio-economic differences in Topçu's and Kısakürek's background is the right place to begin revisiting differences between them. Both were born in İstanbul into families whose origins were in the Eastern Anatolia. Kısakürek belonged to an aristocratic family of Kahramanmaraş. The family migrated to the capital and took office in Ottoman bureaucracy that probably led to attachment to the Ottoman imperium. Thus, Kısakürek inherited an elite identity and maintained an aristocratic, highbrow lifestyle both in his "bohemian" years and after his initiation to Sufi Islam. Whereas Topçu's family, originally from Erzurum, as well as his own lifestyle were rather modest. The family was established in Istanbul after Topçu's father moved the city to expand his trade. The fortune of the family did not depend on the state and was in fluctuation in the turbulent years of the early 20th century. The sudden death

of Topçu's father left the family with scarce financial resources. Unlike Kısakürek, Topçu had to be a self-made person investing himself to secure his future. Kısakürek himself reflected the difference between the two in terms of lifestyles and socio-economic status in a note too. In a passage where he told about their first personal contact, Kısakürek describes Topçu's house as a "simple house around Gedikpaşa".¹⁷⁶ Given Kısakürek's fondness on writing about details of physical environments and especially the grandeur of the mansions he resided, an expression of disdain is implicit in his wording. True that it would be far-fetched to attribute differences in Topçu's and Kısakürek's worldviews to their distinct family backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Yet, bearing these differing sociological factors in making up Topçu and Kısakürek in mind when discussing their political attitudes might be helpful.

Another point of divergence, to move from sociological factors to psychological ones, is the discrepant self-perceptions of the two. Based on his writings, and this is not limited to his autobiographical works, I have described Kısakürek as a highly self-conscious person. He had an egocentric personality and a positive self-image. Corroborating this remark, Kısakürek's adherents and outside observers point out that Kısakürek wanted to create a strong image among his audience and tent to be dominant in chambers and conversations. Evident from his self-reflections, he was aspired to be the only star up in the sky, so to speak. He did not acknowledge any equivalent to himself, intellectually or poetically, among his contemporaries, nor did he imply any precursor, guide or inspirer except his spiritual mentor Arvasi. For the same reasons, perhaps, he preferred giving conferences to the youth, especially to

¹⁷⁶ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Babıali* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2017), 337.

university students. Towards the end of his life, Kısakürek felt the supposed burden of his intellectual solitude and turned more pessimistic about the outcomes of his efforts. In short, Kısakürek speaks to the masses; he would like his audience to be his disciples in a world where he is the *primus solus* of the intellectual space.

A similar pessimistic attitude is shared by Nurettin Topçu who revealed his disappointments with the fact that his ideas were not gaining much ground neither within the elite nor among popular masses. I believe this pessimism indicates that Topçu too had a sense that he was a unique person with a mission. However, Topçu was not at all self-conscious; he appeared to have a rather modest personality that his followers emphasize.¹⁷⁷ Unlike Kısakürek, Topçu rests himself on a tradition and his aim was to sustain this tradition or to create a space for that tradition in Turkish intellectual space. He has identifiable intellectual, philosophical and ideological antecedents and he acknowledged them. He does not hide his feeling of affinity with earlier or contemporary intellectuals among whom there were even those who were on the political left.¹⁷⁸ The real aspiration of Topçu is to settle the accounts with materialist, positivist and westernist academia and intelligentsia. In this, his

¹⁷⁷ “Türkiye'nin bugün Nurettin Topçu'ya daha çok ihtiyacı var”, Saadet Firdevs Aparı's interview with İsmail Kara (10 July 2019), <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur-sanat/turkiyenin-bugun-nurettin-topcuya-daha-cok-ihtiyaci-var/1528120> accessed on 21 July 2021.

¹⁷⁸ Nurettin Topçu wrote an article on leftist poet, novelist and journalist Sabahattin Ali praising him for indigenous originality of his stories. For Topçu, “Sabahattin Ali is a storyteller who comes closest to the heart of Anatolia as he does to its soil. We attribute his being a leftist thinker, his mentality that always thinks the right is the oppressor's front, to his delusion and the inadequacy of his culture in this area. The greatness of his work is an obvious fact; from the beginning to the end, it is full of the nationalistic agony and the love of this homeland and Anatolian people. If it is nationalism itself to seek the right to life of the nation and to have a heart that beats together with nation's suffering heart, besides the love of the nation, then, Sabahattin Ali, whom we know with his work, is the apple of the eye and the real brother of the nationalists on the far right.” See Topçu, *Millet Mistikleri*, 150. Moreover, Topçu reportedly expressed his gratification with Mehmet Ali Aybar's election as a member of parliament. Aybar was at the time the leader of socialist Labor Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi). See Hayri Kırbasoğlu, “Topçu'ya Şerh, Tarihe Not Düşmek! Bir Nurettin Topçu Tipoloji Denemesi: Fikir Dünyamızın Vagonsuz Lokomotif!”, in *Nurettin Topçu Sempozyumu, 15-16 Nisan 2016, Erzurum: Tebliğler*, ed. Cengiz Gündoğdu, M. Zeki İşcan, and Muammer Cengiz (Erzurum: Erzurum Büyükşehir Belediyesi ve Atatürk Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2016), 203–27: 206.

experience in France was particularly influential as he saw there that spiritualism and idealism had solid places in academia. Moreover, Topçu witnessed in France that religion and tradition was embraced by upper classes, contrary to what he came to find in Turkey in the 1930's. Thus, Topçu tried to find a space for his spiritualist philosophy—of which religious experience is central—in the intellectual space, among the intellectual elite. Contrary to Kısakürek, he would like to speak to his equivalents in terms of cultural and intellectual capital.

Differences between Topçu and Kısakürek are by no means confined to the personal matters I have just highlighted. As the coming chapters will show there are deep divergences between Topçu's and Kısakürek's worldviews based largely on their different conceptions of Islam. These divergent views, however, are often easily brushed aside in popular and scholarly perceptions. The association of Topçu and Kısakürek as conservative critiques of Kemalism and westernization rests on the structure of intellectual and political landscape in Turkey, which has largely been shaped by the discourse of modernization as well as the exigencies of the Cold War. The emerging secular-religious duality of the modernization discourse on the one hand, and the political polarization along the left-right axis that Cold War context brought along on the other hand, in a way, pushed the otherwise distinct worldviews of Topçu and Kısakürek to be on the same side. For this reason, from the early years of the Cold War, the two frequented similar nationalist and anti-leftist associations and contributed to similar magazines. Topçu even wrote fifteen articles for Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu*, one published in 1949, one in 1950 and the remaining

thirteen in 1959.¹⁷⁹ Kısakürek did not contribute to Topçu's *Hareket*, but the two published articles at different times in the same periodicals.¹⁸⁰

Their intersecting positions in Turkish intellectual space notwithstanding, Topçu's and Kısakürek's personal remarks on each other are not at all positive due mainly to discrepancies between their worldviews. Kısakürek's reflections on Topçu corroborate this point. For Kısakürek,

[Topçu] was irritable, sinister, suspicious, and lacking a natural tendency for action [*"aksiyon mizacına yabancı"*]. A complex soul and a soul that could not find its channel... We did not have contact for a long time. But from afar and from his writings, I had come to believe that this man had set an exceptional level in terms of abstraction "quality" in a land that had piles of washed-up and rotten anchovy.

I was quickly denied. Topçu believes in the idea of a "wahdat al-wujud", the secrets of which he cannot unravel in his mysticism, and sees Yunus Emre, whom he loves very much, in his own delusional way; moreover, he was running a case called "Islamic socialism".¹⁸¹

Kısakürek had a positive early impression about Topçu and saw him as a potential ally in his self-declared cause of Islam against Western-oriented Turkish modernization. Yet, he is disturbed by Topçu's conception of Islam and Sufism as well as his advocacy of socialism. Presumably, an incident Kısakürek reports in the same place was the point where the enmity between the two became overt.

Accordingly, Topçu visited Kısakürek at his house after the latter released from his prison sentence in 1961. There the two had a heated debate on Islam and the

¹⁷⁹ "Salahaddin Köseoğlu" (21 October 1949; biography); "Bir Köy Monografisi" (10 November 1950); "Memuriyet Hayatı" (13 March 1959); "Egzistansiyalizm Nedir?" (27 March 1959); "İnkılap" (10 July 1959); "Yine İnkılap" (17 July 1959); "Maarif Davamız" (21 August 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-2" (28 August 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-3" (4 September 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-4" (11 September 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-5" (18 September 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-6" (25 September 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-7" (2 October 1959); "Maarif Meselemiz-8" (9 October 1959); Fikir Kuvveti (16 October 1959).

¹⁸⁰ I could detect only two issues of *Serdengeçti* where they both appeared on the table of contents together, apart from the issues of *Büyük Doğu* Topçu contributed. *Serdengeçti* vol. 6, issue 15-16 and issue 19-20. In the first one, there is no writing of Topçu in the magazine.

¹⁸¹ Kısakürek, *Babiali*, 338.

possibility of an Islamic socialism after which they had no personal contact until Topçu's last days before his death.¹⁸² Kısakürek confirms that his discontent with Topçu is based on this issue and gradually became a deep-seated hatred towards him. So much so that Kısakürek finishes his remarks on Topçu by implying that Topçu's views was blasphemous, and that he might not die as a Muslim.¹⁸³

On the other hand, there is no direct reference to Kısakürek in Topçu's corpus except a few scattered twits. It is for sure Topçu too had negative feelings for Kısakürek to the point that he sometimes characterizes Kısakürek as a "megalomaniac", according to one of his followers.¹⁸⁴ In one the few instances Topçu refers to Kısakürek in his writings, he states that "masters [*üstadlar*], journalists and heroes of so-called religious publications ... pretend to be leaders of the community and do not hesitate to sacrifice the safety of the Islamic community for their gambling and robbery".¹⁸⁵ His allusive reference to gambling and the word "*üstad*" implies that Topçu addresses to Kısakürek. This passage is in fact right before Topçu abases those who are irritated by the idea of reform in Islam. Hence, his allusion to Kısakürek is

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ See how he recollected his last encounter with Topçu: "When he [Topçu] was about to die, one of his high school students and a young merchant whom I knew from the Büyük Doğu youth, came to my house and gave a hasty news:

- Nureddin Topçu is very ill... He is in the hospital... He wanted to see you. Maybe he is taking his last breaths. Can we go now?

- I jumped right in. I interpreted her wanting to see me in the turmoil of her last breaths as a return from her ideas that do not fit into the shari'a. In the hospital, I found him sprawled on his bed, but good, colorful, clear conscious, even cheerful. He said that he was very pleased and happy with my visit, he did not mention the separation and contradiction between us, he spoke from the top of the stream and said:

- Now, I will give myself to nature. I do not know of anything else I would throw into her lap! I said to the sad youngster who was trying to settle our dispute:

- I did not like your hoca's mental state. I could not find the spirit I expected in him of the last moments. May Allah grant guidance...

Two days later, news: Nureddin Topçu died!.. I could not find the spiritual strength to go to his funeral, and I could only pray to Nureddin Topçu as follows:

- May Allah have mercy on every believer...

He is one of those who come and go like this..." See Kısakürek, *Babıali*, 339.

¹⁸⁴ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 208.

¹⁸⁵ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 26. Originally published in *Hareket*, III/27, in March 1968.

evidently related to their dispute over the conception of Islam. It is important to underline that both Topçu's and Kısakürek's reflections on each other refer to disputes stemming from their different conceptions of Islam to the extent that one almost declared the other an unbeliever.

Alas, this deep dispute between Topçu and Kısakürek—that has significant implications in terms of their worldviews—is largely neglected by scholars as well as their followers and admirers. It is curious, for instance, to see that the same follower who reports Topçu's characterization of Kısakürek as megalomaniac venerates Kısakürek as the "üstad" of Muslims in Turkey, and becomes almost apologetic about Topçu's dislike for Kısakürek.¹⁸⁶ Likewise, some Topçu's contemporary followers displayed an aspiration to reproach the two by sidelining his ideas on Islam

¹⁸⁶ See for instance how Emin Işık reports the same event Kısakürek tells about his visit of Topçu on his deathbed: "Yurdakul Dağoğlu, one of Hoca's [Nurettin Topçu's] admirers, devised the following plan with the intention of quenching the conflict between Necip Fazıl Bey and Hoca due to the issue of 'Spiritual Socialism' and to reconcile these two elders: During an afternoon visit, Yurdakul bent over Hoca's ear, says:

— Sir, Necip Fazıl Bey wants to visit you, but he is hesitant. 'I wonder if he will accept me if I go?' he says. Hoca replies

— What does he mean if I agree? He does not say! I will be glad, let him come, he is most welcome. Thereupon, Yurdakul immediately takes action. He had a red colored Volkswagen of the tortoise genus. As he got into the car, not even half an hour later, he arrives at Necip Fazıl Bey's house in Kadıköy Kızıltoprak, gets permission, enters and presents the situation to him as follows:

— Üstad, I am just coming from the hospital to visit Nurettin Bey. You know, his illness is in the last stage. He talked about you. 'Everyone came to my visit, Necip Fazıl Bey did not. Does he not know about my illness? He would have come', he says. He is curious and waiting for you. What would you say?

— What can I say, Nurettin is a valiant boy, we need to visit him. But how and when?

— Üstad, I have come by car, the car is at your disposal. If there is no obstacle, we can go right now if you want.

— Then wait, let me get dressed and let us go.

In those years, there was not such a heavy traffic in Istanbul. Taxis from Aksaray to Kadıköy used to carry passengers in 20 minutes. Üstad Necip Fazıl and Yurdakul entered the sick room together.

Hoca's bed was against the door. Anyone who came in would come face-to-face with the patient.

Necip Fazıl, as soon as he enters, in a voice that everyone there can hear;

— Nurettin, you are a valiant boy! What is this pain of the body compared to the pain of the soul for a lifetime? At a time when it is forbidden to say Allah, we raised a flag with you. Do not be afraid, kick it, get in!

— Crazy boy! Only you can do it.

When the Üstad said, 'Shoot the kick in!', he meant [going in] Heaven. Nurettin Topçu also wanted to say, with a bitter smile, this job suits him [Kısakürek] better." See Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 216-7.

and his advocacy of spiritual socialism.¹⁸⁷ Apart from his strict followers around İBDA, Kısakürek's admirers find no harm in this conservative reading of Topçu. This rapprochement between Topçu's and Kısakürek's admirers is still present; subsuming Topçu—who in fact represented an antithetical position with conception of Islam and his socialistic ideas—into the religious camp of the secular-religious duality, and into the political right in the left-right cleavage of the Cold War's.

III.IV. Concluding Remarks

Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek are close contemporaries, and they have a very similar trajectory in their lives that is commonly underlined in existing literature. However, they came at odds with each other towards the end of their intellectual careers. Nurettin Topçu was excluded from religious conservative and nationalist circles, and ended up being the teacher (“*hoca*”) for a rather small group. Although he is remembered as an early Islam-inspired critic of Turkish modernization and of Kemalism by a broader circle of conservatives and nationalists today, followers of his ideas seem to be scattered. Some claims to follow his worldview *in toto*, and remains marginal in Turkish intellectual space, as did Topçu. Others claim his legacy by largely cherry picking his ideas—neglecting or being apologetic for some of them.¹⁸⁸ Whereas Necip Fazıl Kısakürek became very popular among people from different strands of Turkish right including religious conservatives and ultra-nationalists. Today, he is still the master (“*üstad*”) for the members of Erdoğan's government including Erdoğan himself as well as Islamists,

¹⁸⁷ Shared socio-economic background of their audience may account for this attitude. Although Topçu represented an antithetical position in certain key issues, the majority of his followers at the time were the newly urbanized underclass people, like the audience of Kısakürek, who have been alienated by modernization-as-westernization. It is not surprising after all that they also regarded Kısakürek as the “*üstad*”.

¹⁸⁸ Bergen, “Topçu'nun Yarınki Türkiye'si”.

mukaddesatçılar and nationalists—regardless of their position vis-à-vis the government. Even though some of them now find his ideas obsolete or simply wrong, they would not hide their admiration to Kısakürek as the voice of Muslims against the purported oppression of the state.¹⁸⁹

What accounts for this difference? What could explain different trajectories of Topçu and Kısakürek notwithstanding the overt similarities between the two? Is it the powerful voice of Kısakürek's proses and poems that made Kısakürek more appealing to the audience, in contradistinction to Topçu's pessimistic tone and philosophical complexity in his writings? My discussion in this chapter aimed to show a dynamic setting shaped by the interplay of personal/psychological and social/contextual factors that accounts for these differences. It is for this reason that I found it significant to give detailed biographical information to highlight personal and psychological factors without neglecting that these intellectuals were foremost individual human beings. These biographical details show that Topçu was an introverted person, giving himself to books and ideas instead of socializing; whereas Kısakürek was a highly self-conscious person who reflected on himself as a "special" person destined to achieve great things since his childhood. These details, I contend, affected their ideas, the ways they defended them and their positions in Turkish intellectual space. Topçu emerges as someone who lived in his own world with his own truths. Perhaps for this reason, he did not care about being at peace or compatible with established beliefs and thoughts. Yet, he also made it his mission to defend and preach what he believed to be true. This must be why he felt so lonely and indeed became alone at the end of his life. Kısakürek, on the other hand, seems

¹⁸⁹ See for instance, Mengüsoğlu, *Mağrur Öfke*.

to be alone in his own world already. His autobiographies and even other writings suggest that he did not show much interest in anything other than his own existence. Hence, Islam must have provided a framework for his existential reflections, as Mardin indicated; yet, in addition, it might have emerged as a way out from the elite environment he was in before as one among many. Perhaps that is why he has set himself up as the first and most powerful (sometimes only) spokesperson for the “cause” of Islam.¹⁹⁰

A clear-cut separation between religion/religiosity and secularism/secularity was highly instrumental for Kısakürek’s designation of himself in Turkish political and intellectual spaces; hence the congruity of Kısakürek’s personality and the context. For one thing, the modernization discourse of the early Cold War Turkey already paved the way for a dualistic understanding of the secular and the religious. On the other hand, there established, among Islamic sectors in Turkey, a Naqshbandi hegemony which was more than ready to refashion Islam as a distinct identity.¹⁹¹ Taking advantage of these contextual factors with the help of his personality traits and his literary skills, Kısakürek found himself a clear position in the emerging secular-religious duality. Remember his reflections on the years he started publishing *Büyük Doğu*. Kısakürek tries to convince his audience to both that there existed “Allah ve ahlak demenin yasak olduğu günler” (the days when it was forbidden to

¹⁹⁰ While making these suggestions, I must admit that these psychological analyses remain at a very primitive and speculative level. Nevertheless, I believe that these are very useful for understanding Topçu and Kısakürek. It should be noted that studies that adequately analyze the thoughts of Topçu and Kısakürek based on their personalities and psychological mindsets will be very instructive and interesting.

¹⁹¹ Note that Kısakürek did not only establish a personal relationship with Abdülhakim Arvasi, but he also seemed to accept Naqshbandi Islam wholeheartedly and acted as the spokesperson of the tariqa. I do not know how much support the members of the tariqa gave to Kısakürek for his conferences and publications, and to what extent they endorsed Kısakürek among the members or sympathizers of Naqshbandiyya. However, these also probably played a role in Kısakürek’s popularity and becoming the “*üstad*” for broader Islamic sectors.

mention God and morality) and that he was the only one who stood against that tyranny.

The story of Kısakürek's ideological transformation from being an early republican westernized elite to an arch-enemy of Kemalism and westernization from an Islamic perspective is also functional within the narrative of the secular-religious duality. This is why this story is featured in both popular accounts and academic studies. As I discussed in this chapter, it is foremost necessary to review the transformation story of Kısakürek. To recall, Kısakurek met Arvasi in 1934, but has maintained ties with the republican elite for more than 10 years, while also writing positively about the founders of the republic and modernizing reforms. Furthermore, a careful reading of Kısakürek's writings before *Büyük Doğu* indicates almost no rupture in his thought in terms of his ideas' philosophical and intellectual grounds. What then did Kısakürek's ideological transformation change in Kısakürek's thought, and how did it change? These questions were not addressed, as they are not meaningful and functional for the narrative of secular-religious duality in which secular and religious identities are constructed as two separate worlds.

A similar narrative of transformation was sometimes invoked in the case of Topçu, which is even more problematic than the case of Kısakürek. In addition to his personal piety he already acquired from his family, he was familiar with Sufism before he met Abdülaziz Bekkine whose impact on Topçu's thought is not possible to detect from his writings. Against what his followers suggest, Topçu hardly mentions Bekkine himself or Naqshbandi tariqa in his writings. His years in France and his encounter with Blondel's philosophy of action seem much more relevant for

his public intellectual struggle based on Islamic sensibilities against modernization-as-westernization. His experience and education in France inspired him to connect his personal piety and Islamic sensibilities to social and political processes. These inspirations gave Topçu a fresh and philosophically grounded perspective into Sufi Islam. Topçu reinterprets the ultimate purpose of action, i.e. reaching the transcendental being, as the state uniting with God in line with the wahdat al-wujud doctrine. More significantly, he comes to see Islamic morality as a regulator of subject's social environment that constituted the condition of possibility for action. In so doing, Topçu creates an Islamized version of the philosophy of action where the latter provides the form and Sufi Islam provides the content.

CHAPTER IV: DIVERGING CONCEPTIONS OF ISLAM: THE MEANING OF ISLAM AND THE STATUS OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

Divergent conceptions of Islam stemming from disputes over its nature, its meaning or its uses have existed throughout Islamic history. These disputes and ensuing conceptions of Islam were often products of critical junctures such as the death of the prophet, the institutionalization of the caliphal state, and the times of trouble during and after the Crusades and the Mongol invasion. For contemporary Muslims, complexification of social and economic relations and the concomitant bureaucratization of states ruling over Muslim populated lands—which denotes early modernity in Islamic context in the 17th and 18th centuries¹⁹²—and was such a critical juncture that informed existing alternative conceptions of Islam. The advent of modernity in Islamic context, like the other non-Western parts of the world, was interfused with the development of capitalism in Europe as an economically and socially disturbing force in the rest of the world. The advent of modernity was also concurrent with Western colonialist expansions towards non-Western parts of the world including Muslim-populated lands. Perplexed by these processes, Muslim intellectuals in different contexts casted about ways to restore the bygone order. An

¹⁹² For an excellent discussion of modernity beyond Eurocentric understanding of the concept see Loubna El Amine, “Beyond East and West: Reorienting Political Theory through the Prism of Modernity”, *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 1 (March 2016): 102–20.

influential and later prevalent position in this context was to call for a renewal of Islam from within by returning to the “roots”, i.e. Islam’s fundamental sources, and by removing what were deemed bid’ah (harmful or unnecessary innovation in the realm of religion, *bidat* in Turkish). The emergence of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi movement in India represented an early example of this position.¹⁹³

Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya originated from India in the 17th century with the teachings of Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624) who preached the importance of upholding sharia in social and political spheres as well as removing bid’ah.¹⁹⁴ At the time, the Mughal Empire ruling over major parts of India had a highly diverse and cosmopolitan public sphere where different sects and religions co-existed—disregarding the orthodox Islamic principle of attributing non-Muslims inferior status vis-à-vis Muslims, known as *fiqh al-dhimmah* in Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁹⁵ Sirhindi, in this context, preached the significance of Sunni orthodoxy and applying sharia as prescribed by the fundamental sources of Islam, i.e. Qur’an, Sunnah and the canon of Sunni jurisprudence. Hence, although Naqshbandiyya had been a Sufi tariqa that would otherwise emphasize mystical experience as the single most important dimension of religion, Mujaddidi conception of Islam saw the latter as a system of

¹⁹³ Kadızadeli movement in İstanbul and Wahhabism in the center of Arab peninsula could be cited as other early modern examples of this position. For Kadızadeli movement see Marinos Sariyannis, ‘The Kadızadeli Movement as a Social and Political Phenomenon: The Rise of a ‘Mercantile Ethic’?’, in Antonis Anastapoulos (ed.), *Political Initiatives ‘From the Bottom Up’ in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII. A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9–11 January 2009*, (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2009). For Wahhabism see Madawi Al-Rasheed, ‘The Wahhabis and the Ottoman Caliphate: The Memory of Historical Antagonism’, in *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, ed. Carool Kersten, Marat Shterin, and Madawi Al-Rasheed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 117–34.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmad Sirhindi, also known as Imam-ı Rabbani, was considered by adherents of Naqshbandiyya the renovator (mujaddid) of the religion in the second millennium after the hegira. Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 29. He immediately became influential in the Indian sub-continent but his influence did not extend to the Ottoman imperial center until the emergence and spread of Khalidiyya as an offshoot of Sirhindi’s Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the 19th century. For the Naqshbandi activity within the Empire before the outreach of the mujaddidi movement, see Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*.

¹⁹⁵ Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 524.

prescribed rules conveyed and applied by the prophet. Following Sirhindi's ideas, representatives of Mujaddidi movement offered a conception of Islam that reified prescriptions of sharia as the basis of religion. The gradual advent of this conception of Islam as the prevalent one had significant consequences in the construction of Muslimness as a distinct political identity in the later phases of modernization process in Islamic context.

The conception of Islam in the writings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek represents this Mujaddidi position. In fact, he himself was a disciple of one of the sheikhs in the Naqshbandi lineage, Abdülhakim Arvasi, who was evidently his sole source in matters concerning Islam and Islamic knowledge. Based on what he acquired from his sheikh, Kısakürek formulates his conception of Islam-as-identity that denotes adherence to a total ideology in the form of a system of rules that commands on all aspects of life. By virtue of being adhered to this "*İslam ideolocysı*" (ideology of Islam) as Kısakürek puts it, Muslims appear to be essentially and existentially different from not only non-Muslims but also those who do not share this conception of Islam. People who do not adhered to this ideology of Islam, from followers of heterodox Sufism to secular-minded Muslims, for instance, are excluded from his conception of Muslimness. As such, Kısakürek attempts to mold Muslimness as a distinct political position within domestic political contestations. Political discourse of modernization in early Cold War Turkey with its secular-religious duality helped Kısakürek to articulate his conception of Islam and of Muslimness that has acquired political significance through his writings and is established as the prevalent conception of Islam in this context.

Although the late Ottoman intellectual space was rather diverse in terms of understandings and interpretations of Islam,¹⁹⁶ Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya—which had already risen to prominence during the Ottoman modernization of the 19th century¹⁹⁷—triumphed in the republican era as the most dominant current in Islamic intellectual and political movements, due to its representatives’ organizational skills during the secularist single party period which banished all existing Sufi orders.¹⁹⁸ The impact of this Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi dominance restructured Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey in two ways. First, some of the residues of the late Ottoman ulema and Muslim intellectuals as well as other Sufi tariqas were drawn into Mujaddidi movement or approximated their conceptions of Islam to that of the Mujaddidi. Second, with the help of the political and intellectual discourse of modernization resting on secular-religious duality, alternative voices against Mujaddidi conception of Islam, represented by Kısakürek in his Islam-as-identity, were subsumed into one or the other side of the duality—if not neglected altogether.

Take Ziya Gökalp for instance. Known as the architect of republican-era Turkish nationalism and Kemalist reforms, Gökalp offers a renewalist approach to Islamic knowledge and sharia based on his social scientific background and inspirations from Sufi Islam. His ideas and position are confined into the framework of secular modernization by downplaying his Sufi sensibilities and Islamic justifications.¹⁹⁹ Likewise, Kenan Rifai, a Sufi sheikh in Rifa’i Sufi order and a pedagogue who

¹⁹⁶ The three influential magazines of the second constitutional era were *Sebilürreşad*, *İctihad* and *Türk Yurdu* all of which espoused different conceptions of Islam. In addition, other Sufi tariqas like Mawlawi, Rifai, Khalwati, and Shadhili and so on were still active, offering alternatives to Naqshbandi Sufism.

¹⁹⁷ Abu Manneh, *Studies on Islam*; and Yayıcıoğlu, “Guarding Traditions and Laws”.

¹⁹⁸ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, 139-40.

¹⁹⁹ See Alp Eren Topal, “Against Influence: Ziya Gökalp in Context and Tradition”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, no. 3 (September 2017): 283–310.

worked in the late Ottoman and early republican education bureaucracy, is another case in point. Rıfai offers a distinct understanding of Sufi Islam based on the Sufi teaching of *wahdat al-wujud* through which he sees modernization process, including secularizing reforms of the republic, is but a manifestation of the divine being.²⁰⁰ Still, there are other examples like Şemseddin Günaltay and Hasan Ali Yücel who, despite their Islamist or Sufi backgrounds and personal pieties, supported the Turkish modernization process and took part in the single-party governments. What unites these people was their subversion of the secular-religious duality; and the key in this subversion was their conceptions of Islam divorced from reified notions of prescriptions and proscriptions of religion.

Nurettin Topçu represents yet another example to the above-mentioned people with his conception of Islam-as-morality. Despite his connections with a Sufi sheikh, Abdülaziz Bekkine, in the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi movement, Topçu's conception of Islam radically differs from that of the Mujaddidi. His relationship with Bekkine seems to remain at the personal level for he hardly gives any reference to Naqshbandiyya itself or the elders of its lineage including Bekkine himself. Contrary to Mujaddidi conception of Islam, Topçu resists reification of religiosity, Islam and Muslimness. He features inner mystical experience whose ultimate purpose for him was establishing a direct and unmediated relationship with God under the guidance of moral principles laid out by religion, rather than abiding by certain definite prescriptions. Topçu draws his inspiration from the Sufi teaching of *wahdat al-wujud* and gives frequent reference to such figures of Islamic heterodoxy as Mansur Al-Hallaj, Yunus Emre and Jalal ad-Din Rumi. Similar to Kenan Rıfai, Topçu offers a

²⁰⁰ See Feyza Burak-Adli, "Sufi Modernity, Ottoman Elite Cosmopolitanism, and Republican Dervishhood: The Case of Sheikh Kenan Rıfai", forthcoming.

more inclusionary understanding of Islam through his interpretation of *wahdat al-wujud*. Unlike Rıfai, however, he does not embrace the process of modernization that for Topçu poses a threat to the authentic experience of Islam. Although Topçu's conception of Islam-as-morality too subverts secular-religious duality by rejecting the essentialization of what was deemed religious, Topçu's ideas are subsumed into the framework of the duality.²⁰¹

IV.I. Meanings of Religion and Islam

Differences in their conceptions of Islam notwithstanding, Topçu and Kısakürek appear to be on the same page on the worth and validity of Islam against modernist and Orientalist charges threatening Islam's status in modern context. Their responses to these charges differ from that of the late Ottoman Muslim intellectuals who sought ways to solidify the status of Islam within the global public space and the Turkish intellectual space. Against Orientalist charges concerning Islam's supposed role in holding back Muslim societies in their ways to modern civilization, Ottoman Muslim intellectual wrote polemical pieces and apologetics vindicating Islam in the development of civilization and advocating Muslims right to participate in the Civilization that was conceived in singular.²⁰² Moreover, against the overwhelming influence of Enlightenment rationalism and positivism on Ottoman intelligentsia, the late Ottoman Muslim intellectuals represented Islam as a religion of reason that is

²⁰¹ A further parallel with Rıfai was that it was mostly their followers' positions and their interpretations of these two that resulted in the neglect of certain aspects of their thought.

²⁰² French historian Ernst Renan's speech delivered in 1883 entitled "Islam and Science" is perhaps the most famous and controversial example. The speech triggered heated debates among Muslim intellectuals some of whom wrote rebuttals against Renan. See Dücan Cündioğlu, "Ernest Renan ve 'Reddiyeler' Bağlamında İslâm-Bilim Tartışmalarına Bibliyografik Bir Katkı", *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, no. 2 (1996): 1-94.

compatible with rationalism and modern science.²⁰³ In their attempt to espouse Islam and modern science, modernist Islamists Islamized scientific theories through appealing to Islamic sources of knowledge and theories of earlier Muslim philosophers on the one hand;²⁰⁴ and, on the other hand, they rationalized Islamic believes and practices.²⁰⁵

While effects of Islam's rationalization are still observable to this day among many Muslims in Turkey, Topçu and Kısakürek evidently do not give countenance to such apologist attempts. For the latter, religion, Islam in particular, does not need to be rational to be legitimate and of worth. Topçu and Kısakürek belong to a later generation who has witnessed the growing popularity of anti-positivistic, anti-rationalist, spiritualist philosophy in Europe. In this milieu, both Topçu and Kısakürek refer to Henri Bergson who, as an esteemed professor of philosophy, made it clear, for them, that reason and positive sciences could not be the ultimate guide for they were unable to grasp the reality in its true form. Topçu and Kısakürek attribute a special importance to Bergson's *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (The Two Sources of Morality and Religion) as a book which supposedly proved the significance and validity of intuition and mystical experience.²⁰⁶ They interpret Bergson's and other spiritualist philosophers' dismissal of Enlightenment reason and positivism as an instance where most up-to-date and esteemed Western philosophers acknowledged and defended the worth and validity of religion.²⁰⁷ While

²⁰³ Cemaleddin Afghani and Muhammad Abduh are the early examples. See for instance Nikki R Keddie. *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl Ad-Dīn 'al-Afghānī'*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

²⁰⁴ Demir, *Yeni Din Algısının Doğuşu*, 31-32.

²⁰⁵ Considering ablution in terms of personal care and sanitation and emphasizing the health benefits of fasting are among the most obvious examples of this attitude.

²⁰⁶ See for instance Topçu. *İslam ve İnsan*, 210; Kısakürek. *Batı Tefekkürü*, 93.

²⁰⁷ Topçu's note in his notes for psychology of religion class is emphatic: "In the 19th and 20th centuries, the views that accept religion as the truth and regard the religious life of people higher than

Topçu and Kısakürek share the conviction that Islam had a significance in the modern world, they fundamentally diverge on the significance of Islam itself. That is, the ways they understand and define religion, the fundamental aspect of the conception of Islam, are utterly different.

IV.I.I. Nurettin Topçu on Religion

The foremost distinguished aspect of Nurettin Topçu's conception of Islam is that he has an abstract conception of religion which is independent from but inclusive of Islam. Therefore, it is possible to identify discussions on the nature of religion and of God without reference to Islam in his writings. In these discussions, Topçu presents his views on the role of religion in human societies, cognitive and social factors necessitated the emergence of religions and the evolution of religious thought until monotheistic religions. As such, Topçu analyzes religion as a historical and social phenomenon; and more importantly, he designates Islam within the purview of this phenomenon. In other words, Islam appears in his writings as an example, though the perfect example, within the history of religions—not as *the only* or *the true* religion. Topçu takes religion as an *object* of knowledge that is a completely alien, and inadmissible, idea for a *mukaddesatçı* like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek.

Topçu defines religion as the metaphysics of human destiny (“*mukadderatımızın metafiziği*”) which is distinct from philosophy with its method using spiritual experience instead of critical reasoning.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, religion emerges as a search of God emanating from an inescapable spiritual necessity. In the second stage of the

other psychological phenomena dominate the Christian world of our time compared to earlier times; and these views have a wider ground than the views that claim the worthlessness of religion.”. See Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 191.

²⁰⁸ Nurettin Topçu, *Türkiye'nin Maarif Davası* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1997), 163.

evolution of religious thought, human-beings pursued their metaphysical search through reason and tried to find the God around themselves with the help of their senses and intellect—which Topçu called the metaphysical stage. Finally, the search ended as human beings turned to their inner selves to solve the mystery of their own destiny. Topçu, quoting the prophet Muhammed’s saying “Those who know their selves also know their God” (“*Nefsini bilen Rabb ’ini de bilir*”), maintains that the final stage of religion’s evolution becomes an inner experience where human-beings ultimately reach the God.²⁰⁹ Pretty much akin to Descartes’s reaching to God via inner reasoning in the *Meditations*, Topçu offers a conception of religion that started and ended with self-questioning of human-beings. Hence, Topçu’s conception could be identified as an example of “humanistic” religion as opposed to orthodox conceptions of religion in which the God, instead of the human, is the starting and end point.

Topçu’s humanistic conception of religion implies that religion is not a *deus ex machina*, nor is it an ever-existing phenomenon that was ordained upon human beings from the heavens. Religion, in Topçu’s sense, is a mystical journey to reach the God, which is completed in the inner self. Topçu acknowledges that not all religions have had the same mystical and metaphysical dimension. Concerning this, Topçu writes in a passage in his doctoral dissertation about the development of religious thought that

There is no doubt that our subject is the advanced religions from the appearance of the idea of Allah in the history of religions to the religion of Islam. Primitive religions such as animism-spiritism, naturism-naturalism, totemism can be regarded as preparatory stages for reaching

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 164.

the higher form of religion, which, in our view, consists of belief in the one necessary being.²¹⁰

The passage indicates that Topçu historicizes the concept of religion that had evolved from pagan/animistic belief systems—seen as primitive forms, to divine religions—admitted as the perfect form. In other words, stages of the evolution of religious thought are not solely different phases of inner meditations for development of religiosity in individual human beings. The concept of religion, together with the self's relationship with the divinity, has developed along with the historical evolution of human societies. More importantly, Topçu sees no exception in Islam in this respect.²¹¹

Despite Topçu's reference to human psychology in defining religion—that is the reason I have identified his conception of religion as humanistic, the central element in Topçu's definition of religion is God. As I have just pointed out, he characterizes religion as the inner mystical experience of the self which becomes possible only with existence of God which is a *conditio sine qua non* for the mystical experience, and hence for religion. Topçu, elaborating on the necessity of a belief in God and of the relationship of the self with God, offers the clearest and most comprehensive definition of religion in psychology of religion course notes he prepared for the İmam-Hatip School:

a) Religion is belief in the existence of supernatural and mysterious forces.

...

Nature is the realm we live in and has boundaries. The supernatural is the realm that begins outside these limits and extends from all sides to infinity. The supernatural powers possessed by the sacred beings believed to reside in our world in ancient religions were sufficient to distinguish them from the forces of nature. For this reason, although we

²¹⁰ Nurettin Topçu, *İsyan Ahlakı: Notlu Nurettin Topçu Tercümesi ve Eski Harfli Orijinali* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2016), 173.

²¹¹ Ibid, 175.

do not find it sufficient to describe religion with the idea of the supernatural, we will accept that the idea of the supernatural has an important role in the definition of religion.

b) Durkheim defines religion as “compulsory beliefs”. According to him, although there is an obligation to make some movements in religion, the practical obligation is not specific to religion alone. Compliance with the law is also mandatory for human beings. Apart from religion, there are no truths that we are obliged to believe. In fact, we also believe in the truths of science. However, this belief is not obligatory.

...

Just as we took the idea of the supernatural from the previous definition of religion, we will also take the principle of the necessity of believing from this definition. These two are the same kind of thing. The first is an imagination, the second is a principle.

...

c) The most complete description of this character is the description of religion with Allah; “Religion is believing in God.” Allah is the source of supernatural forces and the principle of supernatural order. He is also the founder of the natural order.

Then, Topçu immediately gives the final touch to his definition of religion by moving on to define God (Allah):

What is God? In order to indicate the elements of the imagination of Allah, it is necessary to define Him first. “Allah is the name of the power that man accepts his dominance over the universe and himself, and feels connected with internal ties.”

When the elements of this description are analyzed, it is seen that there are basically two beliefs in it. One is the belief that God has dominion over the whole universe and the person who thinks about it, and the other is the belief that there can be internal, that is, spiritual, bonds between man and God. These are the characters that human consciousness seeks in the imagination of God.²¹²

Here Topçu articulates the components of his conception of religion which was inspired, at least partly, from non-Islamic sources of knowledge—especially modern social sciences. He combines social scientific theses on religion with concepts from Islamic sources of knowledge as in his use of the prophet’s saying. Evident in the definition above, Topçu conceives of religion as an unmediated spiritual bond between the individual human being and God. Religion, then, becomes a

²¹² Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 203–6.

phenomenon created jointly by the human and God—reminiscent of Blondel’s remark on the concept of action saying that “action is the synthesis of God and the human”.

In none of the passages, he discusses his conception of religion; Topçu seems to be concerned with material aspect of religion that distinguishes him from *mukaddesatçı* and Islamist lines. The term “material aspect of religion” is used to explain Kant’s distinction of dogmatic and rational aspects of faith.²¹³ Orthodox conceptions of religion often highlight its material aspect or reduce it to that by taking revelation as the focal point of religion. They understand religion as sum of the revealed commands of God, deeds and words of the prophet and actual rituals or prayers to be performed. Obviously, Nurettin Topçu’s conception is by no means in line with such understandings of religion. Topçu, without denying the importance of actual prescriptions of religion, maintains that

The most perfect of means is, of course, the one that leads to faith in the right way. However, the sharia is neither a goal, nor is it a life that leads to a goal. It’s just the direction of the road, its signs, tracks, ups and downs. If the purpose is the same, it means the multiplicity of roads, the richness, abundance and prosperity of religious life. To regard the religion as composed of sharia means to take its shape instead of a life, its frame instead of a painting, its shell instead of fruit, the path taken instead of a spiritual journey.²¹⁴

Given that sharia stands for the material aspect of Islam, reducing Islam to sharia is a grave mistake for Topçu. Here, sharia has a place in religiosity, but its significance is

²¹³ Eddis N. Miller, Kant’s ‘*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*’: *A Reader’s Guide*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16-7. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant suggests, “material aspect of religion ... would be able to contain special duties as divine commands that do not proceed only from reason giving universal laws, so that they could be known by us only empirically, not a priori, and would therefore belong only to revealed religion”. See Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 276. Here I used the term in a similar way to stress divine revelation in the constitution of another type of conceiving religion that contrasts with that of Nurettin Topçu.

²¹⁴ Nurettin Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2008), 91.

limited to its capacity to facilitate what Topçu considers as the true foundation of religion, i.e. inner mystical experience. Accordingly, sharia is merely an instrument, a body of rules and regulations that organizes social life and helps individual in his/her mystical bonding with the God.

Downplaying the material aspect of religion, Topçu resists reification of Islam and Muslimness around a dogmatic, and hence ahistorical, notion of sharia. Wilfred Cantwell Smith uses the term reification in the analysis of the development of religious thought. It denotes for Smith the process within which religion comes to be understood as a concrete entity through “the preaching of a vision, the emergence of followers, the organization of a community, the positing of an intellectual ideal of that community, the definition of the actual pattern of its institutions.”²¹⁵ Smith argues that entity-like reified religion was a modern concept that has evolved in the West through systematic analysis of Christianity by modern philosophers who from an alien perspective conceptualized and thereby reified Christianity as a “system of beliefs or rituals, an abstract and impersonal pattern of observables.”²¹⁶ Accordingly, the concept spread around the world through a dialectical process where Orientalist scholars scrutinized other religious beliefs and traditions by reifying them as religions in the modern sense of the word, while representatives of other traditions appropriated this notion of religion and came to define their beliefs as reified systems in their responses to Orientalist observations and claims.²¹⁷ While Smith’s account for the historical development of the concept of religion as a reified entity might not be totally convincing for he put too much emphasis on the role of Western

²¹⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 64.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

modernization and Orientalism—especially concerning the case of Islam,²¹⁸ his distinction between religion as personal faith, piety, and a relationship with the divine and religion as an institutionalized system of beliefs, rules and practices is illuminating to understand Topçu’s conception of Islam-as-morality and his critique of Islam’s reification.

Topçu’s discontent with reification of religion has important political and social implications. For one thing, Topçu does not conceive that Islam had the monopoly over legitimate ways of being religious. Moreover, Muslims are not essentially and existentially different from peoples of other religions simply by virtue of being adhered to a certain set of prescriptions and holding onto certain beliefs and rituals. Hence, Topçu is rather respectful and sympathetic in talking about other religions, compared to Islamist and *mukaddesatçı* circles. As noted in the previous chapter, he is especially appreciating Christianity for its capacity to sustain a spiritual religious experience.²¹⁹ Topçu knows that the philosophy of action as propounded by Blondel is deeply connected to Christian thought; and he acknowledges the virtues of Christianity that made it possible to develop this philosophy as well as its capacity to sustain a life in accordance with the philosophy of action. In an article against communism and materialism he writes

Armed with the endless creativity of the Christian and Islamic religions, the spiritual force collides with the material force of the twentieth century. The love of philosophy, morality, art and science that Western

²¹⁸ Smith treated the case of Islam separately in a chapter where he discusses the extent to which Islam represents an exception to his narrative.

²¹⁹ For examples from his work, see *İslam ve İnsan*, 48-9; Nurettin Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2018), 202; *Yarınki Türkiye*, 88. On the respect for other religions, Topçu gives the example of Rumi: “Mevlana is against separating religions from each other and conflicting them. He does not despise any religion. He recommends getting rid of this self-pride inflicted by religious people everywhere. No matter what religion they are, those who are turned to Allah are on the path of Truth. He had disciples from Greeks and Armenians, even priests. People of all religions and denominations were found at his funeral.” See Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 157.

civilization has created until today has always been the work of Christianity.²²⁰

As in this instance, his writings on religion make use of examples from Christianity, which is somewhat unusual in Islamic-oriented press where the main attitude towards Christianity is not sympathy but, very often, hostility.

Nevertheless, the conspicuous anti-Semitism in his writings and his profound dislike for Shiite Islam and Alevism overshadows Topçu's overall respect for religious diversity in the world. Perhaps under the influence of anti-Enlightenment spiritualist thought, Topçu deems the Jewry responsible for the advent of materialist thinking and global capitalism. In as much as he associates Jews with these purportedly detrimental consequences of modernity, he easily embraces European anti-liberal conspiracist narratives on the Jewry. Yet, his anti-Semitism is not based on religious reservations, as Topçu does not refer to Judaism as a religion in these anti-Semitic passages. Similarly, his hostility towards Shiism and Alevism stems from a conflation of Topçu's concerns over preserving the political and social unity of (Anatolian/Turkish) Islamic community. Topçu sees these dissident sects harmful as they pose a threat to the communal unity.²²¹ He usually mentions Shiism and Alevism together with communism and other ideologies to suggest that they are inimical to social and political order. Hence, Topçu's distaste with Shiite sects seems to be an aspect of his nationalistic biases and not stemming from his conception of religion.

²²⁰ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 2008), 256. Topçu wrote in a magazine named *Şule* an article that advocate the necessity of cooperation between Islam and Christianity against communism. See Nurettin Topçu, "Komünizme Karşı Hristiyan Âlemiyle Elele Vermeliyiz" (We Must Cooperate with Christian World against Communism), *Şule* 2, (June, 1962), in *Ahlak Nizamı*, 337-339.

²²¹ Note Topçu's inconsistent views here. On the one hand, he was fond of Hallaj; on the other hand, he found Alevism threatening.

After all, although Topçu conceives religious experience as purely individual, religion appears in his writings as a communal phenomenon guiding individuals to find their ways to reach God. For him, religious principles that help individual members of a community take their form in accordance with the historical experience of that community; and its members, naturally, embraced the religion of their community in their inner mystical experiences.²²² Hence, religious diversity in the world is a natural outcome of communal diversity. This is quite an unorthodox view of the existence of other religions, most probably unacceptable to Islamist and *mukaddesatçı* circles whose worldviews have usually been based on a conviction that Islam is the superior and the only true religion.

IV.I.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek on Religion

Contrary to Nurettin Topçu, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek does not have a conception of religion independent of Islam. Similar to other *mukaddesatçılar* and broad majority of Islamists, he admits religion=Islam equation. For him, while religions that are not acknowledged in the Qur'an are simply human-made belief systems, other monotheistic religions referred to in the Qur'an are distorted by human intervention. Therefore, Kısakürek finds it futile to provide an abstract definition of religion. Discussions concerning the role of religion in human societies, cognitive and social factors necessitated the emergence of religions, and the evolution of religious thought are likewise meaningless from Kısakürek's perspective. In Kısakürek's writings, religion=Islam is an all-encompassing concept which is primordial and eternal; and it is never an object of modern knowledge production and critical

²²² Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 198.

thinking process.²²³ Instead, Kısakürek offers a particular definition of Islam reified through designating the material aspect of Islam, as conveyed and practiced by the prophet, the basis of religion=Islam.

Kısakürek does not reflect on the meaning of religion itself; yet, he puts careful effort in explaining what constitutes the basis of religion. Kısakürek, in the beginning of his *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (Western Thought and Islamic Sufism), states that “The basis of religion is only what the Messenger conveyed [‘*Resulün tebliğ ettiği*’]. And it is sharia”.²²⁴ Without leaving minds in any controversy, he continues that “...anything that is not the subject of communication and practice in the general sense [by the Messenger] cannot be the basis of religion”.²²⁵ This is a clear intervention on the question of the nature of religion Kısakürek makes in a book about Sufism. Irrespective of Sufism’s worth and meaning for Kısakürek, he unequivocally subordinates Sufism under sharia. The contradistinction of Kısakürek’s conception of religion to that of Topçu who prioritizes mystical/spiritual experience over revealed prescriptions and proscriptions of God is more than obvious. While Topçu, as we have just seen, maintains that holding sharia supreme was a mistake, Kısakürek takes the opposite attitude with greater boldness. He states “Those who accept Sufism alone as the basis of religion, those who know Sufism as the foundation [‘*mebna*’] of religion, are those who reject the sharia... They are destined to blasphemy [‘*küfürdür nasipleri*’]”.²²⁶ According to Kısakürek, then, any

²²³ Negative reactions and still-present suspicions towards theology faculties is an example of this attitude. See Gencer, “Şeriatçılıktan Medeniyetçiliğe”, 83.

²²⁴ Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 12. Kısakürek tells that the book was one of his most important efforts together with well-known *İdeolocya Örgüsü*. The book was actually a product of a conference series Kısakürek gave in the month of Ramadan in the early 1960’s, edited and published by Kısakürek himself.

²²⁵ Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 14.

²²⁶ Ibid, 12.

conception of Islam that does not take sharia as the foundation of Islam—like Topçu’s conception—commits an impious crime against the religion of God.

I would argue that identifying the concept of religion with Islam—which was an attitude Kısakürek shares with Islamic conservatives—account for Kısakürek’s insistence on sharia as the foundation of religion. Note that what he proposes as the foundation of religion is not only prescriptions and proscriptions of God but it is also the way the prophet practiced and preached them. The emphasis on the prophet too suggests that he considers Islam as the only true religion. Other religions or doctrines are supposedly either distorted or pure fiction. In a rare passage Kısakürek takes religion as an abstract concept, he points out the uniqueness of Islam:

Why did you become, how did you become, what did you become, what should you be, what will you be? It is the religion that gives the answer and account of them. The only true and the only religion that gives the answer and account of all these is ISLAM...²²⁷

He suggests that religion, not as religion=Islam but all religions in common, addressed existential questions of human beings in search for a meaning of life. However, for Kısakürek, it is only Islam that could adequately answer these questions for it is the only divine religion that remained unobliterated in his account.

Almost all Muslims, conservative or not, believe that God had sent prophets to convey the divine message since Adam up until Muhammed. Hence, those who identify religion with Islam do not deny the authenticity of prophets of say Christianity or Judaism. According to a commonly held view, the essence and the purpose of the divine message have not changed from the first prophet to the last. That is, *the* religion denotes the calling of God for humans to submit to God’s

²²⁷ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 99.

authority by observing the prescriptions and proscriptions conveyed in the message—which is referred to as the true religion or the religion of God in the Qur'an.²²⁸ However, assigning of a new prophet by God is often interpreted as a sign of obliteration in the doctrines or deeds of the previous revelation. According to the Qur'an, Islam is the last religion revealed by God and Muhammed is the last prophet. Therefore, Muslims usually believed that God finalized the message in Islam that would be to last forever without obliteration. Kısakürek shares this conviction:

Islam, which Allah has chosen as a religion and foretold in the Qur'an, stands in this regard until the Day of Judgment, and it is obvious that it has constituted the only remedy for whatever problem humanity has had throughout history...²²⁹

For Kısakürek, Islam, as the last divine religion, is a message of salvation to all humanity. As we know from the previous quotations, Kısakürek and Islamic conservatives see the message of God conveyed by the prophet, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as a whole with its spiritual as well as material aspects. In fact, the latter constitutes the foundation of the message. Thus, according to Kısakürek, no matter how they truly submit themselves to the authority of God, the adherents of other religions could find no salvation so long as they do not abide by Islamic sharia.

Kısakürek's identification of religion with Islam and his dismissal of other religions, especially the Abrahamic ones, also exemplify the anti-Western resentments of Muslim masses who were often confounded with anti-Christian and anti-Semitic sentiments. Those who conceived religion as Islam *per se* have often displayed apathy towards other religious traditions and doctrines that they saw as false or deviant paths. This apathy leaves them uninformed about religions other than Islam;

²²⁸ İlhami Güler, "Din, İslâm ve Şeriat", *İslamiyat* 1, no. 4 (December, 1998), 53-76: 55.

²²⁹ Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 90.

and they have usually been contented with the situation since they are convinced the falsity of other religions. Kısakürek does not share this Islamic conservative apathy and writes on Christianity and other religious and moral doctrines—only to dismiss their truth claims and to prove the superiority of Islam vis-à-vis other religions. In a passage about Christian faith, he says that

Let's not use the word *Hristiyanlık* here, let's separate it from *İsevilik*!²³⁰ For, the prophet Isa [Christ] is the true Prophet... The religion conveyed by the prophet Isa and which was later distorted is the true religion until the Messenger of Allah [Muhammed]. Since it has been tampered with, its divine attributes become blasphemous.²³¹

As has been noted, Kısakürek, like other Islamic conservatives, admits that Jesus Christ was a true prophet of God whose teachings remained valid only until the arrival of the last true prophet, Muhammed. Kısakürek is careful to distinguish the Christianity of the first centuries from the supposedly obliterated doctrine of later. In fact, he is so careful to represent Islam as the only religion that he attacks Muhammad Hamidullah for the title of his book *İslam Peygamberi* (The Prophet of Islam) on the ground that it allegedly denied the universality of Muhammed's prophethood. For him, Hamidullah's book

...expressed consciously or unconsciously, that by calling the Master of the Universe the Prophet of Islam, has given an allotment to him, and with this allocation, [Hamidullah] has given place to other religions and their prophets [whose teachings are supposedly] in force.²³²

Obviously, Kısakürek feels threatened by the implication of Hamidullah's title as it might possibly damage his disregarding attitude towards other religions and, through

²³⁰ *Hristiyanlık* and *İsevilik* are both Turkish translations of Christianity, and they are semantically denote the same thing. What Kısakürek attempts to do here is to distinguish *Hristiyanlık* as the rightful religion until the prophet Muhammed came from *İsevilik* that seems to denote the religious denomination of contemporary Christians. In so doing, Kısakürek denies post-Muhammed Christianity as a rightful religion.

²³¹ Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 34.

²³² Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 154.

this attitude, his attempt to bolster the feeling of superiority among his Muslim audience.

Kısakürek's dismissive attitude to other religions extends to his writings on non-Sunni orientations within Islam as well. His writings on Islam/religion are marked by a profound Sunni bias where Shiism and Khawarij are associated with heresy and deformation of Islamic religious and political unity. Concerning the status of Alevis in Turkey, Kısakürek suggests an assimilative policy to sunnify the existing Alevi population.²³³ The stress on Sunnism and distaste with Shiite sects were attitudes Kısakürek shares with Topçu. Nevertheless, Kısakürek's Sunnism has a strong religious background unlike Topçu's nationalistic concerns. Kısakürek's is a deeply conservative Sunnism where the companions of the prophet were regarded as infallible saints of Islam. As a conventional Sunni fanatic, Kısakürek emphasizes the hazards of criticizing or talking negatively about the companions. In this narrative, Shiites and Khawarij are heretical right from they emerged in the 7th century for they blemished the prophet's closest companions and rebelled against them.²³⁴ Thus, Kısakürek's hostility towards non-Sunni groups is related to his conception of Islam.

It is important to note the discrepancy between Kısakürek's attitude towards other religions and that of Topçu to distinguish their conceptions of religion. Foremost, Kısakürek is convinced that Islam is the only true religion and God ordained it for the salvation of whole humanity. Unlike Topçu, he does not express any sympathy with any other religions that mean for him the deviant paths in the search for the truth. This apathy accounts for the absence of a discussion on an abstract notion of

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

religion in Kısakürek's writings. Since God ordains it, individual discovery of the concept of God or the religion, or the historical evolution of the religious thought, are beside the point for Kısakürek. It is for this reason that I could not elaborate on these points in my discussion of Kısakürek's conception of Islam. Leaving this aside, as I have tried to demonstrate, the locus of dispute between Topçu and Kısakürek concerning the conception of Islam is on the core of Islam—as to whether it is spiritual experience or sharia. This is a deep conflict one would not expect from these two thinkers who were both attached to Sufi sheikhs of the same branch of the same tariqa.

IV.I.III. Topçu and Kısakürek on Sufism

Both Topçu and Kısakürek were known adherents of two Sufi sheikhs of Khalidi branch of Naqshbandi tariqa. Sufism at the outset offers a spiritual and mystical experience of Islam as opposed to material or formal understandings and practices of Islam—so we know, at least. Why, then, did Kısakürek who seemed to be deeply attached to a Sufi tariqa espouse material conception of Islam in his writings? The answer may be found in the doctrines of Khalidiyya that is known with its members' strong emphasis on the material aspect of Islam, i.e. sharia. While Khalidi doctrines featuring sharia as the basis of religion may explain Kısakürek's adherence to this suborder given his conception of religion and of Islam, there may be question marks over Topçu's interest in Khalidiyya. To scrutinize this issue, we need to understand what Topçu and Kısakürek understand from Sufism, what kind of Islam Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya preaches, and how Topçu and Kısakürek relate themselves to Sufism and their sheikhs.

Kısakürek seems to embrace an orthodox version of Sufi Islam as preached by his sheikh Abdülhakim Arvasi. He was already familiar with spiritualist and mystical thought through intellectual circles he joined in the early years of his adulthood. French spiritualist thought, notably the works of Henri Bergson, was especially influential among conservative intellectual circles around Kısakürek during the years of national struggle and early Republican period.²³⁵ While these influences might offer Kısakürek an intellectual orientation alternative to materialism and positivism, they nevertheless did not generate any significant, consistent and sustained notion of spirituality. For that, Kısakürek had to wait until his initiation to Sufism through Arvasi. Kısakürek's devotion to Arvasi manifested itself most obviously in his autobiography *O ve Ben* in which he suggested his initiation to Arvasi as the turning point of his life. His was a total submission to the sheikh's authority that was a gateway for a submission to the whole lineage and tradition of Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya. Kısakürek himself acknowledges that the whole body of knowledge he had regarding Sufism and Islam at large came from Arvasi whom Kısakürek described as "my savior" and "my guide".²³⁶ With the knowledge he acquired from Arvasi, Kısakürek wrote about books on Islam, and particularly about Naqshbandiyya such as *Tasavvuf Bahçeleri* (Gardens of Sufism), *Reşahat* (Dispersions), *Rabita-i Şerife* (Glorious Link), *Mektubat* (Letters), *Halkadan Pırıltılar* (Gleams from the Ring), *Büyük Kapı* (The Great Gate), *Başbuğ Velilerden* (Of the Chief Saints), *Altın Silsile* (Golden Chain), *İman ve İslam Atlası* (Atlas of Faith and Islam), and *Çöle İnen Nur* (The Light Descended on Desert). While Kısakürek aims to introduce Sufism to the broader public with these books, he also

²³⁵ Celal Nazım İrem, "Bergson and Politics: Ottoman-Turkish Encounters with Innovation", *The European Legacy* 16, no. 7 (December 2011): 873–82.

²³⁶ Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 103.

manifests his adherence to the whole institution of Khalidiyya from its doctrines, rituals and tradition to its lineage. Hence, on the one hand, Arvasi appears to be an absolute guide to Kısakürek and there established a conventional sheikh-disciple relationship between them; and on the other hand, Kısakürek's adherence to Khalidiyya extends beyond Arvasi's personality. Kısakürek's allegiance to Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya is so strong that even examples of belittlement of other (Sunni) Sufi orders exist in his corpus.

Khalidi branch of Naqshbandiyya is an offshoot of Mujaddidi movement, and founded around the early 19th century by Mawlana Khalid (1776-1827), a Sufi master originally from Iraqi Kurdistan. Mawlana Khalid maintained the sharia-centered Sufi teachings of Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya to combat Western influences in Muslim-populated lands.²³⁷ To this end, he took an aggressive strategy to expand the domain of influence of his movement by assigning deputies (khulafa) to different parts of the Muslim World and encouraging them to establish ties with state officials. His movement has become especially influential in Kurdistan, Syria, Anatolia and Caucasus.²³⁸ Throughout the 19th century, Khalidiyya have become one of the most dominant religious groups in the Ottoman Empire exploiting the opportunity created by sidelining of the Bektashi tariqa with the abolishment of Janissary corps.²³⁹ While the republican policies banishing the Sufi tariqas, seminaries and lodges in the 1920's led to dissociation or marginalization of many Sufi orders, Khalidi branch of Naqshbandiyya managed to survive under the ground.

²³⁷ M. Brett Wilson, "Binding with a Perfect Sufi Master: Naqshbandī Defenses of *raḥīṭa* from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic", *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 1 (12 March 2020): 56–78.

²³⁸ Abu-Manneh, *Studies on Islam*.

²³⁹ Ibid.

The unofficial lodges of the order became the magnet for individuals with Islamic sensibilities. Starting from the 1950's Khalidiyya played a crucial role in the re-awakening of Islam in the republican Turkey.²⁴⁰ Among the reasons behind the success of the order were its ability to establish ties with the political elite, its popularity among religious officials thanks to its stress on orthodoxy, sharia and Sunnism, and its strict organizational scheme around the charisma of Sheikh Khalid.²⁴¹

Kısakürek's sheikh Abdülhakim Arvasi was originally from Kurdistan, the heartland of Khalidiyya, and among the fourth generation of Mawlana Khalid's deputies. Hence, Kısakürek's understanding of Sufism rests strictly on the Naqshbandi-Khalidi version. His aforementioned subordination of Sufism to sharia is the most salient aspect of Kısakürek's adherence to Khalidiyya. Nevertheless, Kısakürek, like other followers of Khalidiyya, still takes Sufism as an indispensable element of religion and defends it against anti-Sufi currents among modern Islamic intellectual movements. Responding to arguments disfavoring Sufism as an example of bid'ah, Kısakürek suggests "Sufism is the spiritual trust of Him [the prophet Muhammed]! Sufism is His inner part! Sufism is His essence!.." ²⁴² Sufism is so significant for Kısakürek that it may be liken to the soul without which the body (sharia) becomes a mere corp. Surprisingly, however, Kısakürek explains in detail what Sufism is not while remaining ambivalent and unclear in defining the nature of Sufi experience. Instead, he features the formal aspects of Sufi Islam such as the lineage of the order,

²⁴⁰ Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism".

²⁴¹ Abu Manneh, *Studies on Islam*; Wilson "Binding with".

²⁴² Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 105.

Sufi practices such as *rabıta* and *dhikr*, and the importance of historical figures such as Ahmad Sirhindi and Mawlana Khalid.

Contrarily, Nurettin Topçu's reflections on Sufism do not have any trace of adherence to Khalidiyya, or any other Sufi order for that matter. This is despite his initiation to Abdülaziz Bekkine who was a member of the Khalidi branch of Naqshbandiyya, similar to Kısakürek's sheikh Abdülhakim Arvasi.²⁴³ As indicated, Topçu was already familiar with spiritualism and mystical thought before his initiation to Bekkine. Blondel's philosophy of action inspired him to acknowledge that the authentic form of religious experience was an individual spiritual search for God, the transcendental being. Moreover, during his studies in France he became familiar with different, more heterodox, versions of Sufism and focused on Mansur Al-Hallaj in his dissertation. Hence, Topçu developed his own understanding of Sufism before his initiation to Bekkine who appears to be a companion rather than an absolute mentor in Topçu's search for a spiritual experience. For instance, although his biographies highlight his affection to Bekkine, his name appears only twice in Topçu's whole corpus.²⁴⁴ Nor does he refer to Khalidiyya, Naqshbandiyya, or another Sufi order in his writings.

Topçu conceives Sufism as an inner mystical experience to reach the divine truth whose counterparts could be observed in other religions or doctrines. In this sense,

²⁴³ Although Bekkine's and Arvasi's approaches to Islam and Sufism are beyond the limits of this dissertation, differences in their backgrounds might be helpful. Bekkine was an emigre from Kazan (Russia) which was a hub for a cluster of renewalist ulema known as "ceditçiler" in Turkish. Bekkine was probably a follower of Hanafi School of Islamic law that is arguably the most rationalist one among the four mainstream madhhab in Sunni Islam. Arvasi, on the other hand, was from Kurdistan, the epicenter of Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya. He was of traditionalist Shafii School of Islamic law.

²⁴⁴ Both of these references were in *İslam ve İnsan* and related to general moral principles laid out in Islamic sources. See Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 91, 103.

Sufism in Topçu appears as the Islamic form of a spiritual method practiced in Christianity, Hinduism and other religions, and even in philosophy. After suggesting that Sufism is in fact Islamic mysticism and no different than mystical thought of other religions, Topçu goes onto explain the formation of Sufism in Islam under the influence of philosophy and earlier mystical thought of other religions:

In Greece, Plato's theory of the ideal realm of contemplation brought forth the new Platonic view in Plotinus, who was later one of the founders of the Alexandria school. According to Plotinus, the mysticism is the crown of metaphysics. Mysticism is metaphysics lived to the fullest. Plotinus' philosophy is an agreement of both transcendence and togetherness between God and the world. The influence of Alexandrian philosophy spread as far as India; mixed with Christian elements; entered Islam. Traces of Platonism can be seen in Islamic mysticism.²⁴⁵

In line with his philosophy of action and arguments for the evolution of religious/spiritual thought, Topçu sees Sufism as the culmination of the inner mystical search that passed through Greek philosophy, Hinduism, and eventually Christianity and Islam. The exception of the Islamic way in the mystical experience, i.e. Sufism, for Topçu would be the idea of an unmediated contact with the transcendental being exemplified in the incidence of mi'raj (*miraç*) where the prophet Muhammed was believed to appear before God.²⁴⁶

In these passages on Sufism, Topçu always features the centrality of inner spiritual experience and contemplation instead of known practices and rituals of established Sufi orders. Note that Topçu does not discredit the place of these formal aspects of Sufism or Islam in general. As an observant Muslim himself, he acknowledges the role of formal practices, rituals, prayers or other rules in facilitating the experience of

²⁴⁵ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 132.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

religion whose foundation, nevertheless, could not be those formalities. Concerning the relationship between the sharia and Sufism for example, Topçu maintains that

In Islam, those who put the sharia, that is, the law that governs actions of the believer from outside, above the individual's inner experience, were called shariatists [*"şariatçılar"*]. They took religion not as life, but as law and discipline; they never touched the individual's dough. For the Sufis, there was no question of denying the sharia. They simply accepted that it was the shell and that the essence of religion was lived through inner experience.

It can be seen that Sufism and sharia are not two parallel paths in religion. Sufism is the core and kernel of religion, and sharia is its fruit-preserving skin.²⁴⁷

Topçu's remark on Sufism as the essence of religion while the sharia as its protective shell converges with that of Kısakürek who suggested Sufism as the *"batın"* and sharia as the *"zahir"* of religion. The disagreement seems to be a matter of priority for Topçu took Sufism as the basis of religion whereas Kısakürek argued for the otherwise. This difference, however it may seem trivial, have significant implications in terms of Topçu's and Kısakürek's conceptions of Sufism in particular and Islam in general. In this sense, it is not surprising after all that Topçu defines religion in terms of personal spiritual experience while Kısakürek features a formal conception of religion. More importantly, as I discuss in detail below, these differing orders of priority reflected on Topçu's and Kısakürek's ideas about change or reform in religion.

The discussion thus far has manifested significant divergence between Topçu's and Kısakürek's understandings of Sufism and Sufi experience. To recapitulate, since Topçu identifies Sufism with metaphysical search for reaching God, he sees resemblances between Sufism and other metaphysical efforts—religious or philosophical. For Kısakürek, connecting Sufism to philosophy or mystical sects in

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 133.

other religions is an outrageous disgrace for Sufi Islam that ostensibly rests only on the prophetic tradition.²⁴⁸ Moreover, Topçu, by emphasizing inner search and metaphysical contemplation, offers a rather individual-oriented understanding of Sufism. On the other hand, we see no reference to individual in Kısakürek's version. In his writings, the personal mystical experience seems to be of secondary importance compared to the authority and established doctrines of Sufi elders within the Khalidi lineage. Concerning Sufi experience Kısakürek often refers to the practice called "rabita", the attachment of the disciple to the sheikh by envisioning the his image.²⁴⁹ By invoking *rabita*, Kısakürek aims to solidify the authority of the Sufi sheikh and the whole order creating a communal identity for order's followers. In addition, Kısakürek stresses the role of the sheikh in mediating the relationship between God and the believer who is supposed to lose his/her way without the sheik's guidance.²⁵⁰ Thus, in featuring *rabita*, Kısakürek contradicts what Topçu believes to be the unique aspect of Sufism with respect to other metaphysical doctrines, namely the unmediated relationship with the God.

IV.II. Epistemology, Sources and the Idea of Change in Islamic

Knowledge

Relationship with Islamic knowledge in particular and knowledge in general—by which I mean an overall approach to epistemology, acknowledged sources of

²⁴⁸ In the beginning of his *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu*, Kısakürek maintains that "according to the unfortunate types who have reached a little bit of Western culture... Sufism was derived from the Alexandria school (Neo-Platonism) and adopted to bring color and air to Islam, which they saw as dry... Supposedly a more cultured one of blasphemous views..." See Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 11.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 151-52.

²⁵⁰ For instance, in *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, Kısakürek suggests that "again, some of them, with the roughest primary school knowledge and the most vulgar literacy effort, make a refrain in the most ridiculous form of consolation formulas in the world; "No one can come between Allah and his creature; this work does not accept mediation!"... These incurable fools cannot comprehend the misery of the claim of lack of guidance on the endless intricate road leading to Allah, even when they need a guide to go from Üsküdar to Beşiktaş." See Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 160.

knowledge, uses of these sources, and significance of knowledge itself—is closely related to, and a crucial dimension of, conceptions of Islam. Hence, major divisions around conceptions of Islam have emerged throughout Islamic history out of contestations on Islamic knowledge. Analyses of these divisions point out three ideal-typical epistemological positions within Islamic intellectual space: (I) *beyan* taking revelation and/or dogma as its prime movers; (II) *burhan* acknowledging reason the real source of knowledge; and (III) *irfan* featuring intuition and mystical experience to attain the knowledge of the divine.²⁵¹ I note these positions as ideal-types for actual intellectuals or movements might synthesize two or all three of them to arrive at different conclusions. For instance, one may think that Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, given their connection to Sufism, are close to the third position, i.e. *irfan*. However, as I have discussed, Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi movement equally features intuition and revelation/dogma. Kısakürek, as an adherent of Khalidiyya branch of Naqshbandiyya, follows this path and enunciates his *tariqa*’s epistemological position in his writings. Topçu, on the other hand, represents a rather complex position alternating between all three positions in his considerations on different issues and circumstances.

In order to analyze Topçu’s and Kısakürek’s overall approach to epistemology, I start with a discussion on the sources of knowledge they admitted legitimate and how they related themselves to these sources in their writings. Qur’an and Sunnah, of course, are the fundamental sources of Islamic knowledge; but different epistemological approaches are distinguished through their uses of these sources. In line with *beyanî*

²⁵¹ For a discussion of this tripartite division in Islamic epistemology, see Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

(or we may call, traditionalist) approaches, Topçu's and Kısakürek's references to these sources do not go beyond taking well-known passages from Qur'an and the sayings of the prophet Muhammed as testimonies. Neither Topçu nor Kısakürek have any attempt to interpret these sources to recover meanings that could be different from conventional understandings.

A crucial difference, however, arose in their attitude towards the possibility of this attempt. Kısakürek maintains his *mukaddesatçı* position in contradistinction to the project of Islamism, and unequivocally advocates the implausibility of reinterpreting primary Islamic sources to arrive at new rules and prescriptions. Foremost, Kısakürek does not admit rational analysis of Islamic sources of knowledge as a legitimate form of knowledge production. He asserts that legitimate sources of knowledge in Islam have been made clear within the tradition of Sunni Orthodoxy:

The Book, the Qur'an... The Sunnah, every word, every command, every action of the Messenger of Allah... Consensus [*"icma"*], the collective judgments on which the umma, that is, the Companions most worthy of the qualification of being an umma and the highest grade, agree on... Analogy [*"kıyas"*], inventions of religious scholars by way of proportion...²⁵²

Evident in this list given by Kısakürek is his second point of objection to free and unmediated readings of the primary Islamic sources. For him, the capacity to interpret these sources and to derive new principles out of them could in no way within an ordinary Muslim's means. As a strict adherent of Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, Kısakürek holds that Islamic knowledge could not be re-produced by interpreting the sources; accordingly, it could only be transmitted from the Sufi sheikh to his disciples via spiritual means.²⁵³ It is for this reason that Kısakürek finds

²⁵² Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 94.

²⁵³ Wilson, "Binding with".

the authority claims of new Islamists outrageous and often accuses them of blasphemy.²⁵⁴

Whereas Topçu, despite his discontent with the newly emerging Islamists who denounce historical traditions and contextual differences in lived Islam in their calls for returning to the pristine sources, does not reject the possibility of analyzing and interpreting Qur'an and Sunnah. Maintaining that readings of Qur'an has to be inspired by central figures of Sufi tradition, Topçu suggests that

Here, the first herald of our renaissance will be the lucky one who does this: analyzing the Qur'an through the good conversation of Hallajs, Ghazalis and Mevlanas with Platos and Kants, Pascals, Bergsons and Blondels by combining the insatiable love of the formers with the understanding and methods of the latters; then, making metaphysics of the universe and human philosophy with the elements of this analysis...²⁵⁵

From the perspective of the current discussion, the pronounced point of this passage—which in fact comprehensively summarizes Topçu's epistemological position and its differences from that of Kısakürek—is Topçu's rendition of Qur'an as something analyzable which would be unacceptable from Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçı* position. Thus, Topçu does not conceive Qur'an as a sacred, and hence untouchable, source in the production of Islamic knowledge—though he himself never attempts to touch it directly. Instead, he refers to a future generation of ulema who supposedly would immerse in Sufi tradition and contemporary spiritualist philosophy to offer new readings of Qur'an.

In addition to the primary Islamic sources, both Topçu and Kısakürek frequently refer to, not surprisingly, figures of Sufi Islam. The most conspicuous commonality

²⁵⁴ Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*.

²⁵⁵ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 106.

in their writings is perhaps their great respect for Al-Ghazali (1058-1111). He is by far the most frequently referred name within Islamic intellectual history in the writings of both. Nonetheless, their approaches to the legacy of Al-Ghazali are so different that it is necessary to quote their reflections at length in order to see differences in their overall epistemological positions as well. In *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* published in 1982 based on a series of speeches he delivered in the early 1960's, Kısakürek tells the anecdote below to introduce Al-Ghazali to his audience:

The eternally forward-looking views of such an advanced man, of course, are not tolerated by some of the vulgar zealots of his era - we can safely say here - and they went on to accuse him. After that, Imam al-Ghazali became the "Proof of Islam" [*Hüccet-ül İslam*"].

Yes; they were mistaken. But that erring person was still very merciful; he was a benevolent person who achieved something like this:

He sees the Messenger of Allah in his night dreams. Along with the Companions... Imam al-Ghazali also appears in the dream... He [al-Ghazali] has his [own] work. He extends the work to the Messenger of Allah.

Then he shows the erring person:

— O Messenger of Allah, I am a complainant about this man!

The Messenger of Allah takes the work with a smile; and he orders the one who gives this fatwa to be beaten. They beat him in a dream.

And after that erring person wakes up, he immediately apologizes to Imam al-Ghazali...

This is Imam al-Ghazali!²⁵⁶

Compare the gist of this passage, which points to the unquestionable authority of Al-Ghazali, with a passage from Topçu's *Türkiye'nin Maarif Davası* first published around the same time in the 1960's:

Although the great philosopher Avicenna (Ibn-i Sina) and the great theologian al-Ghazali have many dogmatic [*"nassî"*] views that are always alive and standing, there are also general ideas that have lost their scientific value and should be attributed to the history of science. It is natural that this is so. Human intelligence cannot reveal eternal truths with a single move. Like Aristotle, the ideas of Avicenna and al-Ghazali are the first steps of the ladder of knowledge. To get to the top, more steps are needed in between. All of them are necessary. Scientific truth is

²⁵⁶ Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 189-90.

always found on the top step; the lower steps are the means to raise there. When the upper steps are reached, they have now completed their work. After arriving from Aristotle's theory of simple elements to today's understanding of the atom, Aristotle cannot have a say in today's truth debate. Today, when investigating the structure of matter, we no longer make Aristotle the referee. The phrase “Aristotle said so” is not taken into account when making scientific judgments.²⁵⁷

Note that Kısakürek characterizes Al-Ghazali's views as eternally advanced, hence valid and binding, whereas Topçu emphasizes temporality of Al-Ghazali's actual ideas by differentiating them from his still-valid reflections on the faith. This distinction illuminates further differences between Topçu's and Kısakürek's relationships with the concept of knowledge from a broader perspective.

Kısakürek represents an example to the Sunni traditionalism of Naqshbandiyya, which in addition to primary Islamic sources, takes authoritative scholars of Sunni orthodoxy and elders of Sunni-oriented Sufism as unquestionable and unreviewable sources. He does not give any room to reason within the domain of religion as well as knowledge emanated from and conveyed through religious sources. Featuring of mystical and supernatural factors to revere the legacy of Al-Ghazali in the passage above, instead of a discussion on the power of the latter's ideas, is a case in point. Likewise, Kısakürek frequently registers similar mystical stories to legitimate elders of Sufism and Sunni Islam—which is in fact a common practice within traditionalist Sufi circles. Given that the legitimacy of the views of these authorities rested on mystical and supernatural factors, it is not surprising to see Kısakürek's denunciation of rational means to analyze and interpret them.

²⁵⁷ Topçu, *Türkiye'nin Maarif Davası*, 82.

Defining religion as a mystical experience of God, Topçu too associates religious knowledge with the mystical and the supernatural. However, what he refers to as religious knowledge is knowledge of faith itself, the nature of the relationship between God and individual human beings. Evident from his reflections on the legacy of Al-Ghazali, Topçu makes a distinction between knowledge concerning the domain of faith (dogma) and knowledge within the realms of reason and science.²⁵⁸ Accordingly, faith itself is dogmatic, or perhaps primordial and eternal, and not subject to rational and/or empirical inquiries. Things outside the sphere of faith, however, including rules and principles laid out in religious sources that aim to organize social life, politics, and economy and so on are open to re-evaluation, interpretation and change through rational means.

Hence, the salient and manifested difference between Topçu and Kısakürek around the idea of change and reform within Islam. For Kısakürek, religion=Islam denotes a total system of ideas, practices and rules laid out by sources of knowledge he conceived to be legitimate following Khalidi doctrines. The idea of reform in this total system is a total disgrace from the perspective of Kısakürek who persistently associates reformism with blasphemy. For him, those who advocated reforming Islam are

none other than a secret unbeliever who tries to alter the sharia, the table of unchangeable formulas of religion, according to his wishes; that is, he

²⁵⁸ Topçu's distinction reminded, and was partly influenced by, Kant's distinction between reason and faith as two separate domains. Kant argues that the free will, God and the immortality of the soul was necessary presuppositions of morality. Yet, the knowledge of these presuppositions is not attainable through reasoning. It is for this reason that he "found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith". See Andrew Ward, *Kant: The Three Critics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 12. In so doing, Kant separates the domain of the divine from the domain of the reason. Here Topçu registered to a similar separation.

treats religion in the plan of social benefit and corrupts it from being absolute servitude to Allah.²⁵⁹

Note that—whether or not Kısakürek had Nurettin Topçu in mind when he was writing these lines—this severe accusation directs towards Topçu as well for he advances the necessity of a reform in Islam. In a passage addressing Kısakürek and like-minded Muslims, Topçu suggests

Those who become enraged when demands for reform in Islam are put forward should know that a reform that will purify themselves and bring Islam back to its true origin by freeing it from the fallacies of “the crowd of people claiming to be Muslim” is absolutely necessary in order to revive the spirit of Islam. It is their existence that hinders such a reform, that is, the reform movement, and this reform movement will first clean them up. We want their souls to be cleansed before anyone else.²⁶⁰

Topçu conceives reform not as a change in the essence of religion but as a process that would help restoring its authentic form. Given the changing historical and social context, he believes in the necessity of restoring the faith by reforming religion. Reiterating his contempt for the conception of Islam among contemporaneous Muslims in Turkey, Topçu criticizes Muslims who categorically rejected the idea of Islamic reform for being irrational and fanatic.

Last but not the least, the difference between Topçu’s and Kısakürek’s relationship with the concept of knowledge, as an important dimension of their conceptions of

²⁵⁹ Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 158. Kısakürek acknowledges that religion as a total system necessitated renewal every once in while through removing bid’ah—as did Ahmad Sirhindi in the beginning of the second Islamic millennium. The renewal does not mean for Kısakürek amending the system of religious principles through ijtihad, i.e. creative interpretation of primary Islamic sources to arrive at new conclusions that were otherwise absent in the sharia. Kısakürek unequivocally rejects the possibility of ijtihad with a justification that manifests his traditionalist approach to knowledge: “In our period and in every period, the gate of ijtihad is wide open. It is certain that prophet and messenger [‘Nebi ve Resul’] will not come... But there is no provision that a mujtahid will not come. So much so that this point, which was released in the realm of possibility, has been turned into an impossible in terms of the conditions demanded by that realm. It would be correct to say that it is impossible for prophet and messenger to come, and impossible for new mujtahids to come. It is such an ‘impossible’ that it is possible in abstraction, but not in practice...” See Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 98.

²⁶⁰ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 26.

Islam, is crystallized in their reflections on Islam in relation to other doctrines of truth. While Kısakürek, based on his conception of Islam-as-identity, offers an identitarian notion of knowledge, Topçu has a rather holistic approach to knowledge informed by his conception of Islam-as-morality based on the *wahdat al-wujud* doctrine. Reification of methods and principles in the sources of knowledge seen legitimate by Kısakürek renders a notion of Islamic knowledge that is fundamentally distinct from sorts of knowledge produced by non-Muslims.²⁶¹ Moreover, the supposedly distinct Islamic knowledge, following Kısakürek's conception, represents a systematic whole in the form of an ideology that is conceived in contradistinction to, and superior to, other ideologies, methods and doctrines of truth—including not only other religions and major political ideologies but also philosophical schools and entire corpus of metaphysics.²⁶²

We have already seen how Topçu responds to the rendition of Islam as an ideology competing with other doctrines of truth in a quotation towards the end of the previous section. To recall, Topçu suggests that religion is not a contention at all; it is

²⁶¹ Note that Kısakürek's notion of Islamic knowledge preceded the so-called Islamization of knowledge debates in the 1980's and the 1990's. For a critical examination of these debates which were initiated mainly by Muslim intellectuals of South and Southeast Asian origin and created repercussions all around the Muslim world including Turkey, see Bassam Tibi, "Culture and Knowledge: The Politics of Islamization of Knowledge as a Postmodern Project? The Fundamentalist Claim to De-Westernization", *Theory, Culture and Society* 12, no. 1 (February 1995): 1–24.

²⁶² Kısakürek sees a contradistinction between religion and philosophy. Accordingly, while religion is the source that gives the truth already, philosophy is the way to seek the truth without ever achieving it. For him, "Philosophy is a free search for truth without any starting point. The word comes from combination of two words (*filos* and *zofos*). It is Greek... It means 'friendship of wisdom'... It does not believe in anything in advance. Or, there is no such thing as belief in advance in its system... It says 'I will find the truth, I am subject to it' and searches without a head, endlessly. Like an object hidden in a room... Philosophy is the institution of seeking the hidden thing, the abstract, in the universe... Religion is the way to inform the hidden thing in the room in advance... How is it allowed to search further while that certain thing is still in place? This may be the best explanation... Pascal has arrived at this subtle truth... It [philosophy] is an endless struggle of ideas towards the eternal obscurity, around the point of the promised 'thing'... This [finding the promised thing] is the duty of the mind. Its name is wisdom [*hikmet*], not philosophy. Philosophy is not the way to find, but to search desperately..." Then, a few pages later, he adds, "We are excused to see philosophy as a historical delirium, a table of delusions, as a state of heresy, denial and confusion of ideas. Nor can it bring morality; even if it does, it cannot sanction [morality]..." See Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 15, 17.

the whole life itself. Inspired by Sufi doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, Topçu conceives all the existence as manifestations of the divine being. True that, for him, the knowledge of the divine is beyond reason, and this knowledge emanated from religious sources. He maintains, however, that knowledge of “this world” is universal, and that the distinction between Islamic and un-Islamic knowledge is nonsensical. Accordingly,

Another mistake in the understanding of religion is that of the understanding of the cause. This mistake is the fault of those who regard religion as a source of knowledge. They defended religion by either reconciling the Qur'an's explanations of the universe, which are symbolic in reality, with the truths revealed by sciences that are progressing every day, or by arguing against them and rejecting science.²⁶³

Reiterating his contempt for contemporaneous Muslims, Topçu criticizes appealing to religion as a source of knowledge—thereby rejecting the identitarian notion of knowledge espoused by Kısakürek. It is important to note that Topçu's concern is not only practical scientific knowledge but also in areas and aspects of life within the purview of sharia, for he suggests, in an above-quoted passage, that Qur'an ought to be read through the insights from “Hallacs, Gazalis and Mevlanas” along with “Platos and Kants, and Pascals, Bergsons and Blondels”.

IV.III. Concluding Remarks

Although Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek offer critiques of Turkish modernization based on a sense that Islam have been sidelined in the process of secularizing and westernizing modernization, the discussion in this chapter concerning the meaning of Islam and the nature of Islamic knowledge suggested that Islam does not signify the same thing for them. Hence, this chapter, I hope, made the

²⁶³ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 92.

case for my first argument in this dissertation—that is, Topçu and Kısakürek espouse alternative and, more importantly, incompatible conceptions of Islam in their writings. The difference manifests itself right from the way they discuss the concept of religion. While Topçu identifies religion as a metaphysical category in human history through which he posits the meaning of Islam, Kısakürek acknowledges the religion as Islam that exists primordially, was ordained by God, and beyond the realm of intellectual inquiry. Furthermore, Topçu features inner mystical experience and the search for connecting and eventually uniting with the transcendental as the foundation of religion. As such, Islam appears as a framework for this search for imminence; while the rules and rituals Islam prescribes is understood as catalyzers of individual's divine experience. Kısakürek, on the other hand, sees the sharia as a comprehensive, binding and immutable system of rules and beliefs which, for him, stands for the basis of religion=Islam. Although Sufi experience as practiced within the Khalidi tradition is central to Kısakürek's conception of Islam, he designates Sufism as a secondary factor in the constitution of Islam by emphasizing its formal aspects.

These differing views on the meaning of Islam are reflected well in Topçu's and Kısakürek's overall relationship with Islamic knowledge in particular and the concept of knowledge in general. While Kısakürek sees the sources of knowledge acknowledged by the Sunni orthodoxy as immutable and closed to interpretation, Topçu conceives knowledge production as a dynamic process where there are both general principles related to the faith which are dogmatic and rules and regulations concerning social, political and daily lives of Muslims which are open to change in accordance with the tradition and the exigencies of the context. Thereby, Kısakürek

reifies Islam itself as well as the notion of knowledge, and discusses these on a strictly identitarian ground. Islam in his writings appears to be an entity that Muslims possess by adhering to its supposedly well-defined and immutable principles, rules and beliefs. Contrarily, Topçu conceives Islam as a way through which an individual becomes a Muslim, not by observing a definite set of rules and rituals, but by leading a moral life and seeking for imminence with the divine.

Hence, Muslimness in Kısakürek represents a distinct state of being—an identity which was fundamentally different from other states of being, other identities. Topçu resists this identitarian conception of Islam and Muslimness by representing the latter as a state of becoming which is not in the monopoly of Islam. In delineating these differences, I aimed to show in this chapter the problems of taking Islam for granted without attending to its understandings and uses by Muslim intellectuals who are casually juxtaposed in the same camp of the secular religious duality. As I show in the coming chapters, the differences in Topçu's and Kısakürek's conceptions of Islam have further implications in terms of their views on modernization and social change, and on the relationship between Islam and politics.

CHAPTER V: ISLAM IN MODERN CONTEXT: THE WEST, WESTERNIZATION AND MODERNITY

Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek gained their reputation as leading critics of the Turkish modernization process—and of Kemalism seen as the epitome and ultimate model of modernization-as-westernization. It is important to note, before else, that they are not the only ones who critically reflect on the modernization process. Not only other Muslim intellectuals but also intellectuals from a broad spectrum, from the left to the right, express their discontents and formulated their own critiques of Turkish modernization in general, and Kemalism in particular.²⁶⁴ In fact, it would not be farfetched to characterize the development of Turkish political thought as a body of critical reflections on the modernization process—of which Topçu and Kısakürek are two important parts. Nonetheless, paradigmatic hegemony of the secular-religious duality in the analysis of Turkish politics and society reduces this otherwise rich intellectual space to a binary cleavage between secular- or

²⁶⁴ For the leftist critiques of Turkish modernization, see for instance Niyazi Berkes, *Türk Düşününde Batı Sorunu* (İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975); Sakir Dincsaahin, *State and Intellectuals in Turkey: The Life and Times of Niyazi Berkes, 1908–1988* (London: Lexington Books, 2015); Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni: Dün, Bugün, Yarın* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi, 2018); and İdris Küçükömer, *Düzenin Yabancılaşması: Batılılaşma* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1969). For other critics of Turkish modernization that are not directly inspired by Islamic sensibilities, see Aytürk, “The Racist Critics of Atatürk”; İrem, “Turkish Conservative Modernism”; Sezer, “The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity”; and Duygu Köksal, “Fine-Tuning Nationalism: Critical Perspectives from Republican Literature in Turkey”, *Turkish Studies* 2, no. 2 (September 2001): 63–84.

western-minded intellectuals and their supposedly Islam-inspired contenders.²⁶⁵

Topçu and Kısakürek are juxtaposed in the religious side of the duality by downplaying differences between their reflections of Turkish modernization in particular and the notion of West and of modernity in general. True that, as I have suggested, Topçu and Kısakürek comes together in their conviction on the worth and validity of religion against positivism in general, and Islam against Orientalist and modernist charges in particular. In as much as this conviction distinguishes them from other sorts of criticisms against Turkish modernization, fundamental discrepancies in their conceptions of Islam differentiate their reflections on the West in relation to Islam as well as the contents of their critiques of modernization.

Similarities between Topçu and Kısakürek are on the surface and easy to demonstrate. Both are regarded as people who had westernized education, knew the West but still advocated for the significance of Islam. This is perhaps the main reason that distinguishes the two, in the eyes of their followers, from other Muslim intellectuals in Turkey. Ironically, they were much more westernized both in their backgrounds and in lifestyles than a great part of the rest of Turkish society, especially their audience. Furthermore, they both relied on similar sources to discuss the West. Topçu and Kısakürek were especially familiar with and influenced by a particular cluster of Western intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries whose work challenged Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and progress, as well as optimism for the future of Civilization in the singular (that is, Western civilization). These include but not limited to Nietzsche, Bergson, Blondel and Heidegger. Inspiration from the critical voices within the West gave them an intellectual

²⁶⁵ Especially lost in this narrative the voice of leftist critics of Turkish modernization that were usually subsumed in an imagined Kemalist body.

advantage against those who embraced Enlightenment ideals, positivism and the quest for a wholesale westernization. These one-sided sources of influence, however, overshadow their reflections on the West and that of their followers as well as broader circles with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities as their knowledge of the West heavily draw on these two.

Topçu's and Kısakürek's distinct notions of knowledge based on their conceptions of Islam suggest that it is not knowledge of or reference to a particular source but uses of this knowledge that matters in a critical analysis of the text. Likewise, the overt similarities notwithstanding, Topçu and Kısakürek follow rather distinct paths in their critiques of Turkish modernization, and in relation, in their reflections on the notions of the West and modernity—accompanied by different remedies they offered to correct the wrongs of Turkish modernization. The distinction, as I argue, lies in the differences in their conceptions of Islam. To the extent that Topçu and Kısakürek associate Turkish modernization with westernization and include in their critiques debates of the West and modernity, this chapter takes up the previous one by relating their reflections on these issues into their views on the status of Islam in modernization process.

Kısakürek's conception of Islam-as-identity informs his totalizing vision of Muslim identity, in essential contradistinction to others, through which he makes sense of political processes in Turkey, and the world at large, based on an in-group/out-group duality.²⁶⁶ His narrative reads the dynamics of the whole history of Turkish

²⁶⁶ In-group bias, or in-group out-group duality, is a central subject in social psychology that is treated around the social identity theory advanced by practitioners of the field. For an oft-cited attempt to connect social identity theory and in-group bias to politics, see Leonie Huddy, "From Social to

modernization since the 19th century as a tug-of-war between the so-called secular- and Western-minded modernizers and those who have Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities. While sharing the secular-religious duality posed by the political discourse of modernization, Kısakürek rejects the singular vision of modernity offered by this discourse. He argues for an alternative, an Islamic, modernity that is supposedly appropriate material developments of the Western modernity by retaining Muslim identity. Topçu diverges from Kısakürek most saliently in this point by insisting that the idea of an Islamic modernity through adopting modern technology and capitalistic development would have detrimental consequences for Islam-as-morality. Without essentializing differences between the West and Muslims, Topçu argues that modern processes such as the development of capitalism and the dazzling technological progress would inevitably hamper the authentic experience of religion by drowning societies into materialism.

In what follows, I elaborate on how Topçu and Kısakürek arrive at these discrepant conclusions by (I) looking at their conceptions of the West and its supposed distinction from Islam; (II) their notions of modernity; and (III) their reflections on material development, technology and economy.

V.I. The West (against Islam)

Edward Said's seminal book on Orientalist discourse discusses the phenomenon through imagination of the East and thereby self-definition of the West in works of Western scholars, intellectuals and artists. Recent studies, on the other hand, point out that non-Western subjects share similar assumptions and prejudices when they

Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory", *Political Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2001): 127–56.

reflect not only on the West but also on their own cultures or identities.²⁶⁷

Similarities in the way Western and non-Western intellectuals imagine and define their own identities suggest that Orientalist discourse has been constituted at the global scale with contributions of “occidental” and “oriental” subjects together.²⁶⁸

Accordingly, a great majority of non-Western intellectuals reckon that (I) there exists a certain West which is a complete and well-defined civilization in its own right, and (II) this (Western) civilization is clearly distinct, in both ontological and epistemological terms, from the civilization that non-Western intellectuals feel belonged to.²⁶⁹ While those who adhere to the ideal of westernization see the ideal

form they would like to reach in this distinction, those who are motivated by preserving their authentic identities perceived this distinction as an existential threat.

For the imagined Western identity claims to be universal; and moreover, elements that are assumed to form this Western identity attempt to colonize parts of the world that stay out of the imagined West culturally, economically and politically.

Therefore, the main problem for non-Western intellectuals who assume the role of preserving authenticity becomes understanding what the West really is and where its supposed superiority lies—so that the non-Western intellectual could demonstrate why Western claims to universality is false and how it is possible to respond to this ostensibly false claim. The idea of the West as such represents the “other” for the protectors of indigenous authenticity.

Inasmuch as the Western Orientalism conceives the world in “the West and the rest” dichotomy, a great majority of non-Western intellectuals who speak within the

²⁶⁷ Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists*; Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

²⁶⁸ Aydın, *The Muslim World*.

²⁶⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

Orientalist discourse, be its name reverse-Orientalism or Occidentalism, conceive the world in “the west, and us” dichotomy. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and his *Büyük Doğu* ideal fit very well into this reverse-orientalist or occidentalist framework. For Kısakürek, the West represents the absolute other. Perhaps for this reason he named his ideological position and his magazine “Büyük Doğu” (The Great East) in the early 1940’s. Despite suggestions that the word “doğu” actually stands for Islam to be protected from possible purges by the state, it is I think inadequate to argue that Kısakürek’s choice for the name of his magazine rests on practical concerns alone.²⁷⁰ Detailed explanations in the first few issues of the magazine, which also appear in the opening pages of his *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, show that “Büyük Doğu” is not an accidental choice. These introductory articles explain Kısakürek’s worldview around the East-West dichotomy, his reflections on the idea of the West, and the association he found between the East and Islam. Foremost, he presents his curious observations regarding the distinction between the East and the West as well as ideational sources of this distinction.

Kısakürek’s early reflections on the idea of the West and East-West dichotomy have remarkable parallels with Said’s presentation of Orientalism. Long before Said’s intervention whose fruits came in his 1978 book, Kısakürek observes

First of all, it was the Westerner who made the distinction between East and West first. ... Since that day, no matter how [the Westerner] sees the Eastern world as divided into different and opposite spirit climates within itself. ... But eventually the Westerner, with overwhelming majority and average understanding, cannot take his most merciful and prudent gaze towards the East beyond the simple fantasy plan and the dream of “One Thousand and One Nights”, like the turban of an Indian raja and the

²⁷⁰ For instance, according to Mardin, “east” is a cover word for Islam. Mardin, “Cultural Change”, 249. Mardin might advance this argument to fit the situation into his center-periphery framework where the essential dynamic in Turkish politics is the struggle between secular state elite and popular Islam.

diamond on its top in Piccadilly. As we have pointed out, this is the commonplace view of the West, peculiar to the literate rabble...²⁷¹

Kısakürek describes the distinction between the orient and the occident as a product of a certain mentality originated in the West—just as Said defines and explains Orientalism. Again similar to Said, Kısakürek exemplifies this Western mentality, without identifying it as Orientalism, through Western fantasies and fictional representations about the East. He refers to images and stereotypes regarding the East and Easterner in the mind of an average Westerner. The passage is followed by another observation about internalization of these stereotypes and representations by non-Western subjects. Before Said, Kısakürek suggests that the Eastern subject, or more accurately the Eastern intellectual, began seeing himself/herself through the lens of the Western imagination of the East. In these reflections, Kısakürek's target is in fact this internalization of the Western mentality, i.e. self-Orientalism, in the thought of Western-oriented intelligentsia. Scorning the latter by using the label “quarter intellectual” (*çeyrek münevver*), Kısakürek accuses those who adhered to the ideal of westernization for falling prey to and speaking from within the Orientalist discourse.²⁷²

Kısakürek elaborates on this issue with a reference to a certain Western intellectual's observations on the Orient and Orientals without revealing his/her name. The long passage that Kısakürek directly quotes starts with the argument that “the Oriental

²⁷¹ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 19-21.

²⁷² Concerning this supposed alienation of Turkish intellectuals, Kısakürek maintains “It should be concluded immediately that the literate oriental rabble of recent times, too, was under the influence of this Western literate rabble, as they could not take their friend or foe to account in the turmoil between the two worlds, where the necessity of accounting arose, and began to watch the world and their souls through its mirror of understanding; he was imprisoned in the circle drawn by him [the Westerner] and went to the point of annulment of his soul. Here, the barren and rootless reform moves of the Eastern world for centuries have always been the work of these lowly literate rabbles, and of quarter intellectuals.” See Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 21.

always lives in the past”, and is full of classical Orientalist prejudices such as the remoteness of Orientals to rational and scientific thinking, and their mystical and fatalist dispositions.²⁷³ The quote ends with an Orientalist prophecy: ““No matter how skillfully the Oriental tries to embrace the world of mechanical and material discoveries of the West, he will always remain on the surface and helpless because he cannot grasp the case with his own spirit and method.””²⁷⁴ Kısakürek finds in this passage a confirmation for his beliefs that efforts of westernization were doomed to fail for they were rootless and imitative. Perhaps it is for this reason that he stresses and directly quotes this unknown intellectual, which is rather unconventional in Kısakürek’s writings.²⁷⁵ Resting on this testimony, Kısakürek argues for the unavoidable distinctions between the West and the East as well as for the inability of oriental intellectual to grasp what the West really is and where its superiority lies. The early writings of Kısakürek are indeed an intervention into the controversies around the idea of the West.

Kısakürek is firmly convinced that, unlike any other intellectual in the modern Ottoman-Turkish history, he has a thorough understanding of the West and an

²⁷³ The quote Kısakürek cites reads as follows: “The Oriental always lives in the past, does not approach to grasp the situation, and is afraid of advancing to the future, has neither knowledge nor criticism. He may be pious, but he cannot be thinker seeking for causes and effects. Whatever he believes; but he does not worry about description, coverage and proof on any subject. So, he knows neither what to believe nor what not to be believed... He only believes; he does not know! His efforts in the name of his dominion over nature cannot go beyond poetry and talisman. In terms of the reason's right to influence matter, he can invent no tool or method. He cannot reconcile with science. In his oriental mind, you will not find any elements that can be counted with fingers, seen with the eye, or proved with the mind. Thus, the easterner completely lost the realm of facts and reduced his influence over things and events to zero because of believing in everything that could not be proven and being caught in the unreal invitation of bodiless beings.” Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 21.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁵ Considering all his writings on this matter, it is highly likely that Kısakürek created a fictional character in his mind to say these words, or bended the passage in accordance with his own reflections.

adequate grasp on Western thought.²⁷⁶ For him, the real question of Turkish modernization process is to understand the West, which Kısakürek argues, could be undertaken only by Muslims for they are not captivated by false Orientalist claims regarding the West.²⁷⁷ He offers, with this self-confidence, a clear description of the Western identity with reference to Western sources:

The West's view of the West begins with examining itself to three principles, like olive oil, lemon and egg as elements in mayonnaise: Ancient Greece, Rome and Christianity. It is as if the Greek's equal is 1, Rome's is 1, Christianity's is 1, and in the end its own amount is 3... The European means to say that the Ancient Greek is the only source that gave the mental arrangement of the secret of the connection and relationship between nature and human being based on benign feelings and thoughts. Rome brought this mental scheme to the most extensive dominance and order. Christianity, in the innermost plan of all these conditions, is the center of interpretation, sensitivity and morality...²⁷⁸

Kısakürek acknowledges the West as a synthesis of the Ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity—similar to the Orientalist position which defines the West with a reference to European elements only, by disregarding Asian, African and of course Islamic influences in the constitution of modern Western identity. Among the three elements, Kısakürek especially features the legacy of Ancient Greece, which is supposed to be the source of materialist mentality as well as rational and scientific thinking in the Western thought. Accordingly, Roman Civilization systematized the Ancient Greek legacy and spread throughout Europe with its political and social institutions; eventually, Christianity gave the Western identity its spiritual and moral foundations.

²⁷⁶ His followers shared the same conviction regarding Kısakürek's self-declared competency in knowledge of Western sources. See Mengüüşoğlu, *Mağrur Öfke*, 31.

²⁷⁷ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 72.

²⁷⁸ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 23-4.

Yet, clarity of the description above disappears as Kısakürek treats the superiority of the West in terms of material development. Once acknowledged as an element in the constitution of Western identity, Christianity becomes the very reason of the West's supposed backwardness and weakness in the medieval times. According to Kısakürek, the material development in the West was allowed by the retreat of religion and the Church against reason and scientific thinking. For him, the Renaissance signified the victory of the reason over irrational doctrines of the Church.²⁷⁹ Apart from the tripartite description above, Kısakürek associates the West with the reason, positive sciences and technology. He stresses repeatedly that the West have only material superiority over the non-West. In his own words,

The western world is nothing but just a marvel of knowledge [of positive sciences] since the Renaissance that has fulfilled the reason's right to conquer—the Qur'an's command to us—and knew how to display things skillfully; and beyond that limit, it has no value of appreciation or imitation.²⁸⁰

In line with other Occidentalists, Kısakürek represents modern Western civilization as a fruit of dull reasoning and its material production.²⁸¹ In this narrative, the West is a “machine civilization” devoid of any soul or spiritual value. Obtaining that there is nothing in the West apart from technological fruits of its dull reasoning and scientific mentality, Kısakürek points out the futility of westernization efforts in social, political and cultural domains.

I believe that two reasons can account for inconsistencies in Kısakürek's analyses of the Western civilization and identity. First, based on his conception of Islam,

²⁷⁹ He suggests, “The West, too, until the middle of the 19th century, was always full of bigotry... Especially the church?... Medieval bigots?... Pope?... Today, the West have been toppled those absurdities with positive sciences from head to toe. Already (Renaissance) means a revolution of the reason against the church!” See Kısakürek, *Yolumuz Halimiz Çareimiz*, 110.

²⁸⁰ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 433.

²⁸¹ Margalit and Buruma, *Occidentalism*, 7.

Kısakürek does not acknowledge Christianity as an authentic divine religion; for him, the original doctrines of this religion laid out by the prophet Christ were distorted. Accordingly, a fabricated religion that does not rest on divine principles could not be a founding element of a civilization which supreme over other civilizations. Furthermore, the argument that the Renaissance,²⁸² was a movement of the reason against religion would not serve Kısakürek's ideal for the revival of Islam. Instead, Kısakürek is able to dodge calls for an Islamic reform or change by suggesting that the rational revolution in the West was against a fabricated religion and its superstitions. As often recurred in contemporary Muslim intellectual debates, Kısakürek implies the futility of these calls for Islam was an authentic religion whose principles are divinely ordained without any question. Second, in Kısakürek's narrative, the West is associated with reason and materiality whereas the East is associated with soul and spirituality. Kısakürek seems to disregard the role of Christianity in the formation of modern Western identity in order to provide a coherence for his narrative. Nonetheless, his insistence on representing the West monolithically for a coherent narrative leads to further inconsistencies in his analyses.

At the outset, Nurettin Topçu's considerations on the West differ from that of Kısakürek for the former does not conceive Western civilization as a homogenous monolith. Although the West represents an essential other for him too, Topçu does not overlook distinct aspects of modern Western civilization as well as tensions among these aspects. According to him, the modern West has been shaped by

²⁸² It should be noted that while Renaissance is referred frequently as a founding moment for Western civilization in Kısakürek's writings, he never mentions other historical processes such as the Reformation or the Enlightenment.

competing ideal/spiritual and material forces; when the former has been dominant Western civilization flourished and when the latter trumped the West fell into crises. Thus, rather than essentializing its characteristics as Kısakürek does, Topçu historicizes the development of modern Western civilization. Without a concern for an ahistorical and ostensibly coherent narrative of East-West dichotomy, Topçu's reflections on the West offer a more diverse picture with vicissitudes, and positives and negatives. For instance, he affirms the continental European thought that he associates with Christian tradition while disavowing the Anglo-American strand for its materialist and pragmatist character.

According to Topçu, the elemental force in the formation of modern Western identity as well as the factor accounting for the development of Western civilization is Christianity. In his line of thinking, human societies and civilizations flourish when they transcend material concerns and focus on spirituality and inner search. Topçu gives the example of Ancient Greece where the thought and civilization had ripened, for him, after materialist pre-Socratic philosophy gave way to a spiritualist philosophy from Socrates on.²⁸³ Similarly, the rise of modern West was possible through Christian thought that developed during the middle ages and reached its maturity at the end of that era. Topçu argues, "The love of philosophy, morality, art and science that Western civilization has created until today has always been the work of Christianity."²⁸⁴ Note that Topçu appreciates these fruits of Western civilization. The high regard for Christianity in Topçu's reflections on the West could be understood together with his writings on religious thought. Remember also

²⁸³ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 144.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 256. Note that it is not only divinely ordained religions but metaphysical idealist philosophy too that could generate the effect in flourishing civilizations.

that for him Christianity is one of the divine religions; unlike Kısakürek, Topçu does not consider Christianity as a distorted or manufactured religion. Moreover, Maurice Blondel, the beloved and respected mentor of Topçu, was a devout Christian who showed Topçu that Christian beliefs too could sustain an authentic religious experience. Thus, for Topçu, Christianity has the necessary spiritual power to initiate a civilizational development.

Parallel to his considerations on the significance of religion in providing the source of morality and, through that, order and felicity in this world, Topçu designates a homologous relationship between civilizational growth and the evolution of religious thought. To recuperate, Topçu maintains that religious thought started with existential questions of human beings regarding the meanings of their lives and the external world. Human beings attempted to find these meanings outside in the nature; and then, as they turned their own selves eventually, they could discover the meanings they sought for. This phase of turning inward represents the maturity of religious thought. The same process applies at the societal level. Human societies foremost engaged in knowing their environment, interacted and struggled with it. Then, they turned to their inner dynamics and tried to apprehend spiritual forces and to develop them. Only then, they achieved creating great civilizations. According to Topçu, renaissance signifies this civilizational leap following a spiritual inner search at the societal level. Note that, he uses the word renaissance beyond its first connotation referring to a particular moment within European history; for him it could also be used a generic word for moments of civilizational growth:

Renaissance means rebirth. This name was first used in the field of art in Italy. It is a historical name given to the revival of ancient Greek works in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, in the broadest sense, we can call it a renaissance each and every awakening of the human body, which in

any period of time becomes lethargic, loosens in its movements, and is eager to rest and sleep temporarily in the realm of aging habits.... The order of life in China, the style and art of expression that carved eternity into mortal beings in Ancient Egypt, the love of living in the moment in Greece, the ideal of surrendering the man's transience to God in Islam, and finally the love of creativity, which emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries in the West, first in art and then in every field; each of these elements sought its own renaissance.²⁸⁵

Contrary to Kısakürek who describes the Renaissance as the revolt of the reason against the Church, Topçu sees it as the fruit of Christianity. As Christianity did in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries, Topçu argues that different religious doctrines provided human societies with creative force that all civilizations ever existed throughout history. Accordingly, the (first) renaissance of Islam took place in the 10th century in upper Mesopotamia as Muslims were imbued with a love for creativity after they had to know other civilizations during the Islamic expansion.²⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in Topçu's thought, the evolution of religious thought and the parallel civilizational growth do not follow linear progressive paths. Civilizations experience retrogressions as they moved away from spirituality and entered into influence of materialism.

In Topçu's narrative, Western civilization has undergone a retrogressive transformation with the Industrial Revolution that wiped out the positive outcomes of the Renaissance. Topçu maintains that Industrial Revolution unleashed material concerns and ambitions that were not matched with equivalent development of spiritual forces:

Western nationalism, which conquered our earth, once swarmed with the Christian spirit, illuminated a continent and made it dominate the world. However, as a result of an erroneous evolution it followed over time, it took refuge in the dominion of matter and material ambitions. National grudges and passions, in particular, give a new life to big industry and

²⁸⁵ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 87-8.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

big profit aspirations every day, making the Western world suffer with depressions and nightmares.²⁸⁷

Topçu conceives the industrialization and the advent of capitalism in the West as almost a de-evolution, from spirituality to materiality. For him, these processes brought along corruption of the values that once empowered Western civilization which was at the moment supposedly struggling with crises.

The emphasis on excessive materialism, the domination of the machine, and worshipping the reason and positive sciences are conventional charges on the West in Occidentalist thought as well as Western critics of modern civilization.²⁸⁸

Increasing with the development of Western imperialism, non-Western intellectuals who are concerned with imperialist encroachments on their own societies represent the modern Western civilization as an inhumane, soulless, rational machine—a

“monster with a single tooth”.²⁸⁹ That Topçu shares this Occidentalist trope

converges his reflections on the West to that of Kısakürek who makes similar statements on excessive materialism and the ostensible crisis it caused.²⁹⁰ While

Topçu maintains that Western imperialism and the hegemony of

materialism/positivism is an outcome of a wrong-headed evolution, Kısakürek argues

that the West is already essentially a materialist civilization that eventually fell into

the “tyranny of the machine” after the recent developments in industry and

technology. Although one historicizes the purported “machinization” of Western

²⁸⁷ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 160-1.

²⁸⁸ Most influential among those critics from within the West who also inspired Muslim intellectuals of the 29th century were Martin Heidegger, Pitirim Sorokin and Oswald Spengler.

²⁸⁹ The phrase is a famous line of Turkish national anthem penned by Mehmet Akif (Ersoy).

²⁹⁰ Kısakürek argues, “The 19th century is the period when positive [scientific] knowledge began to gush forth, the West brought the era of grooming to things and events in the material plane, but did not yet realize that the horse under its training would become impregnable due to the lack of spiritual spurs... This is the thinnest line of the Western intellectual and moral crisis today.” See Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 87.

civilization and the other essentializes it, the two meet on the same Occidentalizer trope.

Occidentalizer charges on the West regarding the dominance of materiality are not the only terrain Topçu and Kısakürek share similar attitudes. Both make occasional self-Orientalizer observations on Turkish society as well. This is especially true in instances they complain about their audience and the fact that their ideas are not paid the attention they think their ideas deserved within the Turkish intellectual space. In these instances, both Topçu and Kısakürek do not refrain from employing Orientalizer stereotypical arguments based on the supposed characteristics Turkish or Oriental societies do or do not possess. The aforementioned quote from a Western thinker Kısakürek makes is a case in point. Topçu, on the other hand, enunciates a version of self-Orientalism in his own words:

We are being educated under such a cultural environment that the intellectuals who are the products [of this environment] become more materialists than the people. This is one of the differences between us and the West: The peasant of Europe is not as spiritually refined and conscious as the Anatolian peasant who is the heir to the civilizations of the Eastern world and who has acquired the virtues of Islam; and [the peasant of Europe] is not as detached from the fascination of matter as [Anatolian peasant] is. When it comes to the intellectual stratum, this situation is reversed. As opposed to intellectuals who are trying to have a salary, comfort, car, servants and gain these material rights as they rise in the East, Western intellectuals do not value wealth, comfort, clothing, ostentation, ceremonies, rank and future. In the West, we see those who move away from these material values as they rise in science and wisdom. Science leads to faith in Europe, but divert from faith in the East.²⁹¹

Topçu conceives materialism and concerns for material conditions as a form of moral poverty that is supposed to be overcome through education and intellectual capacity. In his narrative, improvement in intellectual capital develops moral sentiments and

²⁹¹ Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 53.

an interest in spirituality in the West. Although lower classes in the East have a more refined sense of morality than their Western counterparts, upper classes with higher intellectual capital in the East retrogress in terms of moral sentiments, instead of further developing the sense of morality. The target of this pro-Orientalist observation seems to be the intellectual elite who, for Topçu, are unable to comprehend the supposed dynamics of Western thought, philosophy and scientific mentality.

Topçu's charges on the intellectual elite that we saw in Kısakürek too are in fact conventional in contemporaneous conservative thought in Turkey. The latter accuse their pro-westernist opponents of not knowing the West adequately despite aspirations for being a part of the Western civilization. In this debate, Topçu is particularly disturbed by being labelled as a reactionary for his religious and nationalistic sentiments. Against this stigmatization he perceives, he argues that religion is a highly prestigious institution in the West; and thus, promoting religious values could not be a reactionary position. Remember that Topçu spent his time in France with prominent members of Catholic thought who were in fact university professors. Moreover, he observed that church visitors were not lower class people exclusively—as is the situation in mosques in Turkey for Topçu, but rather people from higher echelons of French society. True that, Topçu might register cherry picking in his reflections on his own experience in France. Perhaps, he overemphasizes the role and prestige of religion in the West or remembers what he would like to see ideally. Yet, this idealization points to Topçu's vision of social change as well as what he deems to be worth emulating in Western civilization. In this sense, the discrepancy between Topçu and Kısakürek in terms of their visions of

change is remarkable. While Kısakürek argues that there is nothing besides technology and material development in the West that should be transferred to Turkey, for Topçu it is actually the spiritual/ideational aspects of the West that we should emulate.

V.II. Westernization and Modernity

Topçu and Kısakürek, parallel to troubles they locate in Islamic thought and practices, identify a long list of problems in political, social, economic and cultural domains in the ongoing Turkish modernization process. In fact, they conceive troubles in other aspects of life largely as outcomes of the problems of Turkish Islam. Therefore, the discussion on Islam and change in the last section of the previous chapter could help us understand Topçu's and Kısakürek's ideas on modernization, and social, political and cultural change. Foremost important is to understand whether change and modernization are inevitable processes, and if so how Topçu and Kısakürek conceive the meaning, content and direction of this process. I start this section with possible answers to these questions; and then, I discuss Topçu's and Kısakürek's reflections specifically on Turkish modernization by analyzing the relationship they establish between social change and westernization.

We know from the previous chapter that Topçu severely criticizes Muslims for their inability to understand the essence of religion. Likewise, Kısakürek too complains about an ostensible stagnation within Islamic thought that resulted in Muslims' inability to catch up with the modern Western civilization. Nevertheless, what does "catching up with the West" really mean? Kısakürek has a clear answer to this question: levelling the gap between Turkey and Western civilization in terms of

scientific and technological developments that brought the latter its material wellbeing and its military superiority over non-Western parts of the world. Kısakürek sees indifference of the Ottomans to developments in the West in the 16th and 17th centuries as the beginning of the ostensible decline of the Empire. Foremost responsible is the Ottoman religious elite who supposedly rejected new technologies as harmful innovations (“*bidat*”). Arguing that religion and intellectual activity at large were dominated by bigotry and fanaticism, Kısakürek maintains that

Let me tell you all of a sudden that the villain of the period our defeat who occurred in the times when our spiritual balance was broken was rude fanatic and vulgar bigot [*“ham softa ve kaba yobaz”*], and he was a criminal of balance. Because he tries to defend the external elements of religion, without knowing its wisdom, and tries to fly on one wing.²⁹²

The “rude fanatic” and “vulgar bigot” types whom Kısakürek accuses of being clueless about spiritual dimension of religion begot the supposed decline of Ottoman society by rejecting anything they saw did not fit into the framework of the Islamic sharia. Thus, Kısakürek associates being closed to scientific and technological innovations on the one hand, and ignoring the spiritual dimension of Islam on the other. Note that Kısakürek does not conceive the formal aspect of religions, i.e. sharia, as secondary and contingent and the spiritual aspect, i.e. Sufism, as primary and essential. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that he presumes a change or a renewal in the formal aspect of religion because of technological and scientific adoptions as well as social change that these adoptions would possibly bring along. It seems, for him, that adopting new scientific knowledge and technological products is not detrimental to the essence of religion; on the contrary, Kısakürek welcomes scientific and technological adoptions as long as they contribute to Muslims’ wellbeing. He is convinced that the Ottoman intellectual elite could come to the same conclusion if

²⁹² Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çareimiz*, 37.

only they had not disregarded the spiritual aspect of religion and tried to preserve the sharia blindly.

The concept of social change in Kısakürek's writings is associated with deformations in, what he conceives as, the true Islam because of Kısakürek's aforementioned observation regarding the disturbance in spiritual/formal balance within Islamic thought. The change Kısakürek envisions involves, (I) restoration of this balance through a renewal in faith, and (II) adopting the material development of Western civilization. As such, Kısakürek does not think of change as an inevitable outcome of social processes such as transition from agricultural economy to industrial economy, or from traditional to modern society, from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*.²⁹³ The absence of a reference to one of these social processes conventionally associated with modernity does not suggest that Kısakürek does not have any sense of them. Reflections in especially his poems, his self-reported psychological crisis in his early adulthood, and even his fondness to Charles Baudelaire who coined the term modernity indicate that Kısakürek has a sense of modernity, and experienced at the personal level the disturbances that modern processes create.²⁹⁴ However, just as he thought he could escape from his personal inquietude by submitting himself to Islam after knowing Abdülhakim Arvasi, Kısakürek believes that "the ideology of Islam" with a restored balance between its spiritual and formal aspects could guide Muslims in their path to creating a modern civilization for Islam was a dynamic system

²⁹³ In making this observation, I draw on Marshall Berman's discussion of modernity, Georg Simmel's reflections on modern urban life, and Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between traditional and modern societies. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1982); Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (New York: Routledge, 2005), 23–31; Ferdinand Tönnies, "Community and Society", in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16–22.

²⁹⁴ Mardin, "Cultural Change", 248.

commanding on all aspects of personal and social life. However, Kısakürek does not analyze conceptually the novelties and tensions of transition from traditional to modern society, and leaves unexplained the details of how the true Islam would resolve the predicaments of modernity.

According to Kısakürek, the change, or more adequately the deformation, in Ottoman society had begun taking place in the 16th century—which was also the era of scientific and intellectual revolutions in Europe. Kısakürek is well aware that two processes were simultaneous; however, he does not link one to the other. The decline of Ottoman-Islamic civilization and the rise of Western civilization happen to be at the same time in his narrative, and the results of this eventful coincidence were detrimental for Muslims. In addition to having lost their superiority on the battleground that made them vulnerable to attacks of Western armies, Muslims were not able to do what it would take to bridge the gap between Western material development and theirs own. Kısakürek believes that the mentality of “vulgar bigot” and “rude fanatic” was so dominant in the 17th and 18th centuries that even initial steps to reform the army and to import new technologies were prevented in the name of religion and tradition. Kısakürek gives specific examples from the history of Ottoman reform process that for him proved the failure.²⁹⁵ He claims for instance that “A fatwa was given declaring the printing press was blasphemy! ‘Bind knowledge with the book!’ While this hadith stands...”²⁹⁶ Kısakürek does not

²⁹⁵ For instance, Kısakürek told the following story to prove his points: “[A military expert invited from a Western country to reform the army] plans the Battle of Nizip and gives it to the Commander-in-Chief. A very comprehensive plan... The attack will begin the next morning... In the evening, he goes to the Commander-in-Chief and says, ‘The attack starts in the morning, doesn’t it?’ The answer he gets is: ‘There has been no news from the Chief Magi yet!..’ And he wants his horse immediately. ‘I won’t work in this army!’ he says. And what’s more...” See Kısakürek, *Yolumuz Halimiz Çaremiz*, 114.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

associate the negative reactions to technological novelties such as the introduction of the printing press to social dynamics. He designates the reason behind these negative reactions to new technology in the motivation to protect the status of religion with fanatical, and false, consciousness. As seen in this example, he is always alert to inform the reader that this negative attitude towards technological novelties are against prescriptions of Islamic sources, and suggests that pursuit of scientific knowledge and technological development are requirements of Islam by directly quoting from Qur'an and Sunnah. In other words, he sees in the negative attitudes towards rationality, scientific knowledge and technological developments among Muslims a deviation from the path of Islam.

Whether Kısakürek has an experience of modernity at the personal level, and whether this experience is reflected in his literary works, he does not discuss the concept in his social and political analyses. In this sense, he does not have any conceptualization of modernity as a social and/or political process that would enforce change in all aspects of life. The concept of change in Kısakürek refers to re-instituting a certain socio-political order around an ahistorical ideology of Islam that is equipped with modern scientific knowledge and technology. Therefore, Kısakürek foremost disagrees with identification of modernization with westernization which, for him, amounts to blind imitation to Western cultural forms and practices. He maintains that Turkish modernization process in the hands of the Western-minded elite had been both superficial and disincensive to steer the society for a healthy evolution. According to Kısakürek,

With the money we earned from our figs, hazelnuts, tobacco, we expected all our material needs that requires [expertise] in positive sciences from Europe. We could not see Europeanization ahead of the staff of the book "Savoir Vivre - Principles of Etiquette". We carried the

orientals identity in our nose like a ring in a vile creed; so we have come this far. The European, who won all his wars thanks to his technical equipment, who kept a tight rein on Asia and Africa with his terrible imperialism, and who even made our half-awake snobs smell musky, exploited our ignorance to the bottom. In our eyes, instead of being a subject of investigation, it has become a totem in all its aspects as a target of admiration and subjection.²⁹⁷

Kısakürek points out a purported inferiority complex among the Turkish elite against the West, which for him, is the main motivation behind westernization process in Turkey. Ostensible superficiality and formalism of the process arouse from this complex. In his narrative, westernization process is identified with anxiety, almost in a form of delirium, to be accepted by the Western civilization immediately among Ottoman-Turkish elite who have been virtually mesmerized by especially the material development in Western societies.

Tracing the supposed decline and decay in Turkish-Islamic society to an ostensible deviation within Islamic thought, Kısakürek treats Tanzimat era and Turkish westernization process in its aftermath as a special turning point in modern history of Turkey. His reflections on these recent developments in Turkey points to a more hazardous aspect than the deviation and decadence within Islamic thought. The westernization process that arguably started with the Tanzimat signifies for him distancing from the authentic Turkish-Islamic identity:

After our period of balance, we have three eras: 1 - Our era of defeat and corruption that came up to the Tanzimat... 2 - Our era of imitation and emulation from the Tanzimat to the Constitutional Monarchy and even to the Republic... 3 - Our era of complete eradication of our spiritual roots from the Republic until today...²⁹⁸

Kısakürek's narrative suggests that the diversion from the ideology of Islam after the golden age of the Ottoman-Islamic civilization was followed by a process where

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 236.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 39-40.

internal and external enemies brought this civilization to demise mostly through plaguing its supposedly Islamic foundations. Especially blamed are the agents of modernization in late Ottoman and early Republican periods who, in this narrative, transformed an Islam-based world empire to a secular nation-state superficially imitating the Western civilization.²⁹⁹ Accordingly, the history of Turkish modernization is a history of losing Turkish-Islamic soul, identity and authenticity; it has been a process of alienation. In line with his conception of Islam, Kısakürek attempts to build a coherent historical narrative based on secular-religious divide and evaluates the whole history of modernization from this perspective. His narrative of Turkish modernization presents secular modernizers as the oppressors and religious conservatives as the oppressed.³⁰⁰

Although he does not share Kısakürek's conception of Islam and his identitarian notion of Muslimness, Topçu too expresses his discontent with the course of Turkish modernization. Similar to Kısakürek, Topçu sees in this process estrangement from Islam and the moral framework the latter is supposed to provide in Turkish society. In this sense, it is instructive to compare this passage of Kısakürek where he presents westernization process as superficial and formalistic with a passage from Topçu summarizing his reservations on the same issue:

Those who knew the West first put forward that the Turkish nation, whose greatness was known to the world in the past, did not have a civilized existence. Relations with the West, which started with the Tanzimat, dazzled many generations. Intellectuals set out to search for the secret of the rise of the West, and while doing this research, they

²⁹⁹ Kısakürek further maintains, "After Tanzimat, which understood reaching the level of intelligence and ingenuity of the West as an ape-like copy work, and finally the Constitutional era, which was a simple Masonic game, the Turkish society, when suddenly faced with the danger of liquidation, has now inherited an enormous debt from history, both in substance and in spirit." See Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 148.

³⁰⁰ See Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Son Devrin Din Mazlumları* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976); and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Tarih Boyunca Büyük Mazlumlar* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977).

unwittingly found their inner world in the West. A few generations after another, “What should we do to be like Europe?”, “How should we become westernized?” they said for a long time. The force that drove those generations to Western imitation, while even they themselves did not realize, was the sense of inferiority to which they were attached at the starting point.³⁰¹

Topçu, first of all, expresses his reaction to the Orientalist claim that Turkish nation as it was does not have a place in modern civilization. Not unlike Kısakürek, Topçu argues that Turkish intellectuals have bought this Orientalist claim far too easily, and fell prey to an inferiority complex against the West. Turkish modernization history, according to Topçu, is marked by the consequences of this complex. It purportedly revolved around the ways of imitating Western cultural, political and social forms.

As such, Topçu contributes to the conservative narrative charging Turkish modernization process with blind imitation to the West. He, nevertheless, does not characterize the whole process with all its agents seeking alternative paths to reform Turkish society and the state. Unlike Kısakürek for example, Tanzimat does not denote a period of alienation or betrayal. Especially in his later writings, Topçu comes to express a more nuanced narrative of Tanzimat in particular and Turkish modernization in general. In this narrative, the process within which intellectuals and politicians sought for ways to reform state and society involves vicissitudes, heroes and villains, goodwill and malevolence. Instead of epochs and agents in Turkish modernization history, a more consistent concern in Topçu’s writings were the process of modernity in general which is located in the roots of deviation from spirituality and moral framework of Islam.

³⁰¹ Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 13.

According to Topçu, Turkish intellectuals start with a wrong diagnosis in their comparisons between the modern Western civilization and Turkish-Islamic civilization. For him, the discrepancy between the two civilizations could not be reduced to scientific advancements and technological developments in the West. Although he himself complains about material backwardness of Turkish-Islamic society such as poverty, insufficient infrastructure and unplanned urbanization,³⁰² he designates the real problem in morality, spirituality, philosophy and thought. He argues

Since religious life, which once determined our spiritual values, was institutionalized in the field of material patterns of the sharia instead of the field of moral values such as morality, art, and science, development of a spirit of contract was not seen in the Islamic World; it was not known what individual freedom is. Today, what we have as the Islamic World is a skeleton that is far from being the noblest of creatures [*“eşref-i mahlûkat”*], to a prisoner of greed for this world and of fears for the hereafter.³⁰³

Once again, the root of the problem of backwardness is traced back to the conception of Islam and religious practices. Like Kısakürek, Topçu too points out that religion was reduced to its material aspect, i.e. sharia, at some point in history that marked the beginning of the supposed decline. However, while Kısakürek criticizes Muslims whose ostensibly fanatical defense of sharia resulted in rejection of scientific and technological innovations, Topçu highlights the adverse social effects of absolutizing and institutionalizing sharia itself. Accordingly, institutionalization of religion around a rigid notion of sharia disempowered the individual vis-à-vis society and eradicated individual rights and liberties. The retreat of the individual prevented flourishing of arts, philosophy and science, as these were individual endeavors, in

³⁰² For these complains see especially his writings compiled as “Amerikan Mektupları” (American Letters) where Topçu writes his reflections on urban life in Istanbul as well as Turkish social and cultural life as if they were letters penned by an American living in Istanbul. See Nurettin Topçu, *Amerikan Mektupları / Düşünen Adam Aranızda* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2018).

³⁰³ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 106.

Turkish-Islamic society. This process could be identified as “de-evolution” that Topçu associates with the retreat of moral and spiritual values of the Renaissance accompanied by the domination of positive sciences and technology after the 19th century in the West. Similarly, in Topçu’s narrative, Muslims had their renaissance in the 10th and 11th centuries that gave rise to a Turkish-Islamic civilization in Anatolia; yet again, the evolution of Turkish-Islamic civilization deviated from the path of their renaissance movement. As a result, Topçu maintains, Turkish-Islamic society was stuck in a narrow vision that identified religion with the sharia, and estranged by the ideal/spiritual sources of inspiration that once gave way to their renaissance movement.

Topçu believes that a new renaissance movement that would inspire changes in all aspects of social life was necessary. The change he envisions by no means refers to importing or adopting Western scientific and technological developments; a process of sea change in thought, morality, arts and philosophy must be in order. He conceives the Renaissance and the subsequent movement of Romanticism in the West as a source of inspiration for the ideal/spiritual change in Turkish-Islamic context. As opposed to not only Muslim intellectuals but also a great majority in Turkish intellectual space, Topçu argues that it is not the material development that is to be emulated and admired but the ideal/spiritual/moral development of the Western renaissance. For him, material development is only epiphenomenal to the spiritual development:

We misunderstood two things of the West; we saw its two faces backwards: Sciences and morals. While we wanted to become westernized, we decided to take its sciences and not take its morals. We did not know that science and morality came from the same root.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 37.

It is highly interesting from a person who problematizes Turkish westernization process, let alone from an Islam-inspired critic of westernization, to hear that adopting Western sciences and technology while dismissing moral aspect of Western civilization is not plausible. The distinct position of Topçu is no doubt related to his conception of Islam-as-morality that offers a more inclusive understanding of religion. Contrary to conventional *mukaddesatçı* and Islamist positions, Topçu does not see Christianity a false religion incompetent to ignite a movement towards civilization. Just the opposite, he admires Christianity as I have already pointed out. Similar to Christian proponents of the philosophy of action who inspired him in developing his conception of religion, Topçu takes the romantic conservatism shaped by post-renaissance emergence of nationalism as well as development of a new wave of Christian morality as a point of inspiration. The change he envisions in Islamic context is a process of Islamic renaissance that is supposed to trigger an Islamic romantic conservative movement. To accomplish this change, it is important to understand the dynamics of the last example of a renaissance, i.e. European renaissance, and how it achieved renewal in morality, arts, philosophy and scientific thought. Nevertheless, for Topçu, the expected Turkish-Islamic renaissance would by no means a product of blind emulation to the Western civilization; it could only be accomplished through resting on Turkish-Islamic history.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Topçu laments, “We talked about the West because it would be disrespectful to tamper with our own sufferings, to check our own hearts too often, and we envied their plight. How old is our mobilization for knowledge and truth! How much stronger than theirs is the moral building that our national history has given us! But today, the great Orient is in trouble. He needs renaissances that will bring love and self-renunciation in his science, spirit and rebellion in his religion.” See Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 54.

V.III. Science, Technology and Capitalism

The divergence between Topçu and Kısakürek who reflect on the West, modernity and, to a more limited extent, the course of Turkish modernization is most salient in terms of the content of the change they envision for Turkish society. The two diverge right in the names they used in identifying this change. While Kısakürek identifies his ideal as “Islamic revolution” (*İslam inkılabı*), Topçu offers a “renaissance in Islam” (*İslam’da rönesans*). In scrutiny, this differences in nomenclature as well as further differences between their debates in characterizing these processes point out their diverging visions of change in Islamic context vis-à-vis the advent of modernity. Note that in Kısakürek’s “Islamic revolution” Islam is not subject to change. Kısakürek does not conceive of alternative or up-to-date ways in the belief, practice or conception of Islam that is already laid out Islamic sources of knowledge for him. In other words, his “Islamic revolution” is not at all a “revolution in Islam”. Accordingly, Islam, or in Kısakürek’s words “ideology of Islam”, itself with its supposedly ahistorical and eternal essence is the force that would carry out the revolution which, Kısakürek anticipates, would give an end to the process of westernization, and bring along a social, political and legal order around the ideology of Islam.³⁰⁶ Topçu’s “renaissance in Islam”, on the other hand, envisions a transformation in the belief and practice of Islam.³⁰⁷ The movement of renaissance in Islam thus starts from its conception would supposedly expand other domains of Turkish life and renew all social, cultural and political institutions and practices.

³⁰⁶ Kısakürek, *İdeolocy Örgüsü*, 147-184.

³⁰⁷ In *İslam ve İnsan* Topçu suggests that “Those who seek awakening in Islam today have to fill the gap that stretches [until today] from six to seven centuries [ago]. The first condition of the awakening, that is, *the renaissance in Islam*, is to cast aside the verses that have been riveted by the authorities of the masters for centuries, and to make all issues and all opinions the subject of free criticism and discussion with the power of the reason that grasps the world. There is no doubt that what will do this is the scientific and philosophical mentality that science and philosophy sharpened, refined and present to us today. The religious culture and publications of our time do not go beyond the repetition, story, praise and sanctification of the past.” See, Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 57. Emphasis added.

Both Topçu and Kısakürek register to a notion of reality that is understood within the dualism of ideal/spiritual forces and material world. While Topçu sees a dialectical relationship in this duality where spiritual and material aspects of reality could transform each other, Kısakürek does not reflect on a sort of relationship between the two. In fact, it is possible to obtain in Kısakürek's writings that material and spiritual aspects of reality exist almost independently—constituting a duality rather than a dualism. Hence, Kısakürek's line of thought presumes no relationship between scientific/technological development and economic changes on the one hand, and social, political and cultural processes on the other hand. Its traces could be found in the Islamist thinking of the late Ottoman period that could be well summarized in the phrase “adopting scientific and technological developments of the West while leaving its culture and morality aside”. Like his predecessors, Kısakürek denies or neglects the possibility that new technologies and economic modes of production would necessarily bring along social and cultural changes. He is most probably convinced that the ahistorical ideology of Islam as he conceives and construes in his works is immune to unintended consequences and adverse effects of technological and economic developments.

Kısakürek's vision of reviving Islamic civilization through making the ideology of Islam supreme in spiritual sphere and adopting modern scientific and technological developments in material sphere harbingers an ideal Islamic modernity—although Kısakürek himself does not use the exact phrase. A visual expression of this ideal appears on a cover of an issue of his *Büyük Doğu* where mosque minarets and factory

pipes are represented side by side. Addressing the political elite of his time,

Kısakürek suggests

If there are 10 or 1000 or 10,000 or 100 thousand mosques and masjids and as many minarets in Turkey, raising factory chimneys in the same amount and quantity is the main caveat of mosques and minarets. So much so that every minaret is engaged [*“nişanlı”*] with a factory chimney...³⁰⁸

Kısakürek articulates a vision, in his sui generis style, where Islamization and scientific and economic modernization would go hand in hand. He believes in economic development and modernization in material domains to the extent that he sees Western superiority over Muslim-populated states in these areas. Thus, his vision of Islamic modernity rests on an aspiration to evade dependency on the West, put an end to Western hegemony, and eventually bring the West down against Muslims.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 340.

³⁰⁹ Rational and scientific knowledge as well as technological development are instrumental in these aspirations; they do not represent ideals in themselves for Kısakürek. In fact, Kısakürek despises efforts to explore the material aspect of reality against seeking spiritual richness and immersion in religiosity. This is also the reason for the condescending attitude of Kısakürek, even while accepting that the West is materially advanced in science and technology. For him, the West is just “a wonder of the dull reason”. However, the efforts of this dull reason and eagerness to understand matter resulted in a civilization dominating the whole world despite its superstitious principles. In this case, what needs to be done for Kısakürek is to make a move that will enable the production of scientific knowledge and technology as competent as in the West. The path that Kısakürek proposes for this is not very different from the path that has been followed since the Tanzimat period: sending students to the West. According to Kısakürek, “The remedy is one, like the truth: We will filter the West with the guidance of a mature personality of our own; we will analyze and combine it with its good and bad sides in the spirit of our own instrumental guides; we will grind it from the spiritual stomachs of our own mediating guides and apply this spirit to the country, do you understand the solution? [The fruit of] their current maturity is to be stolen from the European, as a sacred theft; it is stolen by entering the chimney with a mask!.. It is recollected as it is enjoined by the meaning of this motto, ‘Truth is the lost property of the believer, he will take it wherever he finds it!’.” See Kısakürek, *Yolumuz, Halimiz, Çaremiz*, 248. As a person who was sent to Paris to study philosophy in this way, but returned to the country at the end of an unsuccessful year, it may come as a surprise that Kısakürek made the same suggestion. Yet Kısakürek believes that this method has not been followed with the necessary precision until now. Elsewhere he suggests “When the Japanese send students to Europe, they first confront the student and say:

— These diplomas, these certificates will come... If it does not arrive on time, commit suicide!.. The Japanese go to Europe... And if he can’t deliver what’s wanted, he’ll sink the knife, die, go. Our people, on the other hand, are deprived of even such an idealism... Let alone what he takes from wherever he goes, he leaves his own soul there as well. And he appropriates the bar culture, the cabaret culture, he comes. Then he looks at us with contempt.” See Kısakürek, *Batı Tefekkürü*, 217.

Despite his emphasis on the success of the modern Western civilization in generating material development, Kısakürek shares the narrative of the decline of the West with other Occidentalist thinkers and Western critics of Western modernity. He attributes the 20th century crises of the West to the lack of spiritual background to the material development. However, his conception of Islam-as-identity enables him to suggest that Islam is the only religion that could sustain a strong spiritual background for aspired Islamic modernity. Moreover, Kısakürek justifies his Islamic exceptionalism through reconstructing Muslimness as a different way of being in the world to the extent that Muslims adhere to the ideology of Islam. Maintaining a pro-capitalist position within the context of the Cold War, Kısakürek suggests that

The right of capital must also be protected within a certain limit. However, the many anecdotes of Abu Zer and the sharia of Islam sent directly by Allah reveal how deplorable the capital is. What is zakat? ... Zakat is cleansing. Cleaning the capital.. Zakat is the enemy of the idle, lazy capital. Every year it asks for one-fortieth of it. If that capital does not earn, it goes bankrupt. It's such a whip that it doesn't stop. Then it [zakat] determines its right and demands it.³¹⁰

This might be the earliest example advocating for an Islamic capitalism where Islamic sensibility and morality are featured as shields against the excesses and harms of Western-style economic modernization. Hence, for Kısakürek, in the Islamic context, commanded by true Muslims, modern technology, industry and capitalism would not have adverse outcomes as they did in the West.

Topçu's concerns distinguish from that of Kısakürek through his notion of knowledge, in relation to his conception of religion. Topçu conceives knowledge,

³¹⁰ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor*, (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1985), 35. Kısakürek in the same book continues: "The West will dominate the realm of machine and of new discoveries. It is looking for moral support. Philosophers cannot give this support. But the excitement and morality of religion.. The West in the age of understanding and returning to religion.. They do not understand this, those who defend the most advanced call us 'outdated' ['çağdışı']... The only way is to return to religion.. The only religion is Islam!.. The mosque whose meaning we destroyed and burned.." See, Kısakürek, *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor*, 53.

technique and economic production as functions of broader social processes. As opposed to Kısakürek, Topçu sees a connection between scientific, technological and economic developments and socio-cultural processes. Moreover, following an idealist philosophical line, Topçu thinks that material developments are mere outcomes of an ideal/spiritual base. For Topçu, therefore, “adopting scientific and technological developments of the West while leaving its culture and morality aside” is a shallow formula devoid of any logical and rational premise. As I pointed out, Topçu narrates development of modern Western civilization as a process in which cultural and technical advancements became possible through the ideal/spiritual infrastructure that Christian morality sustained. For him, once the spiritual base of material development had been disestablished in the 18th and the 19th centuries, Western civilization came under the tyranny of machine. Admiring and emulating the material development in the West without acknowledging its cultural and spiritual aspects that once made the material development possible would result in, for Topçu, experiencing the same troubles with the contemporary Western civilization.

Contrary to majority of contemporaneous Muslim intellectuals including Kısakürek, Topçu does not think that Muslims are immune to these problems simply by virtue of being adhered to formal rules and prescriptions of Islam. According to him, it is not the absence of Islam, nor is it the lack of spirituality in Christian context, that gave rise to dominance materialism in the West through technology and capitalism. It is the modern technology and development of capitalist industrialization that subordinated culture and spirituality, and removed what was humane on earth. According to him

Power of the technique is, as it were, to mechanize the world. Yes, the world is mechanized, and the person who holds the reins of the technique to mechanize the world, as soon as the technique is victorious, follows it with great charm with the love of driving its triumphal chariot. Humans also become machines. The reins are in our hands, but the rearing horses are dragging us along. It is destined to go into danger, into the abyss.³¹¹

It is important to emphasize that Topçu does not spare Muslims from the hazards of drowning into modern technology. The rampant technology in modern times would eventually sweep spirituality—thereby posing a threat to authentic experience of religion in all over the world. For him, having Islamic sensibilities is not enough to protect us from this transformative effect of technology and industry.

With these concerns, Topçu criticizes the notion of an Islamic modernity advanced by broad *mukaddesatçı* and Islamist circles of generation. “Arming with the weapons of enemy”, as the import of technology is justified in *mukaddesatçı* circles, does not Turkish-Muslim society any stronger according to Topçu; it could only result in the same crises the West supposedly experiences. In the quest for possessing the material advancements, he is particularly disturbed by instrumentalization of scientific knowledge:

The mass of people who say they are Muslims do not know what science is and their conscience is against this command of Allah. They admire the technique because it brings benefits. They want their children to become engineers or doctors. They do not want interest-free science [“*menfaat dışı ilmi*”], this endless journey, which is worship for the soul. It is impossible for science to take root in such an environment.³¹²

Making a distinction between technology and disinterested pursuit of scientific knowledge, Topçu sees in the latter a value in itself. Accordingly, science is an esteemed pursuit, for the pursuit of scientific knowledge itself is what religion

³¹¹ Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 20.

³¹² Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 41.

enjoins, and not because it is instrumental for the salvation of Muslims from Western encroachments or for their material wellbeing.

Topçu suggests that the renaissance in Islam necessitates a holistic transformation in Turkish-Muslim society including a new understanding of scientific mentality and work ethics—instead of reviving historical institutions, beliefs and rituals of Islam while adopting modern technology. However, he is aware that the dominant trend in Islamic intellectual movement follows the latter position. Topçu, denigrating contemporaneous Muslim intellectuals yet again, argues that

Those who introduce themselves as men of religion had no idea of the order of the new society. Islam demands justice, but in what kind of order can justice be provided? Islam is a religion of equality, but equality can be the product of which regime? None of these issues was in the hodja's mind.³¹³

He maintains that, without scrutinizing the relationship between technical/material and the social/cultural processes and without being aware of possible effects of modern technology on spiritual dimension in human life, Muslim intellectuals advance the significance of the pursuit of material development. For him, however, a mere belief in Islam's superiority is not enough; one should offer how Islam could institute justice and equality in concrete terms against the strong currents of industrialization and technological development.

According to Topçu, the result of the advent of modern technology and the materialistic mentality is the development of capitalist economy that commands almost all aspects of life in modern societies. Distinguishing traditional economies based on agricultural production and small-scale manufacturing from the modern

³¹³ Topçu, *Türkiye'nin Maarif Davası*, 39.

capitalist economy, Topçu highlights uneven accumulation of wealth in few hands at the expense of laborer masses as the single most important consequence of the advent of capitalist industrialization.³¹⁴ He further purports that problematic relationship between capital and labor represents a cruel system of enslavement that is eradicating spiritual and moral values of both the capitalist coterie and the working class. Hence, for Topçu, “The system of big capital [*‘büyük sermaye sistemi’*] is an assassination device against spirit and morality...”³¹⁵ As such, capitalism poses an existential threat to what Topçu identifies as the essence of Islam, i.e. spiritual experience of the divine through a leading a moral life. Following this line of reasoning, Topçu would see the arguments for an Islamic capitalism nonsensical, for capitalist activity pursued by Muslims would eventually deform the faith as well as the sense of morality.

Instead of a capitalist system run by Muslims, Topçu proposes that a socialism based on spiritual and moral values is the only system that suits best for the moral framework of Islam. This “spiritual socialism”, as Topçu himself puts it, emanates from both the sources of Islam and the historical development of Anatolian-Turkish-Islamic nation. Accordingly,

Muslim Anatolian socialism means mobilizing the people of Anatolia, who will have the spirit and morality of Islam, and all life forces beyond the limits of personal interests and passions in a divine realm, under the discipline of a strong will with full authority, with the community on the path of national security. ... What Islam wants is not a society of the rich, from which a millionaire is born in every neighborhood. It is a society that is not embarrassed by the sigh of the poor; it is the society of a truly happy country that does not burn the heavens with the sighs of ummas.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 201.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

Topçu argues that a proper Islamic response to the advent of modern industrial capitalism is to create a spiritualist socialist system that would not allow unjust accumulation of wealth, and emergence of an order of exploitation. Maintaining a romantic anti-modern and anti-technology position, Topçu believes that this socialist system should be based on cooperative agricultural production, instead of capitalistic industrial development.

V.IV. Concluding Remarks

I have previously noted that Topçu's advocacy of socialism drew negative reactions from religious and nationalist conservative circles; and it is one of the reasons Kısakürek advances for his discontent with Topçu. Their disagreements on this point as well as broader divergence between their critiques of modernization are manifestations of their differing conceptions of Islam. As Kısakürek's conception of Islam-as-identity represents Islam as a total ideology that does not leave anything out, both in form and in content, Kısakürek finds it sufficient to restore the "ideology of Islam" which would supposedly bring along a just and felicitous social order. Similar to his discussion on the meaning of religion, Kısakürek does not see it necessary to reflect on the forms of ideal social order or of justice at the abstract level for he is convinced that Islam already provides these forms. Topçu objects these convictions by arguing that these forms are historically and socially contingent. Islam, in his writings, appears as the source of inspiration, a framework, to attribute the content to these contingent forms of social order.

Moreover, the identity-morality distinction in Kısakürek's and Topçu's conceptions of Islam respectively shapes their reflections on the West and on the process of

westernization. While Kısakürek reiterates a reverse-Orientalist position arguing for the incommensurability of Western and Eastern, or we may say Islamic, civilizations. As his Islam-as-identity constructs Muslimness as essentially distinct way of being in the world, Kısakürek defines Western identity in equally essentialist terms and in contradistinction to Muslimness. He associates modern Western identity with reason and materiality which anyhow have accomplished “the reason’s right to conquer” the nature. To the extent that he believes this right was enjoined by Islam, Kısakürek represents scientific knowledge and technology produced in the West as “lost” properties of Muslims—thereby legitimates their adoption. Contrarily, Topçu sees in the rejuvenation of sciences, philosophy and arts during and after European Renaissance an admirable inspiration from spiritual sources of Christianity, and distinguishes these developments from the advent of modern industrial capitalist society. He offers reviewing Islamic sources anew as early modern Christian thinkers and theologians supposedly did it in the Christian context.

Implied in these discrepant views on the West, westernization and social change are the ultimate concerns of Topçu’s and Kısakürek’s Islam-based worldviews. For Kısakürek, Islam in its reified form appears to be the ultimate concern itself. The purpose of all existence, all instruments, social and political order, science and technology, and culture was the resurgence of the ideology of Islam. For Topçu, the ultimate purpose seems to be establishment of a moral order that could sustain the authentic experience of religion. Religion does not have a purpose other than itself in the first; it aims to lead a moral life to reach the transcendental in the second. Therefore, Kısakürek’s Islam-as-identity implies that what is supposed to be Islamic is the good, the right, the moral, the reasonable or the just. If anything, in this sense,

is right and useful, Islam have already proposed, demanded or required it.

Accordingly, the establishment of the ideology of Islam as it is would ensure the existence of a just and moral society. Topçu's Islam-as-morality, on the other hand, deemed what is supposed to be good, right, moral or just is Islamic. Hence, a just and moral social order would ensure leading an Islamic way of life. No matter how subtle it seems in the first glance, the difference—and the predominance of Islam-as-identity—have had decisive effects on Turkish politics.



CHAPTER VI: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAM “IN THIS WORLD”: POLITICS, STATE AND SOCIETY

Two preceding chapters of this dissertation demonstrated that Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu have two different worldviews albeit ostensible and sporadic rapprochements in certain issues. To recapitulate from the previous chapters, while Kısakürek argues for the sharia as the basis of Islam that is to be lived under the absolute authority of traditional Sufi institutions, Topçu emphasizes spirituality and mysticism in the experience of religion that is rather individual-oriented. These differences notwithstanding, both Kısakürek and Topçu stand against the discourse of modernization that, by taking secularization an essential component of this process, does not designate Islam any significance in social and political matters. The two, however, represent different trends in Islam-inspired critique of modernization and secularization. Speaking in terms of economics, Islam is a public good for both Kısakürek and Topçu, i.e. it has social and political significance; whereas the sense in which Islam acquires this social and political significance differs in their accounts. In line with their conceptions of Islam, while Topçu suggests that Islam has rather indirect social and political uses, providing the basis of morality and the sense of responsibility, Kısakürek formulates Islam as an ideology that directly provides the blueprint for the salvation of not only in the “hereafter” but also “in this world”. Hence, contrary to the attitude to juxtapose the names of Kısakürek and Topçu,

justified by their collaboration in nationalist and anti-communist associations in early Cold War Turkey against westernization and communism, their respective understandings and interpretations of political, in addition to social and cultural, processes fundamentally diverge in line with their distinct conceptions of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality.

In this chapter, I problematize designation of Kısakürek and Topçu as representatives of similar, or sometimes the same, ideological position in Turkish political space by focusing on differences in their reflections on the relationship between Islam and politics. To do that, I take up the second auxiliary dimension in the conception of Islam and present the significance of Islam in practical terms in Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings. In the following, I first discuss Kısakürek's and Topçu's views on the political significance of Islam, and their conceptions of politics from the perspective of their differing conceptions of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality respectively. Then, in the second part of this chapter, I elaborate on Kısakürek's and Topçu's conceptions of politics at the theoretical level by delving into their writings on the state, the scope of its authority and sources of its legitimacy. Finally, I move onto their reflections on Turkish politics and society to see how their views on the relationship between Islam and politics inform their political positions at practical level.

VI.I. Political Significance of Islam: Ideology, Civilization, Morality

Emphasis on morality to remedy the supposed ills of the modern world has been a common denominator of all religion-based movements.³¹⁷ Underlying the emphasis

³¹⁷ Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5.

on morality is the conviction that moral and responsible individuals compose a just society and likewise statesperson of such quality rule the country with justice. To the extent that tradition and more importantly religion are seen as bases of morality, piety has been interpreted as the indicator of being a just and proper member or ruler of the community. It is perhaps for this reason that political obligations were treated in the ethics/morality literature by experts on religious sciences in early modern Muslim societies such as the Ottoman Empire.³¹⁸ Traditional Sufi orders, which are known for their political quietism, continued this legacy into modern times. Sufi orders usually preach the benefits of being a moral person in matters concerning this world. Nurettin Topçu's discussions on practical significance of Islam follow these classical Sufi convictions. In fact, the only article in which Topçu refers to his Sufi sheikh Bekkine is an article where Topçu explains three fundamental moral values he derived from the Qur'an—namely respect, compassion and service, as the moral principles Muslims and other humans alike should hold on to sustain a felicitous life on earth.³¹⁹ Kısakürek, too, shares the emphasis on morality by identifying religion its source. However, given that he sees Islam as the only righteous religion resting purely on revelation, only Islam could be the source of an authentic moral system for him. Hence, the way Kısakürek and Topçu discuss morality in relation to practical significance of Islam are informed by their distinct conceptions of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality respectively. Moreover, for Kısakürek, morality is only one aspect of Islam's significance in regulating this worldly affairs; more than offering a

³¹⁸ See Hüseyin Yılmaz, "Books on Ethics and Politics: The Art of Governing the Self and Others at the Ottoman Court", ed. Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell H. Fleischer, *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3-1503/4) Vol.1*, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 509–26; Marinos Sariyannis, "The Princely Virtues as Presented in Ottoman Political and Moral Literature", *Turcica* 43 (2011): 121–44.

³¹⁹ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 87-108.

moral framework, Kısakürek's Islam represents a comprehensive set of rules and prescriptions covering whole aspects of life.

VI.I.I. Kısakürek and Politics in "Ideology of Islam"

Kısakürek conceives practical significance of Islam at two levels. The more general level is morality which, for him, denotes a system of evaluation providing individuals with answers to "how" questions, i.e. how to do, how to behave, how to see or think.³²⁰ Kısakürek maintains that each and every doctrine of truth presents a moral system of their own. However, he cautions, other doctrines of truth including Judaism and Christianity are not originated from divine revelation; thus, they could only be invalid sources of morality. Hence, Kısakürek immediately suggests, "From the first prophet to the last, better still, from the oldest of the first to the newest of the last, only Islam brings, demonstrates, preaches, establishes morality..."³²¹

Accordingly, Islamic morality gives answer to these questions by featuring a number of principles and values such as the love (for the God), devotion and compassion.³²²

Kısakürek sees these principles as the pillars of Islamic morality emanates from Islamic sources. Nevertheless, for Kısakürek, Islam's message is not confined to these broad moral principles. Islam does not provide answers to "how" questions only, it also manifests for people "what" to do. In other words, Kısakürek's Islam is a source of comprehensive manual of all domains of life.

Kısakürek's position may be located in his adherence to Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, which unlike the quietist attitude of other Sufi orders, seeks to influence people in the

³²⁰ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 86.

³²¹ Ibid., 104.

³²² Ibid., 105-6.

positions of power directly and urges them to implement sharia.³²³ Politically activist stance of Khalidiyya, like other renewalist and revivalist currents in Islam since the 19th century, represents a different position concerning the socio-political significance of Islam. This stance blends the traditional discourse preaching morality as the source of “this-worldly” salvation on the one hand and identification of Islam with both sharia and the system of morality on the other hand. To the extent that one sees the source of morality in Islam alone, abiding by the sharia and being a moral person simply denote the same thing. While sharia might be the source of political legitimacy in the pre-modern context—and might already have a political significance, the stance of Khalidiyya in the context of modern politics opens up the possibility to conceive sharia, or Islamic sources, as a political programme or ideology. Kısakürek, by following Khalidi doctrines, puts this possibility in action and offers Islam as a total ideology.

Kısakürek believes that Islamic sources provide believers with a blueprint to deal with issues in all domains of life. Taking his insights from Khalidi Islam, Kısakürek promotes the idea that welfare of Muslims depends on their reliance on Islamic sources that have all the answers Muslims need to find their way into the modern world. In so doing, he formulates formal rules and prescriptions of Islam as a system of ideas responding to social, political and economic problems, and defines Islam as an ideology. Concerning ideologization of religions Jacques Waardenburg observes that

Ideologizing a religion can take place in at least two different ways. On the one hand, one can make a religion more convincing and promote it by bringing its “essence” into words, specifically a rational system of ideas. In this case, we have to do with a kind of ideological “essentialization” of

³²³ Abu Manneh, *Studies on Islam*.

the religion one wants to promote. On the other hand, one can present a particular ideological version of a religion in order to promote a general noble cause to which one is committed and that need not be religious itself: human rights, justice, or peace, for instance. In this case, we have to do with a kind of ideological “adaptation” of the religion to serve a general cause to be pursued.³²⁴

Kısakürek resorts to the first path—and vehemently criticizes the other—by representing revelation and the tradition of the prophet as the real source of what he dubbed as the “ideology of Islam” (*İslam ideolojyası*).³²⁵ Different from renewalist strands of Islamism, however, he has no intention to opening the Islamic sources for new interpretations to derive new political principles. Instead, he de-historicizes the concept of ideology and applies the term to characterize worldviews of Muslims lived throughout history. It is possible in his writings to see phrases like the “ideology of the companions of the prophet” or the “Ottoman intellectual who drew on the ideology of Islam”. Ideology, in this sense, appears to be a certain mentality or a comprehensive worldview rather than a program of a modern political movement.

Kısakürek’s reified conception of Islam by defining it as a concrete and absolute system of beliefs, rules and values already implicates Islam’s ideologization. Hence, the two, reification and ideologization, appear to be interwoven in the modern transformation in conceptions of Islam. The peculiarity of what Kısakürek does by propounding Islam as an ideology is his appropriation of a concept that was otherwise alien and pejorative for Islamic circles, i.e. ideology.³²⁶ Kısakürek explains

³²⁴ Jacques Waardenburg, *Islam: Historical, Social, and Political Perspectives* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 319.

³²⁵ Note that I did not translate his original “*İslam ideolojyası*” as Islamic ideology. In the sense, Kısakürek used this phrase, it did not refer to an ideology that is based in or inspired by Islam. Islam itself represented the ideology.

³²⁶ Contemporary Muslims who adhere to the reified conception of religion take a similar attitude with Kısakürek, whether they use the word ideology in defining Islam or not. It is for this reason that any attempt to synthesize Islam and any political ideology, or even to mention Islam side by side any ideology, faces with great resistance. Since Islam is seen in the same ontological status with a political ideology such as liberalism or socialism, Muslims who share the conception of Islam-as-identity see

in detail the contours of what he frequently refers to as the “ideology of Islam” in his bestselling book *İdeolocya Örgüsü*. The book contains numerous chapters and sections in which Kısakürek explains what “ideology of Islam” implicates or enjoins in almost all aspects of life—albeit without any direct reference to any Islamic sources of knowledge. From politics, state and justice to social classes, gender relations and economy, Kısakürek’s ideology of Islam asserts rules, principles and practices supposedly unique to Islam which are vindicated against the supposedly un-Islamic ones. The idea that anything necessarily has uniquely Islamic form (and, by that logic, un-Islamic forms as well), goes hand in hand with essential distinction between, on the one hand, Islam and other religions and doctrines, and on the other hand, Muslims and non-Muslims (which might denote for Kısakürek those who did not abide by the “ideology of Islam”). In so doing, ideologization of Islam in Kısakürek works for the formation of a distinct political identity around Muslimhood.

Hence, a particular approach in politics have emerged among the proponents of Islam-as-identity in the context of the early Cold War Turkey for which Kısakürek’s political ideas have been particularly formative. Drawing on identitarian conception of Islam and the ensuing understanding of Muslimness as an existentially different political being as opposed to non-Muslims and secularly oriented political groups, politics in Kısakürek’s writings features a presupposition of the friend/enemy distinction in the way German jurist and political philosopher Carl Schmitt introduced in his *The Concept of the Political* (originally published in 1932). There

in such synthesis attempts to arrive at some form of hybrid identity—which pose a threat to orthodoxy. In fact, Topçu, as a proponent of Islamic socialism, is one of the people who suffered from this the most.

Schmitt argues, “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy”.³²⁷ Schmitt reminds repeatedly that the enmity that gives politics its meaning and content is a public or collective one that poses a real threat to the existence of the whole political community.³²⁸

Evident in one of his writings—where he compares and contrasts different definitions of politics citing, among others, Otto von Bismarck, Georg Jellinek, Carl Schmitt, Otto Koellreutter and Adolf Hitler—Kırsakürek is particularly inspired by Schmitt’s definition.³²⁹ Following the latter’s existential friend-enemy distinction, Kırsakürek maintains in his *İdeolocya Örgüsü* that politics in his imagined Islamic revolution would rest on a similar dichotomy. “To determine the pivotal points of the internal politics of the Islamic revolution”, Kırsakürek says

It is possible to show two poles of which one is the enemy that is to be eliminated and the other is the friend that is to be rejuvenated. The enemy pole has two branches: (I) The generation of unbelievers, rootless and characterless imitators who have pestered Islam from outside the circle of faith for a hundred years with all their supporters. Among their active supporters are Westerners as the masters of moral/spiritual colonialism [“*manevi sömürü uzmanı Garphılar*”], Jews, Freemasons, dönmes, mixed-bloods and cosmopolitans... (II) The generation of those without love (of Allah) [“*aşksızlar, vecdsizler*”], those who learn [Islam] in parrot-fashion [“*kuru ezberciler*”], commentators [of Quran] with only carnal knowledge [“*nefsanî tefsirciler*”], unfortunates who do not have any insight about the human and the world [“*insan ve dünya murakabesinden uzak nasipsizler*”], fanatics who are alien to the inner and outer spirit of religion, who have pestered Islam from inside the circle of faith for four hundred years with all their supporters. Among their supporters are ignorant people who have lost their ground today but can be proliferated with a traditional instinct at any moment...

³²⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

³²⁸ Richard Wolin, “Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State”, *Theory and Society* 19, no. 4 (August 1990): 389–416, 395.

³²⁹ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Tanrıkulundan Dinlediklerim* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1984), 256–57.

The major friendly pole of Islamic revolution in internal politics is the new generations who will grow to represent the essence and sincerity of Islam by totally submitting their hearts and minds to the religion...³³⁰

As opposed to the short and simple remark on the friendly pole, Kısakürek, in his sui generis style, documents a broad portfolio for enemies of Islamic cause. In fact, anyone besides those who stand with the particular conception Islam Kısakürek advances could be perceived as the enemy. Kısakürek suggests in the beginning of the passage that politics refers to annihilation of what is perceived as the enemy since it is a menace for existence of the political community composed of believers—and this is what gives his conception of politics a Schmittian character.

The logical conclusion of reducing politics to the friend/enemy distinction and the assumed necessity to destroy the enemy, however, is that politics would be futile eventually. Schmitt's remark that "the only politics is international politics" in healthy societies confirms the futility of politics in the ideal world.³³¹ Politics apart from pursuing what the friend-enemy distinction requires, i.e. annihilation of the enemy, then, is a feature of morbid polity. It merely refers to interest-based factional struggles. With similar concerns, Kısakürek expresses his distaste for factional politics. In the Islamic society of Kısakürek's imagination, there is no room for "daily, abusive, sluggish, rapacious, fraudulent politics".³³² In contradistinction to conception of politics as a forum of discussion and deliberation on public issues, politics of Islam has two main tasks: (I) to eliminate the enemy through struggle; and (II) to raise new generations in line with prescriptions of Islam that represent the

³³⁰ Kısakürek, "Siyaset." [Politics] *Büyük Doğu*. 5th year, number 14 (January 13, 1950): 2; *Büyük Doğu*ya Doğru. 90-92.

³³¹ Holmes, *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, 41.

³³² Kısakürek, *ibid.*

common good. Thus, Kısakürek's approach to politics is also overtly teleological in that politics is conceived as a means to make Islamic rules and way of life dominant.

Manifested in Kısakürek's discussion of perceived attacks and encroachments on Islam not as an issue of faith but under the title "politics" is his identification of Islam and politics. Note that Kısakürek does not think that he is advancing *an* Islamic form of politics that espouses political principles, institutions and practices by relying on Islamic sources of knowledge. Rather, he had a conviction that what he introduces is politics of Islam itself. In other words, his reified understanding of Islam stands also for a form of politics. The relationship Kısakürek builds between Islam and politics differs from both late Ottoman Islamism and early republican conservatism. For the pioneers of Islamism in the late Ottoman period, religion and politics may be inter-related but the two have different natures and dynamics. Ottoman Islamists used Islam/Islamic knowledge to justify their political claims or they grounded their political theorizing on Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Yet they did not equate Islam with politics or took Islam per se as a political ideology. Kısakürek is distinguished from the contemporaneous conservatives too in his approach to Islam and politics. As hinted above, conservatives tend to see society as an organic whole whose bits and pieces are shaped by culture, traditions and values. Like their counterparts outside Turkey, 20th century Turkish conservatives imagine every sector of society including religion and politics inter-related. Although the degree to which conservatives attach importance to Islam varies, they take Islam as an important component of Turkish culture and they highlight the instrumental significance of Islam for social cohesion, Turkish national identity and fighting

communism. However, they never identify politics and Islam or take the latter as the sole content of their political thinking.

Kırsakürek's "ideologization of Islam" have more in common with revivalist strand of late 20th century Islamism. Despite his profound distaste with the content of revivalist Islamism to the extent that the latter stand for a direct relationship with the primary sources Islamic knowledge to arrive at Islamic alternatives to modern political processes and institutions, Kırsakürek shares their method in his designation of Islam as politics. Moreover, akin to revivalist Islamism, Kırsakürek aspires to mobilize popular masses around his "ideology of Islam. To the extent that Islam stands for a particular form of politics for Kırsakürek, Muslims are supposed to be subject to this form of politics by way of being adhered to Islam. In Kırsakürek's conception of Islam, then, each and every Muslim becomes political agents. Thus, for Kırsakürek, Islam implicates Muslimness to be a distinct political identity. In so doing, Kırsakürek contributes to the reconstruction of Muslimness as a political identity—thereby joins the political discourse of modernization by essentializing secular-religious divide in political terms.

VI.I.II. Topçu and Moral Framework of Politics

In relation to the practical significance of Islam, Topçu, as a moral philosopher himself, features the role of religion in the formation of a system of morality that he thinks the basis of felicity "in this world". Not unlike many other conservatives of his time in Turkey and elsewhere he sees the ills of modern societies as well as the Muslim World in the decline of moral values. The decline of morality, he holds, is caused by the loss of an authentic understanding and practice of religion for the latter

is the formative factor for morality. Topçu associates morality with submitting one's will to the divine will—an idea at the core of divine religions for him. Thus, according to Topçu, it is not possible to differentiate morality from religion. He maintains, “Moral principles should be derived from the revealed principles of religion. The moral history of humanity is the history of religions. These principles are superior truths to us, whose necessities do not need to be proven by reason.”³³³ As opposed to many post-Enlightenment philosophers who dissociate moral faculties from religious prescriptions and sensibilities, Topçu argues that moral imperatives are not to be obtained through speculative reasoning. Accordingly, the individual who submits his/her will to the will of God would derive moral imperatives from the sources of religion. Moreover, Topçu suggests that this submission to the divine will ensured the happiness on earth: “A religious person is a person who surrenders to his true owner, Allah, with his hopes and disappointments, with his pain and joy, in a state of resilience and tranquility. This surrender is the source of happiness on earth.”³³⁴ Therefore, religion or Islam in particular could bring about wellbeing “in this world” to the extent of its capacity to sustain a moral life for its adherents.

In Topçu's account, Islam provides universal moral principles and does not offer any blueprint other than that. In other words, he does not offer or wish doctors of religious knowledge to offer a comprehensive list of rules and prescriptions for believers based on Islamic sources of knowledge. Topçu reminds, right after the passage I have just quoted above from his *İslam ve İnsan* (Islam and Human), that

The sources [of religion] did not move from the dogma to the rule, maybe rules and orders were sent upon contingent events and actions.

³³³ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 91.

³³⁴ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 337.

The source of the first actions waiting for the divine command was the love boiling in the soul of the Prophet.³³⁵

Conceding that rules and prescriptions that organize everyday life of believers are contingent upon circumstances, Topçu takes love (for God) to be the prime mover of religion as well as the system of morality emanates from religion. Hence, in line with his conception of religion, Topçu opposes defining morality as the sum of formal rules and prescriptions. Rather, he features moral themes that are all connected to the concept of divine love he emphasizes in his conception of Islam. For Topçu, these themes are in fact universal principles that are seen in other religions as well; however, the Qur'an gives these principles their complete and perfect form.³³⁶

Its prevalence within Islamic intellectual and political movements notwithstanding, Topçu strictly objects ideologization of Islam, as well as its instrumentalization in political contestations through representing Islam as the only way to salvation and felicity in this world. Identification of Islam with sharia, or taking sharia the basis of Islam, is not in line with Topçu's conception of Islam, as we have already seen. Hence, for him Islam=sharia=ideology formula put forth by Kısakürek is not acceptable at all. Being cautious against the purported dangers of ideologization of Islam, Topçu suggests

It is the best way not to multiply the rules of action to which religion is attached and to treat [the rules] as a legal system [*"hukuk sistemi halinde"*]. If this is not done, the rules, which have multiplied endlessly over the centuries, turn a person into an unconscious machine automatized by a magician or hypnotist given that the doors of criticism

³³⁵ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 92.

³³⁶ He states, "Essentially, there is one single morality. It was presented to humanity by the first religion. It has attained perfection in the religion of Islam. Many moral systems have been put forward in the history of philosophy. However, morality, which is the divine gift of the religion of Islam to humanity, is incomparable in any way on earth." See, Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 105. Note that Topçu, despite acknowledging morality as a universal and primordial phenomenon, still left the door open for an Islamic exceptionalism.

and argument were also tightly closed; and then religious life resembles the workings of a machine used to make certain things.³³⁷

Topçu seems to argue that principles of religion ought to remain at the most general level possible and be conceived as the spirit of the current legal system. What sharia signifies for Topçu are systematized rules and prescriptions in different historical and social contexts within the framework of general religious principles. Accordingly, canonizing and absolutizing these systematized rules and prescriptions under the name of sharia would only cripple the religion itself.

Topçu, then, does not see in Islam a blueprint for “this-worldly” affairs—including politics. In fact, he is particularly averse to conflation of Islam and politics for it is a blatant disgrace for the essential meaning of Islam, as he understands. Reflecting on the increasing Islamic activity in his days, Topçu suggests

The revival of Islam in our era did not happen through a natural and sincere religious path. First of all, this movement was born as a reaction that opposes influences of society, that is, as a claim [*“iddia”*]. However, sincere faith could not sprout from a claim. This claim became arrogant, it became violent, now it has mixed hypocrisy with hatred and has taken the form of a politics within religion.³³⁸

Topçu argues that growing visibility of Islamic political activity did not originate from a truthful faith in moral values offered in Islamic sources. In the same article entitled “İslam’ı Sömüren Siyaset” (Politics That Exploits Islam), which is central to his understanding of the relationship between Islam and politics, Topçu further maintains

So much so that in our time, there is no evidence or witness than the so-called Islamic publications to prove more perfectly that the Islamic front does not have a spirit and character. Islamist political leaders seem to be unique heroes in this business. One of these leaders, who said that he would bring the caliph, open Ayasofya [as a mosque], and even convene

³³⁷ Topçu, *Türkiye’nin Maarif Davası*, 162.

³³⁸ Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 114.

the assembly in Ayasofya, is committing an unprecedented exploitation of Islam in our time.³³⁹

Politicization of Islam for Topçu, then, means reduction of Islam as a means to vindicate Muslims against the supposed enemies of Islam through political contestation. Topçu observes that proponents of this form of politics abuses Islam for their own interests. What he finds disturbing in politicization of Islam is this purportedly abusive instrumentalization of Islam.

Topçu's profound discontent with politicization of Islam as well as its ideologization around a reified conception of sharia has its roots in the development of Sufi Islam against institutionalization of religion in early periods of Islamic history. In fact, Sufi Islam first emerged, in contradistinction to the formation of an Islamic orthodoxy under the aegis of the caliphal state. Early Sufis claimed the legacy of prophetic tradition whose single most important aspect was a direct mystical experience of God as opposed to the practices of religion mediated by authorities of Islamic orthodoxy.³⁴⁰ Topçu is certainly influenced by these Sufi concerns in his discontent with institutional Islam and its representatives, for these concerns are constitutive of his conception of Islam-as-morality.³⁴¹ Accordingly, in its institutionalized form, Islam would lose its exceptional character manifested in the idea of an unmediated contact with the divine.

³³⁹ Ibid., 115.

³⁴⁰ See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

³⁴¹ In the article, Topçu invokes the historical tensions between Sufi Islam and institutional orthodoxy: "The use of the divine authority in the spirits as a weapon in the hands of the rulers began during the Abbasid period. Many of the Abbasid caliphs, especially Mansur, violated the great spirits, the true claimants of rights, in the name of Islam, and committed countless murders. They plucked many heads dedicated to God. Around them, a class of so-called men of religion, whose eyes were darkened by greed, consisted of unscrupulous people who were able to make their gains legitimate, murder legitimate, and cruelty permissible. The caliphs, relying on this horde of black-clad book-bearing sycophants called ulema, became the ruthless murderers of al-Imam al-A'zam and Mansur al-Hallaj." See Topçu, *İslam ve İnsan*, 112.

Alas, Topçu is aware that ideologization of Islam in modern context is the dominant trend in Islamic intellectual and political movements based on the conception of Islam-as-identity. He witnesses the rise of institutions, organizations and associations that claim to offer Islamic alternatives to existing ones that are deemed Western, secular, modern, Christian—in short, deviant. Topçu criticizes these efforts as well as Islamic sectors participated in this process so harsh that he was even accused of being anti-religious.³⁴² According to him,

Religion is not a claim, maybe a life. It does not contain the arrogant claims of mankind. Just as the truth of religion cannot be revealed with bright and pompous words, like the exaggerated inflating in the expression of the seller who wants to make his goods been admired, and the fluffy clichés used in place of respect, the claims of the superiority of their own religion over other religions and the pettiness of other religions, which are widely spread by those who adopt the religious craftsmanship [*“din esnaflığını benimseyenler”*], do not glorify religion or make it more valuable. These people, with their plain ignorance, reveal the collective expression of their arrogance, hatred, envy and hypocrisy.³⁴³

In line with his objection to reducing religion to its formalistic aspects, Topçu identifies religion as a general framework that informs one’s attitudes, or a mentality, in life. Formalism, on the other hand, inhibits understanding of the essence of religion and cripples the authentic religiosity according to him. Addressing exponent of Islam-as-identity, by labelling them in his own terms though, Topçu strictly denounces vindication of practices, concepts and institutions that are deemed Islamic against supposedly un-Islamic ones.

As opposed to Kısakürek’s Islam-as-identity, Topçu’s Islam-as-morality does not designate an existential political division based on Islam. Instead, Topçu puts forth a

³⁴² Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 185.

³⁴³ Topçu, *Türkiye’nin Maarif Davası*, 161.

different kind of dualism, between forces of spirituality and that of materiality that Topçu defines as a primordial and universal contestation beyond and above politics. In fact, Topçu denigrates politics as an interest-based enterprise utilized by material forces. He represents a classical conservative position that displays deep suspicions towards politics as a means to reach the desired outcome. He holds a romantic view that laments after an imagined and bygone political and social order. Topçu would like to have the old order to be restored, yet he does not seem to offer any political way to do that to his audience. Therefore, he is against both political mobilization based on religion and reduction of Muslimness to a political being. To the extent that Topçu dissociates Islam and Muslimness from politics, his approach to the relationship between politics and Islam represents a form of “Islamic secularism”.

VI.II. State, Sovereignty and Legitimacy: Politics at the Conceptual Level

Kısakürek and Topçu are two exceptions to the oblivion in Turkish Islamic conservative thought regarding theoretical discussion on the issues pertaining to politics. A myriad of Islamic conservative publications after the 1940’s notwithstanding, it is very difficult to find authors who touch upon questions that political thought conventionally addresses. Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s political writings fill in this lacunae and, in this way, have shaped the formation of conservative and Islamist political thinking in Turkey since the 1950’s. However, writings that reveal their understandings of politics, notion of state, and reservations for democracy are scattered in their magazines and published books. This is especially true for Topçu whose political writings were compiled posthumously in his *İradenin Davası - Devlet ve Demokrasi* [The Cause of the Will – State and

Democracy], 21 years after his death. Kısakürek, on the other hand, has written more on these issues in his *Büyük Doğu* magazine under different sections of it. Most notable among them were his writings under the title *İdeolocya Örgüsü* that originally appeared in the issues of *Büyük Doğu* in 1940's and 1950's, and were compiled in a book first published in 1968. *İdeolocya Örgüsü* is often read as a manifesto/utopia of a uniquely Islamic polity whose influence supersedes that of Qutb's *Milestones* (first published in 1964 and translated into Turkish as *Yoldaki İşaretler* in 1966) among Turkish-Islamists.

The foremost commonality in Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings is the primacy of state and the importance of political order. The centrality of authority and order is a legacy Kısakürek and Topçu inherit from the late Ottoman political thought, and shared with Kemalism and ideologies of the 20th-century Turkey. Their interaction with European conservative thought as well as Naqshbandi Sufism has only reinforced this notion. In the context of the Cold War, their anxiety for the order is further exacerbated in the face of the perceived threat of communism. The centrality of authority and order, shaped in the Cold War context, has been the most enduring and powerful legacy Kısakürek and Topçu left to later generations. Despite the irrelevance of a communist threat since the 1980's, the state-centric mentality Kısakürek and Topçu registered for sacralizing the authority and order are still highly effective. That being said, differing positions of Kısakürek and Topçu on the political significance of Islam are reflected on their discussions on state, authority and legitimacy at the conceptual level. In relation to their conceptions of Islam, the latter has different significance in their reflections on these political theoretical concepts.

VI.II.I. Nurettin Topçu on State: Dual Source of Sovereignty

Topçu's conception of Islam-as-morality propounds that political significance of Islam lies in its capacity to endow individuals with moral faculties. The single most important one of these faculties in the realm of politics is the sense of responsibility. Accordingly, politicians, in maintaining public affairs, ought to have moral responsibility that is supposedly rooted in the principles of religion. Concerning this connection, Topçu points out

We said that the will for responsibility comes from Allah. Do we mean a religious state by this?.. Never. When religion becomes institutionalized, it falls into the hands of any individual. What we want is for the founder of the state to surrender his will to Allah.³⁴⁴

Here, Topçu makes a peculiar distinction between, on the one hand, a state administered by those who have faith in God and, on the other, a religion-based state. This distinction is indeed in line with Topçu's conception of Islam that rejects identifying religion with a total system of rules. Alternatively, in his conception, the faith is supposed to nourish such moral sentiments as responsibility, respect and service to guide ruling elite.³⁴⁵

The above-quoted passage is indeed key to explicate what I meant by "Islamic secularism" in defining Topçu's position on the relationship between Islam and politics. Topçu does not see in Islamic sources of knowledge as manuals that manifest explicit rules and prescriptions to govern a polity. Nor does he offer appealing to these sources to derive the principles in the administration of state. His

³⁴⁴ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 26.

³⁴⁵ Hence, Topçu also rejected any direct link between Islam and politics, which was expressed clearly in one of his writings. For him, "Religion is not a world reign. It has nothing to do with politics. In our history, the establishment of sheikh al-Islam doing politics with the power it has in the name of religion has been the main reason for the internal collapse of religion as well as the state." See Topçu, *Türkiye'nin Maarif Davası*, 161.

position, as such, differs from both *mukaddesatçılık* and Islamism at once.

Connecting this passage to his reflections on the development of scientific and philosophical knowledge, Topçu conceives politics as a semi-autonomous field, which had its own rules and principles. However, politics is only *semi*-autonomous for politicians ought to be bounded by universal and primordial moral principles that originated from religion. In Topçu's Islamic secularism, legitimacy of political institutions including that of the state as the political institution par excellence has two sources. On the one hand, these institutions relies on the capacity that the public confers to them to maintain public affairs; on the other hand, they are legitimate so long as they remain within the boundaries of the moral framework laid out by the divine being. Hence, political legitimacy in Topçu is both popular (secular) and divine (religious) at the same time.

In line with his Islamic secularism, Topçu offers a unique definition of the state that combines modern political concepts with spiritualist notions. Topçu's definition draws on his version of the philosophy of action where, with apparent inspirations from German Idealism and Turkish nationalism, Topçu emphasizes the role of state in mediating the action. In a pretty much Hegelian sense, Topçu sees the state as a station that connects the individual to the divine will. Topçu's state is a transcendental entity whose will and authority embrace all individuals subject to it. For him,

The state is the spiritual ["*manevi*"] unity formed by people living on a particular territory with sovereignty. [The state] means the spirit of nation's existence. It is the embodiment of nation's will. Particular territory in this definition refers to the homeland ["*vatan*"], people living on it refer to the nation. The third factor, sovereignty, is the fundamental element of state's existence. If the country alone is merely a corpse, a

dead body, then the nation is its life and the state is its spirit. The state is the conscious [“şuur”] of the nation.³⁴⁶

Topçu argues that the state owes its existence to the people who are accomplished to be a nation ruling a particular territory with sovereignty. Yet, on the other hand, unlike contractarian conceptions of the state, Topçu’s state does not emerge out of practical necessities of people who share a will to live together. The state represents a link in the chain that connects individual wills to the divine will. Therefore, state’s existence depends on another source that gives the state its transcendental character. This source is a divine and mystical one that transcends the total sum of individuals who formed the state.³⁴⁷

Topçu’s conception of the state rests on three elements: the nation, the homeland and sovereignty/authority. In the above definition, Topçu asserts that the nation composed of people living on a particular territory that refers to the homeland. Thus, there is an unbreakable link between country (homeland), nation and state in Topçu’s thought. According to Topçu, the nation is composed of national geography (i.e. land), history, and fine arts (i.e. culture). The most significant of these three is the national geography (land) which gives people a national character. It is the soil that has shaped, for centuries, social and economic relations of the people living on it as well as their crafts, arts and culture.³⁴⁸ Although Topçu’s state is indisputably a nation-state and territory is a key component of nation, Topçu’s nationalism radically differs from territorial nationalism and citizenship that liberal political thinkers often espouse. For territoriality alone could not determine one’s national identity. As an archetypal nationalist, Topçu associates the nation not only with commonalities in

³⁴⁶ Nurettin Topçu, *İrâdenin Davası / Devlet ve Demokrasi* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2012), 50.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 34-5.

the present but also with the history that makes these commonalities possible and the future that these commonalities would bring along.³⁴⁹ Therefore, like the state, the nation in Topçu's thought is a transcendental entity that exists independently of individuals who composed it.

As stated above, Topçu believes that one of the two sources of state's existence, besides the nation, is the divine will; thus, sovereignty of the state, the third element in Topçu's definition, has both a popular and a divine character. With its divine nature, state's existence and authority does not depend on the nation that once formed the state. The state uses its unbounded authority to fulfill its mission to elevate the will of individual members of the national community to the level of divine will. In Topçu's words,

The state has started to be the source of nation's prosperity, to sustain the nation and to raise it to the level of the divine will as soon as the nation acquired the conscious in the name of the state. ... The state that was given birth by the nation becomes a school for the nation.³⁵⁰

According to Topçu, then, the nation depends on the state, and needs its authority that embraces all spheres of social life and surrounds the whole national community. In this overly idealistic representation, the state is supposed to use its authority to provide individual members of the nation with necessary means to enrich spirituality and to lead a moral life. Since the nation depends on the state to reach the divine will that signifies the purpose of life for Topçu, he expects individuals to submit themselves to its authority.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 52.

Topçu's reflections on the state accommodate totalitarian notions as he "sacralizes" the state by attributing it a central role in reaching out to the divine will. Italian historian Emilio Gentile uses the phrase "sacralization of the state" to describe the notion of state and its consecration in Italian Fascism. According to him, "Fascism was a political religion and it idolized the State as well as the fatherland. Each citizen had no other goal in their life except that of dedicating themselves [sic] body and soul to the fatherland".³⁵¹ Unlike the fascist position Gentile describes here, Topçu does not conceive the state as an end in and of itself; thus, state does not represent a sacred entity, for him, by virtue of being the ultimate political expression of a nation's unity. Yet, his position evidently dwells around the vicinity of fascistic sacralization of the state. It is very difficult to locate Topçu's reflections on the state in these passages with his conception of Islam based on his peculiar synthesis of Sufism and the philosophy of action. Neither Sufism nor philosophy of action as propounded by Blondel have comparable emphasis on the state. In fact, Topçu himself expresses his aversion to the impact of political authority and institutions on authentic religious experience by invoking the historical emergence of Sufism. Apparently, in taking up the notion of the state, inspirations from a particular strand of German Idealism and Turkish nationalism prevail at the expense of his conception of Islam. The equivocal position of Topçu, in the last analysis, ought to be understood within the context of the early 20th century where the primacy of the state, authority and order were common denominators of almost all currents in Turkish political thought.

³⁵¹ Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle of Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 8.

VI.II.II. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and the Sovereignty of Islam

Kısakürek's political writings reflect the same emphasis on the state, authority and order. Unlike Topçu's abstract discussion on the role of the state and its authority in connecting individuals to the divine will, Kısakürek has a rather direct and concrete approach in discussing these concepts. For one thing, the state in Kısakürek's thought has a definite role: being the guardian of Islamic sharia, ensuring its implementation, and taking necessary measures when it is violated. Hence, Kısakürek, though implicitly, refers in his writings to the three functions of the political power—namely legislation, execution and judiciary—all of which are associated with the practical significance of Islam in accordance with his conception. Thus, Kısakürek envisions a modern state that is supposed to follow sharia in all its functions and actions. Kısakürek's utopian Islamic state is in fact a totalitarian one that controls the minutest details of political, social and even cultural life based on principles laid out by the Islamic sources he sees legitimate. He offers this utopia in his *İdeolocya Örgüsü*—describing the book as the single most important fruit of his intellectual efforts.

The key concept of Kısakürek's reflections on the state is authority. For him, it has been the foremost characteristic of the state to exhibit its authority to maintain order and to guide its subjects in their path towards salvation, which Kısakürek associates directly with Islamic way of life and abiding by the rules and prescriptions of sharia. Kısakürek sees the state as the ultimate source of order that he believes characteristic to the Islamic community. Thus, he often invokes the “din wa dawla” (religion and state) argument suggesting that Islam and the state could not be separated. According to him, “Islam is bound to the state as tightly as the spirit is attached to the body;

they never parted...”³⁵² Similar to his conception of Islam-as-identity that denotes a total ideology, the extension of state’s authority in Kısakürek’s writings embraces all aspects of life. However, while the state is so significant, Kısakürek, unlike Topçu, does not discuss the state in terms of its foundation and nature. It seems that he takes the state as given, without offering any definition or any argument for explaining how it came to exist. Instead, he elaborates on the steps that are to be followed in his ideal Islamic state.

Despite his indifference to the nature of the state at the conceptual level, Kısakürek reflects intensely on existing alternative forms of government. It is in these reflections that we can find his ideas on the source of political power and the legitimacy of authority. At the outset, Kısakürek denies pointing out any one particular form of government as the one that is truly Islamic. He, in fact, suggests that

There is no form of government in Islam, there is a spirit of government; and lofty and excluded Islam has nothing to do with the simple and primitive forms and cadre preferences that remain at the ground level, such as the sultanate, the republic, etc.³⁵³

Yet, he immediately adds that

[Islam] places the authority of a single individual enslaved to the right above the rule of freedom condemned to idleness; but it considers the government based on consultation among the most distinguished representatives of the community to be superior to all of them...³⁵⁴

Kısakürek thinks that there is not a definite form of government prescribed by Islam, but an oligarchic government of a distinguished group based on their qualities is accordingly preferable. Here, Kısakürek registers to a form of elitism in which the

³⁵² Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 107.

³⁵³ Ibid., 108.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

right to take administrative offices belongs to “those who know” who are to rule over “those who do not know”.³⁵⁵ In his peculiar Islamic utopia, Kısakürek offers such a political system, the so-called *başyücelik* state, which is ruled by what he calls “assembly of the exalted” [*yüceler kurultayı*] composed of a group of privileged who have the necessary credentials to represent the whole national community and undertake the executive powers on behalf of it.³⁵⁶ In his own words, “The state of Islamic revolution, in a deeply and rightfully Muslim understanding, guides the popular masses just as a doctor’s treatment of his patient without asking him what to do.”³⁵⁷ Kısakürek believes that the history would prove the superiority of such an oligarchic system over other types. He even suggests that, among the three forms of government humankind recognized, monarchy had the predominant system of the remote past, democracy was of the recent past and oligarchy would be of the contemporary times.³⁵⁸

Conspicuously missing in Kısakürek’s reflections on the state is reference to the political community, the people—either in the form of an Islamic community or umma, or a Turkish-Muslim community as a nation. That the connection between the state and the people/nation remains rather vague in Kısakürek’s writings implies that the state exists independently of the people/nation. This implication is validated by Kısakürek himself in his ideas on the nature of state’s sovereignty. Similar to the later generations of Islamists, Kısakürek believes that sovereignty had only one

³⁵⁵ These phrases were from a verse in the Qur’an saying that “Are those who know equal to those who know not?” (39: 9)

³⁵⁶ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 259-62.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 205.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 204.

source: the divine. Sovereignty of Kısakürek's state does not belong to the people but to Hak, i.e. Allah. According to him,

Since, in Islam, the people are the outward appearance of the right and the right is the inner aspect of the people [*“halk, hakkın zahiri ve hak, halkın bātını”*], the only measure of the Islamic state is the right [*“Hak”*, i.e. Allah] and its sole dominion. The rule of the right [*“Hakkın hakimiyeti”*], not of the people. In Islam, the people, as the captives of the right and truth, are truly and perfectly boundless, and in the same sense, truly and perfectly bounded.³⁵⁹

Kısakürek stresses that the (Islamic) state carries out its functions in the name of God, which is the absolute sovereign. Note that he expresses these ideas within a context in which Atatürk's phrase “Sovereignty rests unconditionally with the nation” was the prevalent motto in Turkish politics—which also appeared on the back wall of the national assembly. Kısakürek elsewhere mentions his aspiration to change that inscription with the one that says, “Sovereignty belongs to God”. Hence, he envisions a theocratic state ruling over people in the name of God and through the rules and prescriptions God manifested via his messenger, the prophet Muhammed. The legitimacy of state's authority, then, rests on the application of these rules and prescriptions codified by elders of Sunni orthodoxy under the name of sharia.

Parallel to his conception of Islam-as-identity, Kısakürek offers a notion of Islamic state that was supposedly distinct from other state forms. Kısakürek refers to Islam as a reified entity that enjoins the state to follow a particular way in its functions and organization at almost every opportunity. Note for instance that he starts his sentences in reflecting on the state by phrases such as “in Islam, the state...” or “Islam propounded the state to be...” The very formulation of these sentences suggests that there exists a certain form of politics in Kısakürek's mind irrespective

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 108.

of historical and contextual differences between polities ruled by Muslims. Whether this certain form rests on the body of political practices and ideas in the times of the prophet Muhammed or it emanates from the body of Sunni orthodox jurisprudential tradition is not clear, for Kısakürek does not make reference to any source in these reflections. Either way, what we have is “a kind of ideological ‘essentialization’ of the religion” that Kısakürek would like to promote.³⁶⁰ Kısakürek’s views on the relationship between Islam and politics in general, and his notion of the state in particular, rest on this schema where politics is not at all an autonomous space. Islam as Kısakürek conceives it designates its framework and principles as well as its purposes, which is rendering Islam and Muslim political identity supreme. In Kısakürek, political institutions and processes are instruments for this purpose.

VI.III. Politics in Early Cold War Turkey: Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s Reflections on Political Community

Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s reflections on politics at general and conceptual levels are in line with their conceptions of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality respectively. In this section, I analyze their ideas on politics at the practical level by discussing how they apply their views on the relationship between Islam and politics in their reflections on Turkish politics and society. In so doing, I problematize conventional designations of Kısakürek’s and Topçu’s ideological positions in the same corner of Turkish political space. I suggest, against the current, that Kısakürek and Topçu represent two different positions against the emerging contestation between secular and religious identities in the context of the early Cold War Turkey. Kısakürek’s Islam-as-identity informs a definite ideological position in this context. Kısakürek

³⁶⁰ Waardenburg, *Islam*, 319.

successfully reconciles diverse trends within Islamic intellectual movement on the one hand, and Turkish nationalism on the other hand. At the outset, he offers a restorationist ideology rests on his conception of Islam. Yet, as we saw, he adopts a revivalist method epitomized by modern Islamist movements seeking political mobilization of Muslims and an Islamic alternative path to modernity. Kısakürek is concerned with the status of Islam in Turkey and in the modern world at large; but, as we will see, his ideas are also nourished by Turkish nationalism. As such, established concepts of intellectual history such as conservatism, Islamism or nationalism could only partially explain this peculiar ideological position. Therefore, I will use the Turkish word *mukaddesatçılık* to define the ideological position of Kısakürek who himself uses this word frequently to refer to his position. Topçu, however, is not part of this political ideology starting with his divergence from the conception of Islam that *mukaddesatçılık* espouses. In fact, Topçu's political reflections represent a critique of *mukaddesatçı* politics as much as they present a critique of secular and western-oriented modernization process.

VI.III.I Kısakürek and the Consolidation of *Mukaddesatçılık*

The foremost significance of Kısakürek's writings on Turkish politics and society is their contribution to the formation of a conservative political language resting on the early Cold War instrumentalization of Islam for state's security concerns. The anti-communist atmosphere in early Cold War Turkey opened up opportunities for intellectuals with religious and nationalistic sensibilities including Kısakürek who fashioned his discontent with secular modernization under an anti-communist guise and exerted influence on right-wing politicians and state officials. Representing nationalist and religious sentiments as antidotes to left ideologies was the main

strategy in this effort to draw support from the political elite. Kısakürek, in this milieu, powerfully states an expression of this strategy with his own legitimation in his 1962 speech entitled “Komünizm Geliyor!” (Communism Is Coming!):

No force could carry out anti-communist struggle but Islam, the true religion. Neither philosophy, nor pulp nationalism [*“posa milliyetçiliği”*], nor economic doctrines antagonistic to communism... For these are either empty speculations without any dynamic base in real life or psychological penchants that do not denote a system or an ideology. Although communism was 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.”³⁶¹

This remark, reflected in other outlets of conservative press in early Cold War Turkey too, is foremost a call for those in positions of power to give rein to the Islamic revivalist movement.³⁶² Dramatizing the strength of communism in Turkey, as the title indicates, Kısakürek seeks for 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 CHP as the embodiment of these ideals by holding them accountable for the advent of left ideologies. Moreover, the supposed leftist threat favored his attempts to reconcile nationalist and Islamic sensibilities to arrive at *mukaddesatçılık* as a new ideological position

Kısakürek’s association of communism with Western-oriented modernization process and its agents and supporters is a milestone in the development of *mukaddesatçılık*. Not unlike nationalists, nativists and Islamists in other parts of the world, Kısakürek purports that communism is but a hazardous product of the advent

³⁶¹ Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 47.

³⁶² Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 326.

of secular Western modernity at the expense of the faith. This conception of communism gives him an advantage to identify secularism with the political left, which has already been the chief enemy in Turkish political landscape since the early years of the Cold War. In so doing, Kısakürek negates agents of Turkish modernization process who are, 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].”³⁶³ In his *sui generis* style, Kısakürek refers to (I) modernizing reformers and the like-minded intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries; and (II) founders of the republic who accelerated the modernization process, and adherents of a worldview around the founding principles of the republic. For Kısakürek, agents of Turkish modernization act as part of the political community, and claim to rejuvenate Turkey with their reformist and modernist policies and ideas. Characterizing them as “*sahte kahramanlar*” (fake heroes), Kısakürek argues that modernist reformers are “the agents of hatred emerged within ourselves from our own flesh and blood” who sought the cure for the ills of the country in denying the Islamic roots of Turkish identity and imitating the West.³⁶⁴ Kısakürek further maintains that these “agents of hatred” have been actively supported by Western imperialism, international Jewry and Freemasonry—all of which are conspicuously demonized in Kısakürek’s writings.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 190.

³⁶⁴ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Sahte Kahramanlar* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1977), 46.

³⁶⁵ See for instance Bora, “Narrating the Enemy”; and Marc David Baer, “An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 4 (2013): 523–55.

In response to the discourse of modernization in the mid-20th century, Kısakürek constructs a historical account of Turkish modernization process that has been central to the formation of Turkish-Muslim political identity for people with Islamic and nationalistic sensibilities who feel alienated by the Western-oriented political identity offered by the republican regime. This alternative modernization narrative rests on an existential secular-religious divide, and presents secular modernizers as the oppressors and religious conservatives as the oppressed. Thereby, century-long intellectual contestations on modernization in Turkey are reduced to an existential divide between indigenous Turkish-Muslim identity on the one hand, and sell-out appendages of Western imperialism on the other hand. Featuring an essential clash between secular and Islamic worldviews akin to the *Kulturkampf* of the late 19th century Germany, Kısakürek's alternative historical account aims to debase secularism and amplified consolidation of *mukaddesatçılık*.

Perhaps, for Kısakürek and other *mukaddesatçıs* alike, no other example could better demonstrate the feeling of injustice and humiliation in the modernization process than the case of Ayasofya. For Kısakürek this was an appalling decision taken by “a coterie of infidels” who were only ostensibly Turkish. Accordingly, Ayasofya was converted into a mosque as the conqueror's “right of sword”; and it has been a symbol of Muslim sovereignty over Istanbul and Turkey at large.³⁶⁶ Ayasofya's new status was a source of humiliation and alienation for it is a sign of outright rejection of Ottoman-Islamic heritage and Muslim identity, which for *mukaddesatçıs* are the defining characteristics of Turkey. In a 1965 speech delivered at a student's association meeting Kısakürek addresses the sense of humiliation caused by the

³⁶⁶ Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 158.

decision to convert Ayasofya into a museum. He cultivates the grudge of his audience against the perpetrators of the decision, and finishes his speech with a prophetic revenge talk. Kısakürek maintains that

Ayasofya was closed down. This was the gravest treachery against Turkish history, soul and *mukaddesat*. The coterie or the clique which 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.³⁶⁷

Kısakürek harbingers a time that Ayasofya would be wide open for Muslim prayer with the effort of *mukaddesatçı* Turkish youth. He emphasizes grudge to channel feelings of injustice and humiliation into mobilization of the youth. Convinced that the time to take revenge for injustices against Muslims both domestically and globally has yet to come, Kısakürek devoted himself to nourish his followers' hostility towards perceived enemies of the Islamic cause. He assumes a self-designated role to mobilize a *mukaddesatçı* political identity that rests on a conviction that Muslimness and Turkishness are inseparable to uphold the cause of Islam against its enemies.³⁶⁸

The aforementioned anti-communist speech of Kısakürek is also a recommendation to nationalists for reconciling under the umbrella of Islam and creating a unified conservative-nationalist bloc against the left in Turkey. Already in the mid-20th century, nationalist and anti-communist associations were founded within which nationalists, conservatives and Islamists collaborated including Kısakürek himself.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 162. Emphasis added.

³⁶⁸ Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Rapor 2* (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976), 19.

³⁶⁹ See Kılıç, '*Allah, Vatan, Soy, Milli Mukaddesat*'; and Meşe, *Komünizmle Mücadele Dernekleri*. Remember that Islamic-oriented intellectuals probably prefer pursuing activity under a nationalist guise to protect themselves from possible purges by the secularist state.

Hence, the Cold War context forced these groups to cooperate against left ideologies and the perceived communist threat—favoring Kısakürek’s attempts to reconcile nationalism with Islamic revivalism. Although the use of nationalist themes by Islamic-oriented intellectuals might be instrumental at the onset of the Cold War, in this process, Kısakürek and the likeminded intellectuals acquired a more nationalist outlook on the one hand, and tried and managed to infuse an Islamic tone to Turkish nationalist movement on the other hand.

Marrying Turkish nationalism with Islam at the intellectual level required an effort in the context of mid-20th century Turkey. At the time, nationalism was still commonly associated with Kemalism, pan-Turkism and racism—having very little, if any, affinity with Islamic-oriented worldviews.³⁷⁰ Kısakürek is particularly careful in sparing the pro-Islamic potential in other variants of Turkish nationalist movement, and only rejected nationalism’s secular variants by disparaging them as “pulp nationalism” (“*posa milliyetçiliği*”). He suggests that secular nationalists conceived Turkishness along exclusively ethnic or racial lines, which denote the “pulp” of Turkish identity. For him, what gives Turkishness its “juice”, following his own metaphor, is Islam. To solidify this metaphor Kısakürek registers a historical narrative where Islam brought along dignity and civilized manners to primitive nomadic Turks of the Central Asian steppes. Turks, on the other hand, immediately took up the cause of Islamic world-domination with their dynamic combatant force after submitting themselves to Islam.³⁷¹ Through these arguments, Kısakürek attempts to convince his readers to the supposed inseparability of Turkish and

³⁷⁰ İlker Aytürk, “Nationalism and Islam in Cold War Turkey, 1944–69”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 5 (September 2014): 693–719.

³⁷¹ Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 256–7.

Muslim identities, and hence Islamizes Turkish nationalism while marginalizing its secular variants.

Kısakürek's narrative on the constitution of Turkish-Muslim identity hardly refers to pre-Islamic Turkish history that Kısakürek associates with primitive social and political order and cultural backwardness. Pre-Islamic Turkish people were supposed to be energetic and war-ridden; yet, for instance, they were unable to develop a complex language.³⁷² As such, pre-Islamic Turkish history appeared as a period of immaturity of the emergent Turkish nation, almost akin to a pre-historic era. As he articulates himself, against arguments for conception of Turkishness without reference to Islam, "If the aim is to be Turkish, it is necessary to know that a Turk is a Turk after becoming a Muslim."³⁷³ Thus, conversion of Turks into Islam is indeed a founding moment in Kısakürek's narrative. However, Kısakürek does not put an emphasis on this initial stage of Turkish national history as he seldom refers to earlier Muslim Turkish states founded outside Anatolia. More interestingly, Seljuks too have their share in Kısakürek's neglect of earlier Turkish-Islamic history. Nowhere in his writings had he mentions the Battle of Manzikert that is otherwise an important landmark for nationalists and conservatives.

Moreover, Kısakürek's narrative is an expression of his imperial aspirations that appeals to people with religious and nationalistic sensibilities at the time.³⁷⁴ In this narrative, Muslim Turks since the high middle ages have been the carrier of the banner of Islam and eventually the leader of Muslim World with the acquisition of

³⁷² Kısakürek, *Tanrıkulundan Dinlediklerim*, 100-1.

³⁷³ Kısakürek, *Hitabeler*, 257.

³⁷⁴ Örnek, *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*, 319-20.

the caliphate by the Ottoman Empire in the early 16th century. Alas, Kısakürek maintains, Islam's last caliphal center have become the focal point of its demise. Modernization movements and the eventual abolishment 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 could be regenerated elsewhere..."³⁷⁵ Kısakürek thus believes that Turkey is the natural leader of the Islamic world. For him, it is the logical implication of the course of history that the sun of Islam should rise once again where it was once set. These convictions both reflect existing nationalist underpinnings in Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık* and draw people with nationalistic sensibilities to his ideological campaign.

Finally, the third intended recipient of Kısakürek's 1962 speech is his usual audience, namely Islamists and conservatives. In fact, the latter do not need to hear Islam's supposed potential to resist communism to maintain their personal allegiances to religion. However, for Kısakürek's purposes, these people with Islamic sensibilities are lacking the necessary motivation and mobilization to (re-)assert Islam as "the most excellent of systems". Note how Kısakürek asserts Islam itself as an ideological system standing against other ideologies. Failed in grasping the dynamic nature of Islam, according to him, passive Muslim generations "have oppressed Islam from inside the circle of faith" by arresting the material and spiritual expansion of the Islamic community first and hindering its flourishing once again later.³⁷⁶ Thus, Kısakürek invites especially the younger generations to take a more active stance in the revival of Islam by restoring values and institutions based on

³⁷⁵ Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 161-62.

³⁷⁶ Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 191; and Kısakürek, *Dünya Bir İnkılap Bekliyor*, 97-8.

Islamic faith, which once elevated the Turkish-Islamic civilization to the level of a world empire. Kısakürek's *mukaddesatçılık*, as such, shares with 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, the revivalist tendency in Kısakürek is limited by his conception of Islam-as—identity that features revival (*ihya*) without renewal (*tecdid*). In fact, for Kısakürek renewalists are no less dangerous than the effect of earlier Muslim generations in “oppressing Islam from inside the circle of faith”. Kısakürek identifies two new groups claiming authority on Islamic knowledge: (I) graduates of Islamic Institutes and Divinity Schools founded by the state; and (II) Muslim intellectuals outside Turkey who influence Turkish Islamism increasingly after the 1960's. Renewalist tendencies have found strong appeal among these new technicians of Islamic knowledge who often took Quran and, to varying degrees, Sunnah as the primary sources in Islamic knowledge production. They challenge legitimacy of traditional authorities and argue for Muslims' right to interpretation of primary sources by occasionally 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, is concerned with protecting the status of traditional authorities on Islamic knowledge. As a known adherent of the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, he prioritizes revelation and mystical intuition over reason and rational methods of interpretation. Thus, Kısakürek's writings against non-Turkish Islamist intellectuals as well as the graduates of Islamic Institutes and theology faculties are outcomes of a traditionalist

reflex to the extent that they pose a threat to the status of traditional Islamic authorities by freely interpreting Islamic sources of knowledge.

Furthermore, Kısakürek's rebuke of new interpretations of Islam aims to preserve the supposed purity of Islam from possible influences of external ideational forces, notably competing political ideologies in the context of the Cold War. The foremost target of this concern over purity is socialistic interpretations of Islam. The idea of socialism has found appeal in Islamic intellectual circles increasingly in the Cold War context. People, especially the youth, with Islamic sensibilities in Turkey became familiar with such interpretations of Islam through mostly the writings of Islamist intellectuals outside Turkey, in addition to Nurettin Topçu.³⁷⁷ Though Kısakürek's anxiety for possible success of rapprochement between Islam and socialism mainly stems from his profound distaste with political left, his point is also related to his conception of Islam. He treats tendencies to merge Islam and other political ideologies with a strictly rejective mentality for he believes that Islam alone stands as a perfect ideology, or in his words "the most excellent of systems", commanding on all aspects of life.³⁷⁸ Kısakürek is convinced that Islam is a total and dynamic system; and that the political system based on the ideology of Islam does not need any reference to other ideologies which could but lead to deformation of the faith.

³⁷⁷ For one of the most influential one of these publications see Seyyid Kutub, *İslam'da Sosyal Adalet*, trans. Yaşar Tunagür and Adnan Mansur (İstanbul: Çağaloğlu Yayınları, 1964). *İslam'da Sosyal Adalet* (Social Justice in Islam) was the first ever translation of a book by Qutb which was allegedly translated upon the request of Turkish intelligence service to prevent the youth with Islamic sensibilities to incline towards left ideologies. See Özkan, "Soğuk Savaşta Türkiye", 142-3.

³⁷⁸ Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü*, 96-98

VI.III.II. Topçu: Forces of Materialism against Spiritualist Morality

Nurettin Topçu is yet another influential figure in anti-communist intellectual struggle who associates communism with Western-oriented modernization process and its agents and supporters in early Cold War Turkey. Not unlike Kısakürek, Topçu argues that communism is a product moral decline and social decay because of excessive secularization and advent of modern technology. His engagement with anti-Enlightenment current in Western spiritualist thought is particularly influential for the development of his anti-communist stance. Virtually backing up Kısakürek's anti-communist remarks above, Topçu argues that

The machine, exploitation, the modern mentality that destroys the old and can only come about by destroying it, the positivist view that opposes the reason and the conscience, the unconscious will to become westernized, the bigotry that calls faith superstition, the dark force that denies the history of a whole nation, all of these combined to create the existence of communism.³⁷⁹

At the outset, Topçu too holds western-oriented modernization in Turkey and the concomitant decline of the role of religion in social and political processes accountable for the advent of communism. Topçu, thereby, joins the cause of associating modernity, secularity and the political left that has pushed Islamic-oriented political activity and thought further to the right. These overlaps with Kısakürek's position against communism notwithstanding, Topçu's emphasis is on the supposed harms of modernity—indicating his stronger affinity with anti-materialism and anti-positivism. Nonetheless, it is not only a shift in emphasis that differentiates Topçu's stance from that of Kısakürek. Topçu is further distinguished in (I) the way he uses Islam in their anti-communist struggle; (II) the way he conceives political community; and (III) the way he assesses the lines of divisions in Turkish politics and society.

³⁷⁹ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 258.

Topçu's opposition to communism stems from his conviction that the ideology is a result of materialism that threatens spirituality and moral values at both the individual and the societal levels. Religion as the source of spirituality and morality appears as the most vital component of fighting communism in Topçu's writings. Topçu, then, shares a similar stance with Kısakürek with respect to featuring religion against communism. However, Topçu does not oppose communism as an ideology of equality; and, as such, his justifications for his anti-communist stance differ from that of Kısakürek who argues for the legitimacy of private property and free market based on his conception of Islam. Topçu, on the other hand, maintains economic equality and collective ownership of the means of production as necessary conditions to create a moral and just social order. He offers an Islam-inspired socialist system with these convictions:

Christianity, and more so Islam, preach equality to us with the moral principles they put forward, and they accuse the conditions that destroy [equality] of taking a stand against believers in many places. In fact, first of all, as a human being and later as an umma and a legal community, Islamic socialism attracted our admiration; and even if its principles in the Qur'an are collected alone [Islamic socialism] constitutes a whole philosophical doctrine that can go beyond the ordinary moral sense of devotion and even of compassion.³⁸⁰

Topçu believes that equality is a central ideal in religions including Islam. He also puts forth that moral framework laid out in Qur'an enjoins forming a social system based on the ideal of equality. In this sense, it is important to highlight the distinction between the ways Kısakürek and Topçu make use of Islamic sources to oppose communism. While Kısakürek represents Islam itself as an alternative ideology to communism, Topçu offers an alternative social system based on what he thinks to be the essence of moral framework provided by Islamic sources.

³⁸⁰ Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 37-8.

Topçu, as we saw, has a unique position within Turkish conservatives of the mid-20th century with his unconventional defense of socialism. So much so that he came at odds with Kısakürek who finds Topçu's Islam-inspired socialism outrageous. In response to criticisms not only from Kısakürek but also from broader right-wing intellectuals who are irritated by Topçu's reference to socialism,³⁸¹ Topçu holds that spiritualist socialism as he defines it is the only socio-political regime that would meet the requirements of Islamic sensibilities:

Those who are loyal to the Islamic culture among us opposes [Islam] to socialism due to fact that they have always understood Islam from the superficial and the opposite side. In fact, this cause is the cause of rights, which is at the core of Islam. Socialism is the defense of *kul hakkı* [rightful share], which Allah has declared that he will not forgive if it is violated. Those who do not know that we will be at the very heart of Islam as being socialists are deceived by the foreign dress of the word. They do not think that the word is a dress, a dress; we put on it [in the way that suits us]. What belong to Allah are the spirit and the cause. They shoot a poor dress because they cannot see the spirit.³⁸²

The passage reflects how Topçu's approach in terms of practical significance of Islam differs from *mukaddesatçılar* including Kısakürek and most other strands of Islamic intellectual movement. Here, Topçu formulates his ideal social system through evaluating and modifying an existing social doctrine, i.e. socialism, based on "*kul hakkı*", a notion that is highlighted in Islamic sources. In defending his ideal, Topçu abases identitarian reification of religious principles and the accompanying categorical rejection of a doctrine that is not originated from Islamic context. Nevertheless, Topçu's association of secularism and materialism with communism in particular and the political left in general served against his own purposes as it

³⁸¹ Işık, *Nurettin Topçu*, 206-8.

³⁸² Topçu, *Ahlak Nizamı*, 199-200.

contributes to the very same identitarian discourse that aims to preserve Turkish-Islamic authenticity.

Topçu's reflections on political community exhibits similar inconstancies as he, on the one hand, espouses an ideal-based territorial nationalism in contradistinction to an identitarian conception of nation, and on the other hand, appeals to ethno-nationalist themes that undermine the existence of ethnic and religious minorities in Anatolia. Despite the xenophobic undertone of his reflections on the nation that see any form of heterogeneity as a threat to political order, Topçu, in fact, emphasizes the significance of socio-economic dimensions in the historical constitution of the political community in Anatolia that we do not come across in most other nationalists and conservatives. For him, it is the Anatolian soil that created a nation out of people living on this land. The turning point in the constitution of the nation, then, is the adoption a sedentary life by previously nomadic Turkic people after their conversion to Islam and their migration to Anatolia. In this narrative, Anatolian soil provides Muslim Turks with livelihood, a particular culture and a way of life; it has even changed the physical appearance of them.³⁸³ Hence, Topçu states

I can't be a fellow national with people whose face shape and body structure do not resemble mine, who do not live and grow up in the lands I live in, who did not give their labor and blood to this land and this history with me, who do not speak my language, who do not sincerely live out my wishes, who do not believe in what I believe at all.³⁸⁴

The passage indicates that Topçu looks for something more than ethnic or religious affinity alone in his definition of the nation. What he seems to suggest as the founding principle of Turkish nation is a kind of association that is rooted in people's

³⁸³ The sense of belonging to a soil that gave the nation its characteristics had remarkable parallels with German romantic nationalists. See Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. David Maisel (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 16.

³⁸⁴ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 84.

relations with Anatolian land. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that Topçu makes frequent references to the Seljuks who conquered Anatolia and established it as a homeland for Muslim Turks. Different from Kısakürek, for instance, Topçu's historical narrative presents the Battle of Manzikert as a founding moment of the Anatolian Turkish Muslim nation.

The way Topçu conceives of nation with close association of Turkishness and Islam as well as with an emphasis on Anatolia being the homeland of the nation brings to mind whether he has a notion of "Turkish Islam" that is markedly distinct from conceptions or practices of Islam in other contexts among other Muslim peoples. Kısakürek shares the association of Turkishness and Muslimness as well. In relation to his conception of Islam, however, Kısakürek, who has a monolithic understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular, does not refer to possible contextual differences in conceptions and practices of Islam. Although his assaults on non-Turkish Islamist revivalists such as Qutb, Maududi and Hamidullah imply a nationalist bias, he never articulates a notion of "Turkish Islam" or attempts to distinguish and conceptualize the way Turks have practiced religion. Contrarily, Kısakürek sometimes praises for instance the religiosity of Arabs as well as their culture, especially Arabic language; and he is largely pleased with the Arabic influence in Turkish culture in the aftermath of Turks' conversion to Islam.

Topçu, on the other hand, has a more profound nationalist undertone in his reflections on the association of Turkishness and Islam. While emphasizing the positive role of Arabic and Persian influence in the development of Turkish language like Kısakürek, Topçu is concerned with preserving authenticity of Turkish culture

and the way Turks conceive and practice Islam. He urges his readers to remember that the Arabs are after all an alien nation and their cultural norms and practices should not be confused with Muslimness.³⁸⁵ In fact, for him, “When we [Turks] were the true owner and heir of the spirit of Islam, we were a nation that brought civilization to continents. We lost our greatness in the times when Arab imitation overshadowed the creative consciousness.”³⁸⁶ Topçu, then, has a sense in which Turkish Muslimness display peculiar characteristics that are somehow superior to ways other peoples conceive and practice Islam. The notion of “Turkish Islam” in Topçu supposedly captures the true essence of Islam, and its loss because of Arabization purportedly led to a demise on the part of the Turks. These reflections notwithstanding, Topçu never articulates a well-conceptualized form of the notion of “Turkish Islam” he evidently has in mind.

Topçu’s nationalism stands against not only transnational Islamism with its communitarian emphases but also Turkism-Turanism with its stress on Anatolian culture. It is his opposition to race or ethnicity based nationalism that contradicts his occasional appeal to ethno-nationalist themes. According to Topçu,

This land has created the people of this nation. The child of the country, who is heedless of this truth, is tired of chasing after ambitions that are separated from the body and heart, such as Islamism that leaves out lineage and homeland, and Turanism which escapes from the soil of the homeland; he deceived himself as well as the destiny of the country in different eras.³⁸⁷

Topçu assesses transnational Islamism and Turanism with similar concerns and argues that the two misunderstood and misrepresented the notion of political community and its unity as an ideal. The strawman in Topçu’s criticism of Turanism

³⁸⁵ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 42.

³⁸⁶ Topçu, *Türkiye’nin Maarif Davası*, 23.

³⁸⁷ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 147.

is Ziya Gökalp who formulated the contours of republican-era Turkish nationalism.³⁸⁸ Topçu highlights Turanist dimension in Gökalp's writings on nationalism and charges him of being the main inspirer of Turkism-Turanism among republican-era nationalists. One of his critical passages on Gökalp reveals Topçu's conception of nationalism clearly:

There must be political reasons for Ziya Gökalp's arguments for [Turanism]. For him, territorial unity was not a constitutive value for the nation. For some reason, Gökalp does not believe that Switzerland, which maintains a legal system and lives in unison, is a nation. He thought that the Oghuz, who lived dispersedly in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran and Khwarazm were one nation.³⁸⁹

In addition to the constitutive role of land in terms of nationalism, Topçu refers to the unity of law and of ideal as essential aspects of nationalism. For him, it is in fact the land that provides for people living on it with similar traditions and customs that eventually lead up to a unity of law as well as with similar lifestyles that lead up to a unity of ideals. Relating these reflections on nationalism with Topçu's conception of Islam-as-morality, the framework of these legal and ideal uniformities comes from religion as the principles laid out in religious sources are actualized in particular forms determined by people's relationship with the land.

Topçu laments that Turkish people at the time is a far cry from being a unified nation with its fragmented interests, lifestyles and ideals. His assessment of Turkish politics

³⁸⁸ Gökalp drew criticism from Kısakürek as well. He too focuses on Gökalp's Turanist ideas in these criticisms that purport Turanism as a form of "*posa milliyetçiliği*". In one of his writings Kısakürek defines Turanism as an ideological current that proposed by "Ziya Gökalp, who wanted to place some idolatry items instead of Islam which is the soul content of the Turks (a religious crime), by defacing his own intellectual master philosopher Durkheim (a scientific crime) ... [Turanism] does not go beyond a psychology of a kind of animal instinct, is completely deprived of the dignity of being a serious ideology, and found its way easily because of its ease and appealing to the hidden Islamophobia of tie intellectuals [kravat aydınları], and has survived to the present day with certain zigzags, and is now debunked by the new, real nationalist and religious believers..." See Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Moskof*, (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1979), 321. Note that Kısakürek does not criticize Gökalp on the ground that Gökalp misconceived the concept of nationalism. Rather, he is disturbed by Gökalp's purported disregard of Islam in formulating his nationalism.

³⁸⁹ Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye*, 148.

and society is marked by this discontent with the fragmentation of Turkish nation.

Conceiving a dichotomy between secularly- and religiously-oriented groups within

Turkish nation, Topçu suggests that

If today's conditions will continue, we should be prepared for the clash of these ranks, which line up as if they were two nations. There is no way to avoid this fight; because this means denying ourselves, and because today, on the opposite side, there is the majority of the nation and the owners of its *mukaddesat*, even though it is still chasing its ox now. If we do not want this, we should wait for an act of introspection that will bring the light of love and truth to both sides, bring peace to the community, and sacrifice hatred for love by merging with the identity of our nation [*"milletimizin benliğine dalarak"*]. For this, a moment of reconciliation is necessary between the old and the new, between the conservatives and the reformers. Returning to ourselves is the beginning of every worship and every peace.³⁹⁰

Topçu himself is a critique of secularization and westernizing reforms of the modernization process. Yet, he foresees that Islam-inspired discontent with Turkish modernization is about to give way to the emerging Turkish-Muslim political identity against the secular political identity, and the course of development of a political contestation between the two would not bring along an auspicious outcome. Topçu draws a bleak picture for Turkey if the contestation would intensify between the two camps around secular-religious divide. For him,

Both [camps] have their own idols. Both are hostile to freedom of thought. Both were militant with an anxiety originated from the lack of faith in truth; and both were disrespectful to humanity. Both were idolaters who reach their idols through formalistic practices and conducts and through using material compulsions.³⁹¹

Topçu sees a deeper struggle between forces of materialism and forces of spiritualist morality; and he evaluates the cleavages as well as actors in Turkish politics from this point of view. Seen from this perspective, Topçu argues that the ostensibly clashing secular and religious identities equally represent forces of materialism.

³⁹⁰ Topçu, *Kültür ve Medeniyet*, 136.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 34.

Despite his affinity with the proponent of the emerging Turkish-Muslim political identity, Topçu feels equally distant from the two camps of secular-religious divide. Hence, although he observes a dichotomous structure in Turkish politics and society similar to Kısakürek, Topçu does not take a side in this dichotomy as it existed at the time. He maintains that the salvation of Turkish nation could come from neither camps of the emerging secular-religious divide:

It is seen that we are witnesses of the old-new struggle in every field. It is their collision that will break the great storm. ... Which of them will be victorious? Which will represent the right? Which one is the force that saves our future? ... Salvation can come neither from the one nor the other. The frequent clashes between them wear out the national identity rather than crushing each other. The time has come for a third force to appear on the scene that will eliminate both of them. ... The good news of the truth, which will destroy two passions and eliminate two darknesses, is expected from those who have reason, fairness and faith. More than ever, we are in need of a revolution and such a social movement that believes in the reign of reason. This revolution will not overthrow our values, but will give them life and freshness.³⁹²

Topçu envisions a third way that would be distinct from both camps of the emerging secular-religious divide. By taking reason, fairness and faith its guide, Topçu's alternative way would desirably carry out a spiritual revolution to unite the Turkish nation around shared ideals based on the moral framework provided by Islam.

VI. IV. Concluding Remarks

As two leading Islam-based intellectuals, Kısakürek and Topçu notice the possibility of an eventual contestation between secular and religion-oriented groups. However, while Kısakürek aspires to see the “day of reckoning” where *mukaddesatçı* Turkish-Muslims would take a revenge against their enemies within, Topçu does not anticipate any auspicious outcome in this probable contestation. These different

³⁹² Ibid., 76-7.

attitudes manifest Kısakürek's and Topçu's position in the emerging secular-religious duality in Cold War Turkey which, by now, became the major division within Turkish politics. Topçu regards both sides as well as the emergence of a dualistic rivalry between them threatening for social and political unity of the nation. Whereas Kısakürek's effort to political mobilization of people with Islamic sensibilities and political and historical narratives he constructs in these efforts have helped solidify the political significance of secular-religious divide. In this, Kısakürek's ideologization of Islam and his representation of Muslimness as a distinct political identity have been formative during and after the Cold War era.

Note that Kısakürek's conception of Islam-as-identity and the accompanied ideologization of Islam have been central to the civilizational thinking that has gained ground among Muslims towards the end of the Cold War. Hence, in addition to ideologization, reified conception of Islam-as-identity also brought along the rise of a view of Islam as a single continuous civilization that is distinct from other civilizations. It is not surprising after all that both manifestations of Islam-as-identity and civilizational thinking have been on the rise after the 1980's. Islamic schools, Islamic think-tanks, Islamic business associations, Islamic financial institutions, Islamic broadcasting, Islamic fashion, Islamic entertainment, and so on and so forth emerged within this context resting on the conception of Islam-as-identity as well as the idea that Islam was a civilization with its own unique institutions and practices. Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-civilization as twin projections designate that contemporary Muslims should follow the suit and produce their own institutions. These projections are deeply rooted in the social and political activities of mostly

Khalidi-affiliated associations and organizations of the early Cold War Turkey, as well as intellectual activities crystallize in Kısakürek's writings.³⁹³

Hence, the so-called Islamic, or Muslim, political identity in today's Turkey has been shaped by these social, political and intellectuals efforts during the Cold War era. Kısakürek appears in this context as a founding figure in the constitution of secular-religious duality and Muslim political identity by constructing a narrative based on a notion of authentic national identity that is strictly associated with the conception of Islam-as-identity. In this narrative, a particular understanding of Muslimness is represented as the ahistorical identity of Anatolian people. Interestingly, Topçu objects to the conception of Islam-as-identity and the accompanied understanding of Muslimness as a political identity while reiterating the identification of Turkishness and Muslimness in his writings. As such, he too contributes to the process of politicization of Islam and Muslimness despite his overt criticisms and cautions against it. Moreover, Topçu's contribution to the association of communism and the left with secularism, modernization and materialism has further solidified identitarian notion of Muslimness as a political being at the expense of his criticisms against Muslim political groups and his own advocacy of socialism. Finally, Topçu's political writings, especially his views on the state, undermine his own position as he, on the one hand, rejects religion-based state, and on the other hand, defines the state an almost sacred entity.

³⁹³ For instance, Kısakürek articulates the phrase "Islamic capital" decades before the formation of the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD) as an Islam-based alternative to the purportedly secular business associations in 1990. See Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, 183.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have analyzed political ideas of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu as two prominent representatives of Turkish-Muslim thought in the context of the Cold War—positing that genealogy of major “decontestations” put forth by Islam-inspired critiques of Turkish modernization process could be traced back to these Cold War intellectuals.³⁹⁴ Until recently, the impact of Cold War exigencies in the development of Islamic and nationalist movements as well as in broader political processes in Turkey has largely been neglected. Notably, ideological tensions between the left and the right, state’s intervention into these tensions, the salience of modernization paradigm, and different responses to the discourse of modernization are rarely analyzed critically to spell out their effect in Turkish political and intellectual spaces. Literature on the relationship between politics and Islam/Muslims have been particularly distant to these factors constitutive for contemporary Turkish politics; instead studies since the late 1980’s often referred to mid-20th century as a period of transformation in the demographic structure of the country. This is not to suggest that the latter did not have any explanatory power itself; yet, sociological transformation was usually misunderstood or misinterpreted

³⁹⁴ Decontestation is a useful concept offered by Michael Freeden who argues that political ideologies, or attitudes if you wish, compete over meanings of politically relevant concepts and categories, and attempt to assert their own definitions as correct ones. As such, each and every political position engage in decontestation over definitions of political concepts in a given society. See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See especially Chapter 2, pp. 47-95.

to account for the “revival” of Islam through this transformation. Accordingly, the correlation between the rapid migration from countryside to urban centers and the growing popularity and impact of Islamic movements was taken as a proof to the Muslim identity of peripheral sectors who supposedly had the chance to express visibly their religion-based worldview in a modern/urban context. Inspired by recent studies that challenge this narrative and highlight the formative power of the Cold War context on the joint rise of Islamic and nationalist sentiments in contemporary Turkey, I aimed to review the Cold War era development of Turkish-Muslim thought through reading Kısakürek and Topçu anew with an alternative perspective.³⁹⁵

As it was crystallized in their reflections on the status of Ayasofya I presented in the epilogue to the Introduction, there are certain common notions such as distaste with modernization-as-westernization, profound opposition to materialism, positivism and communism, and supposed inseparability of Turkish national identity and Muslimness that Kısakürek and Topçu espouse in different places of their corpora. Drawing on these shared notions, the two are conventionally referred to together as founders of republican-era critics of Turkish modernization process with Islamic sensibilities. Within scholarly frameworks that explain the dynamics of modern Turkish politics since at least the 19th century through a duality of secular and religious identities, Kısakürek and Topçu are represented as two proponents of authentic and indigenous Turkish-Muslim political identity against the purportedly Westernized secular political identity that modernizing founders of the republic offered. However, as I have argued, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, as the representative of the conception of Islam-as-identity through which secular-religious divide acquired

³⁹⁵ See Örnek *Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı*; and Gürakar and Özkan, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düzeni*.

political significance, is among the architects of this seemingly existential division between religious and secular identities in the context of the Cold War; whereas Nurettin Topçu rejects construction of Muslimness as a political identity by propounding a distinct conception of Islam-as-morality that does not fit with the secular-religious duality.

Existing analytical frameworks based on secular-religious duality remain inadequate in making sense of discrepancies between Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldviews on fundamental issues starting with their conceptions of Islam, and problematically represent the two as exponents of Turkish-Muslim political identity. In this dissertation, I content that the problem lies in the inattentiveness of scholarly inquiries to divergences among Muslim intellectuals who are casually characterized as conservative, nationalist, pious, or Islamist without distinguishing these concepts. Hence, the analysis of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's and Nurettin Topçu's writings I offered in this dissertation aimed to show both the complexity of Islamic intellectual movement in Turkey and the problems of secular-religious duality as an analytical tool to understand and explain this complexity. Hence, I aimed to develop an alternative framework to address to highlight this complexity. Given the lack of an established and comprehensive analytical approach that would serve my purposes in this dissertation, I followed a grounded approach. Based on my readings of Kısakürek and Topçu, I posited that the key to understand differences in their worldviews was their differing conceptions of Islam. After all, I content, the major problem in approaches resting on secular-religious duality have been the implied conviction that differences in conceptions of Islam were ultimately trivial, reducible or negligible in analysis of Islam-based worldviews and political thought.

What puzzled me most about studies espousing the secular-religious duality is that they seem to argue for the paramount significance of religious beliefs in the constitution of Islam-based political thought while neglecting Islam itself as a factor that needs to be explained. In other words, they represent Islam as the key to a whole different worldview and Muslimness as a whole different identity than secular worldviews and identities; yet they rarely ask how Islam is understood by a particular group or an intellectual and further how this relates to worldview of that group or intellectual. In so doing, they, consciously or not, essentialize Islam and Muslimness by taking them as given reified entities. To argue against these narratives in this dissertation, I aimed to devise conception of Islam as an analytical tool to account for divergences among Muslim intellectuals concerning the meaning of Islam as well as its social and political implications. I have asked questions to my sources to understand their reflections on the nature or religion and Islam, on the notion of knowledge both in relation to Islam and in general, on the status of Islam and Turkish-Muslim community vis-à-vis modernization and westernization, and finally on the practical significance of Islam and the relationship between Islam and politics.

Based on these questions and their answers in Kısakürek's and Topçu's writings, I elaborated in subsequent chapters on different conceptions of Islam, critiques of Turkish modernization process, and debates on politics in general and Turkish society and politics in particular. In the fourth chapter, I presented the first argument of the dissertation concerning the differences between Kısakürek's conception of Islam-as-identity and Topçu's conception of Islam-as-morality. Islam-as-identity rests on an understanding of Islam as the only religion and the only doctrine of truth

based on a reified interpretation of principles, rules, rituals and beliefs derived from particular religious sources. In the case of Kısakürek who depends on Naqshbandi-Khalidi teachings in formulating and articulating his conception of Islam-as-identity, these sources are those that have been considered legitimate within the Sunni orthodox tradition. Taking these principles, rules and beliefs as the basis of religion, Kısakürek identifies being religious/Muslim with abiding by these formal aspects of Islam which arguably stands for a totally alternative form of existence in the world. Although Topçu has personal relations with a Khalidi Sufi sheikh, his conception of Islam-as-morality diverges from Khalidi teachings and Kısakürek's Islam-as-identity. He foremost disagrees with featuring formal aspects such as rules and prescriptions codified within the sharia as the basis of religion. For him, the authentic form of religious life amounts to a personal mystical experience of reaching God for which moral framework provided by religious sources is the guide for an individual seeking to be connected with the divine. More importantly, for Topçu, Islam is not the only religion or doctrine of truth that could sustain the capacity to provide this moral framework.

There is, I think, a significant difference between, on the one hand, seeing Islam as an immutable, infallible, and even uninterpretable source of knowledge that does not exclude anything, and on the other hand, considering concepts such as knowledge, truth, morality, and even religion independently of Islam and believing that they have different manifestations in Islam-based communal traditions. This significant difference in Kısakürek's and Topçu's conceptions of Islam lies at the basis of the divergence in their worldviews. Although the two are among the staunch critics of modernization-as-westernization based on an anxiety for preserving the faith, their

critiques of westernization differ to the extent that they define the faith itself in different terms, as I explained in the fifth chapter. Accordingly, Kısakürek envisions an Islamic revolution, or a revolution of Islam, which would create a social and political order based on immutable and infallible teachings of Islam. The revolution of Islam would restore the supposedly authentic Islamic institutions, beliefs and practices—thereby revitalize the faith, and prepared Muslims to do what it takes to reach and surpass the level of material development modern Western civilization have achieved. As such, Kısakürek sees no contradiction in his calls for restoring what are deemed *mukaddes* (sacred) and adopting modern (natural) science, technology and industrial economy. Kısakürek argues that these modern processes and developments led to a moral crisis in the West that purportedly have suffered from a lack of divine guidance. Since the ideology of Islam provides this guidance through its immutable and infallible sources, he maintains, modern technology possessed by Muslims and a modern industrial economy governed by Muslims would be immune to the problems they created in the West.

On the other hand, Topçu offers a more comprehensive critique of modernization including technological advancements and economic developments. In fact, he seems to associate modernity with the advent of modern technology and capitalism that, for him, pose a challenge to the moral framework that led individuals' relationship with the divine. Topçu argues that the source of morality was rooted in spirituality, which he associated with religions. Since modern technology and capitalism divert individuals' from spirituality to materiality for him, an authentic experience of religion—the real purpose of life—could not be achieved under a social order dominated by these material products of modernity. More importantly, Topçu does

not spare Muslims in his warnings about the supposedly adverse effects of modernity. Accordingly, Muslims, by virtue of adhering to certain rules and performing certain rituals, would not be immune to the advance of material forces of modernity. Topçu calls for contemplating on social and political orders that could sustain a moral life whose framework was to be derived from religious sources. With these concerns, he offers a spiritualist socialism against modern capitalism for which he drew heavy criticisms from religious and nationalist conservative circles he once frequented in the early Cold War years.

Revealed in these different reflections on modernity and modernization are alternative conceptions of Muslimness. Kısakürek's Islam-as-identity represents a proper Muslim as a person who abided by the ideology of Islam and thereby becomes a fundamentally different from non-Muslims. Kısakürek's identitarian conception of Muslimness, which almost forebodes the advent of "homo Islamicus" debates among the late 20th century Muslim intellectuals, envisions an existentialist conception of politics based on a strict separation of Muslims and their supposed enemies. Muslimness, in this sense, is reconstructed as a political identity that must be vindicated against non-Muslims both domestically and globally. Contrarily, Topçu sees in this identity politics based on Islamic sensibilities a disgrace for the essential teachings of Islam. He dissociates Islam and politics on the one hand, and Muslimness and political identity on the other hand. Thus, he takes a subversive stance against the emerging secular-religious divide in Turkish political space—criticizing both secularization and identitarian instrumentalization of Islam. I aimed to understand and explain these diverging views on the relationship between politics

and Islam in the final main chapter of this dissertation through differentiation between conception of Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality.

I offer the analytical distinction between identity and morality to understand and explain Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldviews, which, I argue, diverge based on their conceptions of Islam. In so doing, I aim to ground empirically and discuss analytically the argument that different "Islams" would imply different political imaginaries. I think that analytical distinctions and identifications I make in the literature review between Islamism, conservatism and mukaddesatçılık on the one hand, the one I discuss throughout the dissertation between Islam-as-identity and Islam-as-morality on the other hand, are the foremost important contribution of this dissertation, which may help understanding different positions within Islamic intellectual movement at large. To make my case, I put forth two preconditions: (I) the long established secular-religious duality perspective needs to be questioned and revised; and (II) critical junctures like the Cold War era need to be reconsidered as moments within which positions within Islamic intellectual movement and conceptions of Islam take different courses. In this dissertation, I tried to accomplish this task albeit with some limitations. I think these may be grouped into three.

First, the extent to which conception of Islam accounts for all aspects of Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldview as well as differences between them could be questioned. How should we understand the relevance of conception of Islam to the political ideas of Kısakürek and Topçu? What is the extent of it? Which aspects of their worldviews could their conceptions of Islam explain or fail to explain? If their conceptions of Islam fail to explain their stances on other issues, what could be the reasons? In cases

where their conceptions of Islam did not suffice to explain their attitudes and ideas, did other factors or sources of inspiration in the constitution of their intellectual personalities prevail? Did contextual factors affect their intellectual and political priorities? Bits and pieces of this dissertation addresses some of these questions, but there is still room for further discussions, especially on the parts of Kısakürek's and Topçu's worldviews that their conceptions of Islam may not adequately explain.

Second, I certainly omit or neglect some parts of Kısakürek's and Topçu's corpora by focusing on their conceptions of Islam through identity-morality distinction. For instance, I do not touch upon their reflections on exigencies of Turkish politics, or their ideas on education—which is an important point in their corpora given its relative weight. Moreover, it is I think necessary to take into account diachronic differences and changes in their ideas as they were intellectually active for a very long time. I attend these contextual differences only partially in this dissertation. A new reading of Kısakürek's and Topçu's corpora in chronological order would be particularly useful to analyze contextual differences and changes in Kısakürek's and Topçu's ideas.

Finally, there are of course different conceptions of Islam that may not lie within the purview of identity-morality distinction. I do not argue for the comprehensiveness of identity and morality in identifying different conceptions of Islam. A more comprehensive analysis should include different Muslim intellectuals, especially from different strands of Islamic intellectual movement, not only in Turkey but also from the larger Muslim World to identify further distinctions in conceptions of Islam and their relevance for political thinking. Mapping out different positions in Islamic

intellectual movement based on different conceptions of Islam would certainly improve understanding the content and the context of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's and Nurettin Topçu's ideas as well.



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