MEMORY, MODERNITY, AND THE REMAKING OF REPUBLICAN TURKEY: 1945-1960

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

By

Nicholas L. Danforth, M.A.

Washington, DC November 20, 2015
Copyright 2015 by Nicholas L. Danforth
All Rights Reserved
Memory, Modernity and the Remaking of Republican Turkey: 1945-1960

Nicholas L. Danforth, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: Mustafa Aksakal, Ph.D.

Abstract

Memory, Modernity and the Remaking of Republican Turkey: 1945-1960 explores the relationship between ideology and politics during a transformational period in 20th century Turkish history. During these years, NATO membership and the advent of multi-party democracy radically reshaped Turkey's foreign and domestic policies. These changes forced Turkish writers and statesmen to rethink their understanding of modernity and invent new discourses surrounding their country's history, religion, and geography. In doing so, Turkey's political and intellectual leaders simultaneously built on and critiqued the Kemalist ideology they had inherited. Across Turkey's growing partisan divide, representatives of rival political movements claimed to be uniquely capable of synthesizing paradoxical elements of Turkish identity by reconciling tradition and modernity and bringing together the best of East and West. Their competition created a secularized and nationalized version of Ottoman history while promoting a self-consciously scientific form of Islam enmeshed in Western religious trends. At the same time, Turkish diplomats sought to exploit the rhetorical possibilities inherent in their country's geography and history to reconcile long-standing anti-imperial instincts with the needs of their new anti-Soviet allies in the Middle East. And US diplomats, observing Turkey's internal debates, developed their own views on the country's identity, which routinely shifted to accommodate converging and diverging US and Turkish interests. Taken together, the political, diplomatic and cultural controversies of mid-century Turkey prefigured present-day critiques of modernity and led to the consolidation of a consensus within which many of Turkey's contemporary identity debates occur.
Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my family. Their love, support and encouragement made its completion possible and their interest in history, politics and the wider world inspired my own. It is also dedicated to Irina Levin, who fully shared the joys and frustrations of its writing. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to my advisors, Mustafa Aksakal, Aviel Roshwald, Nathan Citino and David Painter, as well as my fellow students, especially Eric Gettig, Graham Pitts, Daniel Singer, Sarah-Neel Smith, Soha El Achi and Chris Gratien. Thanks as well to the Institute for Turkish Studies, Cosmos Club and the American Research Institute in Turkey, which helped fund my work, and the librarians and archivists who assisted with it.

Many thanks,

Nicholas Danforth
# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 1  

Chapter I  
Asia in Europe and Europe in Asia: Turkish Identity Beyond East and West ......................... 8  

Chapter II  
God is Modern: Popular Islam in a Democratic Era ................................................................. 35  

Chapter III  
Multi-Purpose Empire: Reinventing Ottoman History in Republican Turkey ................. 92  

Chapter IV  
Istanbul Yesterday and Today: Making the Past Modern ......................................................... 129  

Chapter V  
Defiant Nations: Foreign Policy between the Arab East and the Imperialist West ...... 162  

Chapter VI  
Rethinking American Policy, Aid Programs and Propaganda in 1950s Turkey ............ 210  

Conclusion: A Century of Statements ............................................................................................. 262  

Dissertation Images .......................................................................................................................... 267  

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................ 297  

Introduction

Between 1945 and 1960, multi-party democracy and NATO membership radically transformed Turkey’s diplomatic relations and domestic politics. These transformations helped consolidate a consensus on the “synthetic” nature Turkish modernity that continues to shape political and cultural debates today across such diverse realms as religion, Ottoman history, gender relations and geography. During this period, Turkey appeared to be undergoing a transition from the authoritarian modernization of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to a superior form of democratic modernity. Both Turkish and American observers believed that at long last Turkish society had advanced to the point where modern religion would replace heavy-handed secularism and where multi-party, pluralistic politics would replace one-party rule. In other words, it was Turkey’s seeming success in articulating an authentic and popular form of liberal modernity that inspired the optimistic teleology of the era, captured in the pages of books like Bernard Lewis’s *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

Unfortunately, the historiography of 20th century Turkey all too often overlooks the 1950s, presenting contemporary political fractures as the extension of late Ottoman and early Republican identity debates. But we can no longer understand the grand narrative of Republican history as the gradual realization of Ataturk’s vision, or, as is now popular, a growing reaction against it. Instead, this dissertation argues that we should simultaneously recognize the discursive continuity in a century’s worth of efforts to articulate a distinctively Turkish alternative modernity and the unique and enduring
changes that took place in this discourse during the 1950s.

Faced with clichés about East and West or Tradition and Modernity, Turkish politicians, artists and intellectuals in the 1950s built on a long tradition of seizing the sometimes paradoxical middle ground. Across the political and ideological spectrum, they repeatedly proclaimed their unique ability to fully harmonize rival elements of Turkish identity that their opponents could not. Kemalist ideologues, American high-modernists and Islamist reactionaries alike – that is the very people who supposedly embraced these binaries – all claimed to believe in a national future that was at once fully modern but respectful of tradition, liberated from oriental backwardness but not condemned to superficially aping the West. In short, every Turkish modernity was, to some extent, intended as an alternative one, and transcending Turkey’s famous clichés has been a cliché for almost as long as these clichés existed.

Exploring the relationship between ideas and politics in 20th century Turkey also forces us to confront the malleability that exists within discourses about the past and the future. Ideological elements such as modernization theory or the Ottoman legacy were intimately bound up in foreign and domestic policymaking, but such ideological factors consistently proved too malleable to play the causal role often assigned to them. Diplomats, politicians and writers proved adept in interpreting dominant discourses in seemingly contradictory ways in order to accommodate their immediate interests. This is the story of individuals influencing ideologies, creating and deploying both democratic and authoritarian versions of modernization theory just as they created secular and pious
versions of Ottoman history.

Though all these arguments are specific to Turkey, they can help us integrate political, diplomatic, intellectual and cultural history in order to better understand the way nations and states across the world position themselves within space and time. Every identity is, to an extent, built from paradoxical and flexible components, in accordance with the confines and possibilities of the world around it. This dissertation seeks to create its own synthesis, reconciling the near-infinite malleability of discourse with the reality of the past, of technological advancement and of physical location. Without completely dismissing our ability to craft meaningful and politically relevant narratives about history, modernity, or geography, I hope the accumulated evidence will at least lead us to pursue our efforts with a better awareness of how readily they can be coopted or politicized.

Chapter Summary:

The first chapter offers a brief overview of the variety of discourses through which mid-century writers used art, history, technology, and gender to articulate a version of Turkish modernity that claimed to synthesize East and West or or transcend the division between them.

The second chapter explores the scientifically-informed Islamic modernism found in the official and popular religious press during the 1940s and 1950s. In this context, I investigate the way advocates of a mid-century religious revival in Turkey sought to
position themselves as a part of a broader return to faith that encompassed the Christian West as well and offered a necessary corrective to the failure of materialist modernity.

The third chapter examines the Kemalist appropriation of Ottoman history, beginning at the moment the empire itself ceased to exist and culminating in the 1953 commemoration of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul. While prevailing accounts often depict Ottoman historiography as the site of a century-long struggle between pro-Ottoman Islamists and anti-Ottoman secularists, I argue that through a series of reinterpretations the empire’s history was put to much more nuanced and diverse uses between 1923 and today.

The fourth chapter shifts focus, looking at the visual and rhetorical styles through which Ottoman history was made modern. I argue that, faced with prevailing Western Orientalism, Turkish authors, architects and illustrators took a number of distinct stylistic steps to celebrate their history while presenting themselves as unequivocally modern.

The fifth chapter focuses on the intersection of ideology and foreign policy, looking at the role ideas about Turkey’s history and geographical position played in its NATO accession and its relations with the United States, the United Kingdom, and the countries of the Middle East. During the early years of the Cold War, I argue, Turkey’s historically-informed, anti-imperialist sympathies were redirected to accommodate the country’s changing geostrategic orientation; anti-British sympathy for Arab states gave way to anger supposed Arab support for “Soviet Imperialism.”
Finally, the sixth chapter looks at how American diplomats and advisors employed the language of modernization when crafting policy and propaganda for Turkey. I argue that while their general understanding of what it meant to be modern remained consistent, it was sufficiently malleable that it served to justify diverse, often contradictory conclusions about Turkish democracy in accordance with American interests.

Sources:
In trying to synthesize political and cultural history, this dissertation draws on two principle sources: the United States National Archive and an extensive array of published primary source material – books, journals, newspapers and magazines – in Turkish. Together, this material has proved to form an incredibly rich source base. The records of the Turkish Foreign Ministry were closed while I was conducting my research and those of the Republican Archive, while occasionally fascinating, remain far too limited to provide any serious insight into the Turkish government’s thinking during this period. Close contact between the Turkish and American governments during this 1940s and 1950s has at times created the odd situation where confidential Turkish government documents that are not available in Ankara appear in translation in the US archive. In search of the most complete array of sources on American-Turkish interactions, I have examined not just State Department cables but also records from the United States Information Service and the Joint US Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, as well as the internal embassy and consulate documents found in Record Group 84. Conspiracy theories abound about the many ways the US government supposedly influenced Turkish
politics in the early Cold War period. The largely declassified US records offer a perfect source for disproving most of them – and confirming a few as well.

A combination of free press and increasing wealth led to an explosion of publishing in the immediate post-war period in Turkey. Increasingly colorful, abundant, and diverse magazines from the period spanned topics from popular history to politics and religion, employing many of the period’s most famous writers and artists. [Figure 1] There was also a vibrant newspaper industry at the time, with several papers affiliated with both political parties and a number of more or less independent papers as well. Finally, a number of scholarly journals begun in the Republican period continued and expanded their activities during this period. Many of the publications from the 1940s and 1950s have been digitized, and most are available in library collections while some can be found scattered in used bookstores throughout Istanbul. At times it is possible to trace the fortunes of a publication or its owner by watching, issue-by-issue, as page tallies shrink, paper grows courser, color photos give way to black and white shots, and then, finally, publication ceases altogether. As historical sources, these publications are of unparalleled value as they open up windows on Turkish history in unexpected ways. And I hope readers will enjoy the frequently humorous and clever content as much as I have. Many of the contributors to these publications remain famous for their enduring literary and artistic talents; others in their eccentricity or earnestness nonetheless contributed something remarkable. If the eloquence of the writing does not always come through in my translation or the beauty of the images in reproduction, I have tried to provide a hint of the richness of the era’s print culture.
Finally, I have, where possible, benefitted from the private papers of several individuals who were prominent during this period, including the George McGhee papers at Georgetown University, the İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı papers at the İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı Library in Istanbul, and the private collection of Bülent Ecevit, shared generously by Rahşan Ecevit.
Chapter 1. Asia in Europe and Europe in Asia: Turkish Identity Beyond East and West

For individuals sometimes thought of as paradigmatic disciples of Western modernity, Turkish thinkers in both the Kemalist period and the 1950s identified their national culture as part of the “East” with remarkable regularity, often in order to promote a view of Turkish identity as a synthesis of East and West. This, I argue, forces us to consider not only the malleability of geographic rhetoric in modernization discourse, but more importantly, helps highlight the extent to which throughout the past century changing modernization discourses have repeatedly position themselves as the “authentic” or more “organic” alternatives to other forms of modernization that are in turn denounced as superficial imitations of the West. Taking this approach, earlier Turkish modernization discourses prefigured much that seems new in contemporary Turkish political debates, from the language of Ottoman tolerance to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Alliance of Civilizations.

During the 1950s, authors and publications that embraced elements of an Eastern or non-Western identity did so in a way that explicitly rejected its potential Islamist (and Communist) readings, though many were eager to associate it with some kind of Asian, Asiatic, or even Oriental identity, quite frequently in a defiantly anti-colonial context. In exploring the usage of this “eastern” identity, I do not intend to argue that it ever became a dominant, or even mainstream one, but rather to explain the development, particularly during the 1950s, of an identity built on Turkey’s claim to be a synthesis of the very best
of “Eastern” and “Western” culture, a synthesis that was repeatedly invoked in discussing Turkey foreign and domestic politics during the period.

Atatürk always spoke of making Turkey “civilized” or “contemporary,” but never “Western.” Whether this detail should be read as a crucial insight into Atatürk’s ideology or dismissed as a mere technicality speaks to the rival ways scholars have approached 20th century Turkish identity. On one hand, authors like Orhan Koçak have argued that Atatürk’s efforts built on nationalist thinker Ziya Gökalp’s call for a synthesis between national essence [has] and global values [medeniyet] that would enable Turks to “be like the West and still be ourselves.” Thus while he insisted that embracing European civilization required Turkey replace or destroy its attachment to Eastern civilization Gökalp also emphasized the need to preserve Turkey’s cultural authenticity and Muslim identity. Thus Koçak’s reading hints at the ways Gökalp’s rhetoric prefigured a Kemalist critique of hyper-Westernization that would later find expression in a positive embrace of Turkey’s “eastern identity.” Koçak points out, for example, that Gökalp was quick to criticize the “imitative [taklitci]” nature of cultural production late Ottoman Westernizers, accusing the Servet-i Fünun literary movement, for example, of not only borrowing styles and methods from European literature “but trying to borrow its lyricism [lirizm] and taste [zevk], things which should not be transferred from one society to another.”

---

2 Specifically its attachment to “Acem,” meaning Persian, or Acem-Arap civilization, which he distinguished from “far-Eastern” civilization.
3 Ziya Gökalp, quoted in Koçak’s "1920'lerden 1970'lere Kültür Politikalari." Koçak argues that from the 1920s through the 1970s “Gokalp’s idea of a “synthesis of National Hars and Western Civilization” maintained its influence of cultural politics and showed this influence in the most unexpected places and
In contrast to this view, a considerable amount of recent scholarship has instead downplayed this element of the Kemalist critique in order to emphasize Atatürk’s commitment to hyper-Westernization. Şükrü Hanoğlu, for example, argues that Atatürk’s “initiatives in Westernization surpassed even the most avant-gardes projects of the radical Ottoman Westernizers of the Second Constitutional Period.”\(^4\) It is in this reading that Atatürk becomes the paradigmatic devotee of Western modernity, that is someone who “rejected the very possibility of a non-Western modernity, despite having lived in one of the major examples of such an environment, the Late Ottoman Empire.”\(^5\)

In the same view, Erik Zürcher argues that Atatürk “went farther than Gökalp… and came closer to the ideas of the Westernizes, (garbeclar), a small group of Young Turk intellectuals who had rejected the dichotomy of cultural and civilization and advocated adoption of a completely European lifestyle.”\(^6\) Comparing Atatürk to Persian thinkers who called for “blind submission to Western civilization” Zürcher presents Atatürk as someone who believed European civilization “had to be accepted lock, stock and barrel if Turkey was to survive in the modern world.”\(^7\)

A similar approach is embodied in Cemal Aydin’s comprehensive treatment of anti-Westernism in the Ottoman Empire, which takes as its chronological endpoint Atatürk’s times.” He claims Gökalp’s synthesis, for example, proved far more popular among the Republican cultural elite than, Agaoglu’s criticism, expressed in the 1927 Uc Medeniyet, that anything short of complete Westernization was impossible.

\(^5\) Ibid, 204.
\(^7\) Ibid.
abolition of the Caliphate.\textsuperscript{8} It is a natural decision given Aydın’s focus on Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic ideologies, but it reinforces the impression that anti-Westernism in Turkey ended with the triumph of pro-Western Kemalist nationalism.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed Aydın suggests that modern Turkey’s effort to “leave the Muslim World” stemmed from the belief that “Eastern-Islamic civilization was dead and could not be modern,” just as, according to Hanioğlu, the late Ottoman Garpcılar believed “that Islam and modern life could not be reconciled.”\textsuperscript{10} As a result, “there was no path for Turkey other than trying to become a member of Western civilization.”\textsuperscript{11}

Notably, though, one of the Pan-Asianist thinkers featured prominently in Aydın’s book is the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. In the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the leader of Atatürk’s Republican People’s Party was a man who devoted several years of his early life to translating Tagore’s poetry. Bülent Ecevit completed his last term as Prime Minister in 2002, having regularly infuriated “Western” leaders over the previous decades with his often pro-Soviet and anti-EU policies. As Mehmet Döşemeci argues, by the 1970s Ecevit, alongside Islamist politicians such as Necmettin Erbakan opposed Turkey’s membership in the European Economic Community, arguing for “a return to Atatürk’s original position, one he claimed had displayed a profound ambivalence toward the west.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{10} Hanioğlu, “Garpcılar.”
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{12} Mehmet Döşemeci, \textit{Debating Turkish Modernity} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 177, 188. Döşemeci claims that in the 1970s Turkey experienced a “Great Westernization Debate” which reconsidered “the foundations of the Turkish project and its social, ideological, cultural and economic relationship with the west.” This chapter seeks to demonstrate that in fact by 1970 such a debate was well underway.
Ignoring the distinctly anti-Western elements of Kemalism makes it impossible to fully understand the complex debate about Turkish identity that occurred in the 1950s, as well as the focus on East-West synthesis that emerged in the writing of Ecevit and many others. In fact, the earliest uses of a positive “non-Western” identity in Kemalist rhetoric appear in an explicitly anti-colonial context. In his epic speech *Nutuk*, for example, Atatürk’s proudly declared that both before and after their acceptance of Islam, the Turks were “the strongest of Eastern peoples [Akvam-i şarkiye]” at the “forefront” of their “attacks into the heart of Europe” against the people of the West.13 Echoing this worldview is a striking map from the 1920s that showed the territories controlled by European powers, then labeled the rest of the world, including China, Japan, Persia and Russia, as “defiant [muthadiye] governments of the world. [Figure 2] By the 1950s, assertions of Turkey’s Eastern identity, or of particular “Eastern” aspects of Turkish cultural, served in the realms of foreign and domestic politics to claim a more inclusive, synthetic identity built on of Turkey’s unique position between East and West. In contrast to the map of defiant nations, another map from the 1940s, offers an equally nationalistic message predicated on a slightly different sense of geography. [Figure 3] Here Turkey appears in its own color between Europe, in green, on one side and Asia, in purple, on the other. The caption reads: “Because Turkey’s territory is in the center of three continents Turks must work more than any other nation. Let us as a result undertake our duties with zeal. Turkish youth! Look on the world and life from above and do your duty.” Prefiguring the idea of Turkey as a bridge between East and West, the caption defines

---

13 *Nutuk*, Bedi Yazıcı, editor, 426.
Turkey’s importance not in reference to its being European but rather to a geographic position whose uniqueness is visually stressed by the map as well.

Writing in the 1950s, some of Turkey’s most important writers would push the possibilities inherent in Turkey’s geographic and cultural position to their logical extremes. With leading newspapers declaring that “Asia’s star was rising”\textsuperscript{14} and the continent was “neither exhausted nor sterile,”\textsuperscript{15} the \textit{Vatan} editor Ahmet Emin Yalman declared:

\begin{quote}
A new sun has risen for all of Asia and mankind at large… It will be remembered that there was a time when we for a while followed the course of denying our relations with the East, with a view to assimilation with the Western world. Our natural role, however, consists in serving as a bridge in the moral and material sense between East and West. Whether we like it or not, we constitute the most important factor of stability for the lands surrounding our territory and for all of Asia.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Not to be outdone, Turkey’s Washington press attaché told Princeton University in 1951 that Turkey was “truly a Western power” yet “it would be ignoring history and geography to exclude Turkey altogether from the area of the Middle East.” Indeed, he claimed “the Turks believe that the Middle East is but a continuation of the Continent of Europe.”\textsuperscript{17}

Yet no one proved more eager or more capable in playing with Turkey’s East-West identity than Bülent Ecevit. Ecevit would become one of Turkey’s defining political figures for the latter half of the twentieth century, completing his last term as Prime

\textsuperscript{14} Editorial, \textit{Tasvir}, March 31, Embassy Despatch No 1532, Unclassified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 100, National Archives.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Cumhuriyet}, March 22, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Vatan}, August 17, Despactch 1803, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} “Turkey’s Vital Role in the Global Context, an Address by Mr. Nuri Eren,” General Records of the Department of State. Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 2. RG 59, National Archives.
Minister in 2001. In the 1950s he was a newspaper columnist who, in addition to opening Turkey’s first private art gallery, studied Sanskrit in London and interned with a local paper in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Writing in Turkish or in English, Ecevit articulated Turkey’s place in the world in terms that were hardly unique in their convoluted, sometimes paradoxical nature. Ecevit, for example, was always eager to tell American audiences about the dramatic success of Turkey’s Westernization, but as he explained to the Washington International Center:

It would, however, be incorrect to define Turkey as mainly a European or an Asiatic country. Today, Turkey is both, she is Asia in Europe and Europe in Asia. In fact, the Turks are more conscious and prouder than ever of their Asiatic heritage, now that they find themselves regarded as a European as well as an Asiatic nation. What is more, they now find themselves charged with a historic mission, imposed on them by the geographic position of Turkey. This mission is to provide a bridge between Asia and Europe, a link between the East and the West. [In his draft, Ecevit then crossed out East and West to replace them with orient and Occident.]  

Turkey achieved this mission, Ecevit argued by joining NATO while simultaneously entering into a series of alliances with Eastern neighbors such as Pakistan. Yet while there was a military and diplomatic dimension to Turkey’s role as a bridge or link that Ecevit would return to on many occasions, he insisted that there was also a uniquely cultural dimension. As he explained to Turkish readers in a weekly newspaper column:

In centuries of fighting the Turks had not been able to bring the West under the control of the East and the Europeans had not been able to bring the East under the control of the West… [But] just as Turks had begun the end of imperialism with their victory in the War of Independence, by adopting a new lifestyle they had destroyed the wall between east and west that could not be destroyed for centuries through the use of force.

Put more abstractly, he suggested that under Ataturk, Turkey had become more Western but had also, as an Eastern country, freed Westerns from the West:

18 Personal Papers of Bülent Ecevit.
As westernness [batılilik] was freed from any religious, racial or geographic limitations... it became a lifestyle that could be embraced by all nations... As this lifestyle spread eastward, it was enriched through the addition of Eastern values. And when development is completed, the division between East and West will be completely eliminated... 19

While Ecevit himself often used the term “Orient” to refer to the East in a geographic sense, he made a point of rejecting its use as a cultural term, explaining in a note written across the back of another speech “Using ‘outmoded’ in place of ‘Oriental’ would be appropriate [Oriental yerine outmoded demek yerinde olur.] 20.

Ecevit was hardly alone in insisting that there need not be anything Oriental about the East. Two decades before the Islamist newspaper Buyer Doğu [the Great East], famously sought to claim this cardinal direction for Islam, a 1931 fashion and lifestyle magazine appeared called Resimli Şark, or The Illustrated East. 21 As the editors explained in the first issue:

It could be put forward that naming this magazine Resimli Şark constitutes a contradiction with today’s resolute Westernization, and some could be found to mock it on these grounds. There are those that will accuse Resimli Şark of orientalism [Şarklılık] and slavish traditionalism [anana persetlik] No! Resimli Şark is completely Western and Modern [Garpli ve asridir]. 22

While never offering a completely unambiguous explanation of the magazine’s name, this introduction went on to hint at what, in the editor’s mind, separated it from the country’s many other, western-inspired, lifestyle and society magazines. It would be a “serious” [ağır-başlı] magazine for a “dignified” [vakarlı] nation, that avoided the

20 Personal Papers of Bulent Ecevit
21 The title of Resimli Şark, incidentally, was entirely composed of Arabic and Persian words, whereas the title Büyük Doğu reflected the impact of the Kemalist language reform.
22 Resimli Şark, Issue 1, 1931
pretension, gossip, and sarcasm [tariz] of rival publications. Aiming to be “constructive not destructive” it would avoid both moralizing and encouraging immorality” while seeking to offer “a few minutes peace to a population tiring of life’s thousands of burdens and hardships.” In short, the magazine would be completely western and modern, but free, from many of the worst aspects of Western modernity while also offering a respite from its hardships.23

While Resimli Şark’s appropriation of the East was obviously atypical enough to require an explanation from the editors, it was by no means unique either. During the 1950s, many writers conflated Turkey’s ability to realize a proper synthesis of East and West with its realization of true democracy. Rejecting the overly rigid aspects of Kemalist Westernization became a way to articulate a cultural and political progression from Empire to Republic and then, in time, to full democracy.

Ecevit, for example, began one of his many articles on the Turks’ long-standing love of poetry by explaining that this love “was natural within the framework of Ottoman culture, which was essentially Oriental, because the Oriental mind does not, in general, go in for rational thinking.” He went on to explain:

23 An article in the second issue (Issue 2, 2 February, 1931), for example, declared that parents should expose their children to Turkish and Western music in order to train a generation that could “elevate today’s soulless and tired alaturka music to the artistic level it deserves.”
24 *Winston-Salem Journal-Chronicle*, “Poetry in Turkey, A nation’s most popular art,” 21 November 1954. Ironically, if not necessarily surprisingly, Ecevit offered his most comprehensive analysis of Turkey’s artistic history not to Turkish readers, but instead to the people of Winston-Salem. In November of 1954, North Carolinians opening the Journal – Sentinel found articles on the history of Turkish painting and several weeks later Turkish poetry. What stands out particularly clearly in both these articles, where Ecevit seeks to provide a broad overview of the topic rather than the detailed treatment he reserved for his Turkish readers, is that in using a broader lens Ecevit more clearly highlights the fundamental themes of his historiographical view.
Although the Ottoman tradition of interest in poetry has continued during the Republican Period, the literary traditions of the Ottomans have completely died out. Actually modern Turkish poetry was born out of a rejection of the past. Like many aspects of contemporary life in Turkey it is a product of the reforms initiated by the late Kemal Atatürk after he had founded the Republic in 1923….25

Yet this simple Kemalist narrative quickly became more complicated:

Ottoman poetry exerted a negative influence, however, on modern Turkish poetry through the various reactions that it evoked among the younger poets. There was a reaction against the elaborate poetic diction of the Ottoman poets. The reaction stimulated the simplification of diction. There soon came a time when poets of the younger generation shunned any word which had not become part of the spoken language. There was a reaction against the excessive use of metaphors and adjectives in Ottoman poetry, which had in time, stagnated into clichés. This feeling caused several poets to avoid adjectives and metaphors altogether. Since Ottoman poetry has lost all its appeal during recent years, reaction against the old does not play as important a part now as it used to. Those who have carried the banner of the anti-traditional movement have won the battle and cleared the way for less prejudiced experiments.26

As an example of this new trend Ecevit cited the increasingly influential poet Fazil Hüsnü Dağlarca, about whom he said: “As against the simplicity of diction and the direness of Orhan Veli he often uses a very complex syntax, at times recalling E. E. Cummings, and has introduced a modern brand of mysticism to Turkish poetry.” It is worth quoting Ecevit’s views at length here to show how his logic develops over the course of a few sentences. After starting out with a striking and essentialized dichotomy between West and East in which Western rationality is posited as superior, Ecevit reaches a point where he claims Dağlarca’s limited return to tradition, with which there can be “no compromise” but against which there should be no “prejudice,” makes his writing similar to that of the Western arch-modernist E. E. Cummings.

25 Ibid
26 Ibid.
The same narrative appears when Ecevit tackles the subject of Turkey’s visual art.27 “The ending of the Ottoman Empire,” he claimed “brought emancipation for the Turkish artist, awakening him to the beauties of nature and the joy of living. Previously, “Turkish people had listened to monophonic and melancholy music” and watched “decorations composed of lifeless objects, abstract forms and colors that did not reflect the sun even when they were bright.” With the advent of the Republic, by contrast, “[i]t was as if all the plastic elements which had been imprisoned for centuries on the lifeless miniatures and stylized tiles, away from nature and sun and human feeling, were now rushing forth into real life to associate themselves with real nature.” Yet despite the liberating impact of the Republic, Ecevit felt that “[u]p until 1946 Turkish painters made no contributions of their own to modern art. “[W]hen the one-party regime ended and a multi-party system began,” he went on to argue “a new reform took place in Turkish art, ending the blissful days of the Turkish painter.” Without the government to serve as a “generous patron of the arts... the painter was left on his own.” In essence “he had lost his material comfort to some extent but had gained his artistic freedom.” And it was with this freedom, Ecevit believed, that the Turkish artist rediscovered the positive elements of Ottoman art:

The painters, free to experiment, could look back to old Turkish art with an open mind and it was by looking back that they became inspired by the works of the old calligraphists as a means for reviving the human element in non-figurative art. The calligraphic art of Islam, not like anything in Western art, has provided a great source of inspiration for the younger Turkish painters...28

Cultural synthesis in the 1950s, especially of Ecevit’s liberal variety, has often been associated with the somewhat eccentric Mavi Anadolu or Blue Anatolia movement. Yet

---

28 Ibid.
arguments quite similar to Ecevit’s can be found in a wide range of more conservative and traditionally nationalistic sources. For example, authors writing in Türk Yurdu, a publication whose orientation was aggressively nationalist, argued that Turkish art in the 1950s had failed to establish the ideal synthesis it was capable of:

Turks, who throughout history have exemplified art’s multiple manifestations, who have proved their maturity in art, and risen to the level of genius in their architecture and decorative [decorative] arts if not necessarily picture-painting, should be ashamed of the sad fate of their obsession with and imitation of the West.

Saying that Turks were at the artistic forefront of the Eastern and Islamic nations [Şark ve İslam Milletleri] and that with their unique style “brought refinement to the level of enchantment [tabiat fussünkar bir hale gelmiştir],” the author went on to argue that in order to recapture this glory it was necessary not to “look at the old decorative arts as obsolete” but instead “study the old, study old Turkish painting and create a new spirit, a new technique, a new Turkish painting style that is original and substantial and accommodates tradition.”

Another piece from the magazine elaborated on the idea that Turks’ ability to accomplish this depended on their having “a rich cultural heritage built on a range of interactions with different civilizations from both west and east” from whom they had “taken and

29 Despite periodic closures, Türk Yurdu remained one of the best known nationalist publications from 1911 until today. Published in conjunction with the Turkish Hearths, its most famous contributors include Yusuf Akçuraoğlu and Hamdullah Suphi Tanrîöver.
31 Türk Yurdu, Ibid. Indeed, in his study of the Mavi Anadolu or Mavici movement, Can Bilsel argues that the groups synthetic ideas were more widespread than often assumed: “[D]espite its marked political differences with Blue Anatolia, the officially sanctioned "Turkish-Islam" was also intended as a "synthesis" seeking a cohesive and organic "culture." It, too, was adopted from a refraining of the Turkish History Thesis and of the "right-wing" Anatolianism of nationalist-corporatist thinkers of the early twentieth century such as Remzi Oguz Arik. "Our Anatolia": Organicism and the Making of Humanist Culture in Turkey,” Muqarnas, Vol. 24 (2007), pp. 223-241, 236.
given a number of things.” It was in spite of these diverse contacts, the author complained that “in our recent history we have not been able to bring into being a national, homogenous and country-spanning culture that is unique to us by drawing appropriately on this rich civilizational treasury.”

Discussions of identity in the realm of art were simply one illustration of a broader cultural phenomenon. In the early 1950s, several of Istanbul’s most prominent cultural and intellectual magazines devoted themselves to a heated debate about the nature of Turkey’s identity and the question of westernization. Among the most eager to address the issue was Türk Düşüncesi, or Turkish Thought, a journal started by the well-known publisher and intellectual Peyami Safa.

Claiming that current Turkish intellectual life was in a state of disorder, Safa ambitiously stated that his journal’s program was to provide the country intellectual order, “bringing a bountiful intellectual harvest [bareket] out of the ungrateful Anatolian ground” like modern machines did for farmers. This would require rescuing the country’s discourse from every demagogue’s revolution-reaction [irtica-inkılıp] dichotomy” and creating “a real discourse in the light of modern western thought.”

Safa set his intellectual campaign in the context of Turkey’s industrial and mechanical modernization. Stating that in Anatolia, “the ox is living his last days,” he argued that it was necessary to debate the issues “that the agricultural technology revolution [zirai

---

32 Ibid, 421.
33 Türk Düşüncesi, Issue 1, Editorial.
teknik devrim] is creating in our country.” After framing his discussion in light of Turkey’s mechanical modernization, Safa articulates the false dichotomy he seeks to escape through a critique on an outmoded vision of modernization that the West itself has abandoned:

Europe and the West, in the manner that some of our Westernizing [Garpci] journals and thinkers who consider themselves revolutionary understand it, can be considered long past gone. When speaking of Western Europe they cannot save themselves from the mental molds of the first three quarters of the last century, which have been completely abandoned today…. When we say Europe, or in the broad sense the West, we reflect the an understanding of yesterday’s culture and civilization which is a part of history, its era having passed. We do not know that being created today is a new and vital West working to clear away this outdated past. No matter how good their intentions, those who want to force the Turkish revolution into the dead Western mold do not know how outdated the ideas they consider advanced are. The first question they must wake up from the Western dream in which they are dozing and ask themselves is, if I am not mistaken, “which west?”

Saying that it was necessary to remain in contact with the foundational elements of Western thought, Safa tried to articulate what these were in Europe’s new intellectual era. Beginning with Einstein’s critique of Newtonian physics and Heisenberg’s uncertainty [kararsızlık] principle, Safa wrote that the world had witnessed the “collapse of the dictatorship of science [ilim], and the shaking-up of “not just the idea of measurement, on which the concept of positivist knowledge rested, but the determinism on which all science and materialist philosophy rested.”

He went on to say that the intellectual revolution of the 20th century was not just a revolt against science “but a revolt against reason [akla karşı bir isyandır].” In a subsequent article, he explained the rise of existentialist philosophy as a result of the hopes destroyed

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
by the Second World War and the end of the “dream that reason and science could not only explain everything but also give human society eternal peace and order.” To succeed, then, Turkey would have to “share in the intellectual fever [fikir humması] that gave the West its present dynamism rather than “remain passive before or merely ape a frozen example.” Thus Safa concluded, his goal was to “seek to surmount today’s spiritual tension, the cultural and civilizational malaise [buhran] by articulating a synthesis, appropriate to and above Turkey’s historical and geographical situation, between dichotomies like spiritual and physical, East and West, past and future.” This would require refuting those who were “against the creative and forward-looking actions of the Turkish revolution” and also “those who condemned the living values of the past alongside the dead ones.”

For Safa, it was not just a matter of Turkey’s modernization, but of Turkey overcoming a spiritual crisis of “the age.” Turkish society, in other words, needed to participate in a transition from old to new that was sweeping all of Europe. Thus with reference to Westerners borrowing from Eastern mysticism, he argued like Ecevit that Eastern artistic traditions were in their own way already more modern:

20th century Europe… thought it could find the grand spiritual inoculation it needed after World War One in the East. Since then in the West there was a feverish longing and effort to research and appropriate the archaic values of the East. Thus the possibility is long since born for a fusion [kaynaşma] between the East, seeking to arm itself with the West’s scientific and technical methods, and the West, seeking to find spiritual inoculation in the East’s spiritual life.

36 Ibid.
37 “Türk Düşüncesi ve Batı Medeniyeti,” Ibid.
With Europe itself seeking spiritual meaning in Eastern tradition, there could be no shame in Turks doing the same, leading Safa to conclude: “We can find all the vital elements of the synthesis that will save the Turkish revolution from appearing to leap between aping the Arabs and aping the Franks in the national and religious traditions of our own which touch our soul as much as in the works of the West’s greatest scientists, philosophers and authors.” Moreover, by presenting Turkey’s intellectual and cultural challenges in the context of European trends, Safa ultimately suggests that wrestling with these problems, is not an aspect of development but of modernity. That is, confronting the dilemmas of modernization makes Turkey a modern country, not a modernizing one.

Finally, Safa took particular aim at those whom he considered excessive in their embrace of the West:

Atatürk wanted to ensure that the Turkish nation entered the Western cultural family not as an imitator but in possession of its own identity and personality, and completed with Westernization revolution with language and history reforms. Most of our Atatürkists forget this, and what’s worse, support the radical leftists who want us to forget the Turkish revolution’s sincere nationalist character.

Subsequently, Safa advanced the argument that in fact all Westernizing countries outside of Europe had taken a similar approach. Citing Russian and Japanese examples, the other wrote that “every westernizing culture defends its own identity against westernization” while emphasizing that civilizations “with their own proud history come up with a synthesis.” Thus Safa concluded that the “Asianist movement” [Asyacılık Hareketi] that Atatürk assumed command of had existed in Turkey since the Second Constitutional

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 “Asyacılık Hareketi,” Ibid.
period as a national reaction to the policies of radical Europeanism [aşırı Avrupacılık].”

Thus in Safa’s formulation, Turkey, despite its position, had always had the foresight to try to preempt the loss of identity that could befall late modernizers, but nonetheless faced the same challenges of modernization as advanced Western countries.

Safa’s thinking was echoed in that of other writers from more conservative ideological backgrounds. *Istanbul*, another prominent intellectual journal from the time whose contributors included religious conservative Ibrahim Kafesoğlu and writers such as Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, devoted considerable space to debates over Turkish identity, with a particular emphasis on the fact that Turkish modernization had long embraced synthesis. In one of its initial issues, Mehmet Kaplan responded to Safa’s discussion of synthesis in *Turkish Thought*. Beginning with an examination of East-West synthesis in literature, Kaplan, subsequently expanded his analysis into a broader discussion of Turkey’s cultural geography. Kaplan began by arguing that he was a believer in Safa’s idea of synthesis, not just as an ideal but as a social necessity, and a historical reality that was already in progress:

> All great civilizations were a synthesis. Just like ancient Chinese civilization, Indian civilization, Egyptian, Greek, Roman civilizations, and medieval Western civilizations were all syntheses, Islamic civilization, and the Ottoman civilization that had its own characteristics within it, were syntheses. Today’s Western civilization is a synthesis. And our own new civilizational movement that has been developing seen the Tanzimat is nothing if not a synthesis. 41

Kaplan then went on to explain that he was not alone in making this observation. Most of Turkey’s famous intellectuals felt the same way:

As far as I know Sinasi was the first to use the phrase “from a marriage of Asia’s ancient mentality and the west’s virginity of thought" [Asyannın akl-ı piranesi ile Avrupanı̇n bikr-ı fikrinin izdivacından]. And he strove to realize this idea in his works. Most of the Turkish intellectuals who came after him, Namik Kemal, Ziya Paşa, Ahmed Midhat, Muallim Naci Ziya Gökalp, Mehmed Akif, Yayha Kemal and others, always defended and applied the idea of synthesizing old and new, East and West. Because the understanding, challenges, conditions and issues of each era, generation and individual were all different the syntheses they produced were also different. Among these only two generations – the Servet-i Fünun generation and the Republican era’s radical revolutionary generation – took a stand against national values and past in the service of an agenda of completely imitating the west. But don’t be deceived. If their works and actions are examined, [it can be seen that] they hardly went beyond the national and historical frame…

A number of contributors besides Kaplan took the same approach, disagreeing with the specific form of synthesis Safa proposed Turkish Thought but in doing so endorsing the essential elements synthetic vision. A piece titled “Entering the Technical Era” from one of the journal’s first few issues offered an emphatic treatment of the subject.\footnote{Istanbul, Volume 1, Issue 4, March 1954.} Beginning with an epitaph from Hegel - “Let us praise tools more than nature” - it offered the same grounding in Turkey’s mechanical progress as Safa had:

For many years Western civilization was widely discussed. Only a few things that changed the external face of our lives were adopted. And this newness was exclusively limited to one or two big cities. Now there is a movement that can be seen and felt across the whole country. Many more cars, trucks and buses fill our roads than before. Many more tractors work our fields… New neighborhoods are rising in the ruins. Apartments are taking the place of old houses. Grand plazas and roads are being revealed in our cities. Cities, even towns are being lit with electricity. The vitrines are full of modern goods. A new décor, a new comfort exists in our homes… The people, who stayed generally opposed to ideological revolutions, or even secretly resisted, are giving themselves over to technological devices. Nowhere is there the least resistance to automobiles, tractors, electricity or radios. Quite the contrary even people who still have not rescued their heads from old ideas are embracing technological civilization [teknik medeniyeti]. This behavior is the biggest sign that this movement will accelerate without any obstacle…\footnote{Ibid.}
Moreover, the editorial defined Turkey’s mechanical success as an organic development:

Turkey’s advancement from the perspective of technical civilization is not just the result of borrowing from Europe and America. Today in our country there is a technically enlightened coterie that has graduated from technical schools and universities, studied abroad and returned. These people are building roads and buildings, they are founding and running factories. The presence of this coterie and the peoples’ aspirations are the strongest evidence and insurance that technical progress in Turkey will be continuous not interrupted.44

Having emphasized both technological roots and populist nature of modernity, the editorial goes on to articulate its vision for cultural synthesis, focusing heavily on nationalist authenticity:

We do not want nationalism, religion, or tradition to be ranged against modern technology. For us, if defending the true value of our historic civilization is important, so is acquiring and mastering the tools of modern civilization. We know these may be in opposition from many angles. But this opposition does not force us to choose one of the two. Despite all conflict, we find it valuable to bring both together and believe that synergy [terkib] arises specifically from this contradiction.45

The specific implications of this synthesis, however, became most clear in editorial that appeared in Istanbul several weeks later. The split with Safa was partisan. Turkish Thought, despite its critique of traditional Kemalism, nonetheless offered its vision of synthesis in support of the Republican People’s Party. Istanbul, by contrast, insisted that its rival the Democratic Party, best embodied these synthetic ideals. The magazine was emphatic in its identification with the populist rhetoric of the Democratic Party, in particular their focus on rural development through mechanization. 46

Issues like [methods of production, land distribution and professional training], that are treated as fundamental in countries that have assimilated modern civilization like Europe, America Russia and Japan, are not properly understood

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Volume 1, page 8.
by us today. When most of our intellectuals discuss revolution they still think of things like hats and writing. These are issues that have already been solved. The people know what is important for them better than the intellectuals: machines, tractors, trucks, electricity, water, roads and honor. When the people could vote freely these issues came to the fore. The issue of government, removed from a purely circumstantial [teferruatçı] understanding, became a social issues based on daily needs. Today in Turkey democracy is tied to factors like land, wheat, beets, tractors and investment. It has surpassed the turban-hat stage.

While the partisan appropriation of modernization will be discussed in the final chapter, what should be noted first is the extent to which supporters of both parties participated in and contributed to a shared discourse on the subject.

In fact, the similarities between Istanbul and Turk Düşüncesi in their approach to the question of synthesis stand out all the more dramatically for the two journals’ disagreement. Turkish Thought aligns itself with the European critiques of scientific positivism, using this as grounds for calling on Turks to overcome the false dichotomy between revolution and reaction. Istanbul, by contrast, criticizes Turkish Thought’s approach, associating it with zuppelik, or the superficial, snobbish imitation of European style widely condemned in late Ottoman times. Instead, Istanbul’s editorial puts its faith in the transformative power of technology, an approach that has already been criticized as maymunculuk, or aping, by Safa.

While criticizing others for embracing the wrong aspects of European society and thought, both journals positioned themselves as partisans of a more sophisticated, nuanced, and by extension, modern vision of modernity the transcends the limitations of those embraced by others. Safa and Turkish Thought took the position of having
surpassed 19th century modernity and almost arrived at a form of post-modernity, while
Istanbul took a populist approach in which it can claim that the experience of
modernization transcends the meaningless intellectual debates on the subject that
characterized previous endeavors. At the same time, their focus, like that of many
American modernization theorists, was on modernization as a social phenomenon rooted
in the transformation of an entire society rather than merely its elite. Both journals are
able to explicitly identify Turkey’s situation with the positive example of Asian
modernizers such as Japan, highlighting the need for East-West synthesis while also
claiming that not only foreign modernizers but all their Turkish and Ottoman
predecessors felt the same way. Turkey’s leading intellectuals were eager to proclaim that
Turkish culture and Turkish modernization were the product of synthesis, should aspire
to be even more of a synthesis, and had, in fact, always been a synthesis, since the
Tanzimat, certainly and even under Atatürk.

But lest it seems that these debates over identity were limited to excessively highbrow art
and literature journals, let us turn to the popular, which in this era meant mildly
pornographic, press. An examination of the depictions of women, particularly Turkish
women, from the 1940s and 1950s provides evidence of a similar perspective on
questions of modernity and national identity with reference to West and East, European
and Oriental. That modernity has frequently been defined, debated and imposed in
reference to women’s bodies is well established. Indeed the Kemalist project to make
“modern” women through means ranging from mandatory unveiling to state-sponsored
beauty pageants is well documented. With this in mind, I argue that depictions of women from Turkey’s first decade of free press provide further evidence of a coherent and widely shared identity based on the dual rejection of Islamic reaction and negative aspects of European, and at times even American, modernity. At the same time, the depictions of women in mid-century press should provide further evidence, though perhaps it is no longer needed, that “secularization” or “modernization” projects were in no way inherently liberator or feminist. In light of the earlier discussion about how malleable the discourse on modernity could be in the agile minds of those applying it, we might conclude that when interpreted by men, this discourse can easily reinforce the values of a patriarchal society.

After World War Two, the combination of an increasingly competitive publishing market, more liberal press laws and an environment where the vast majority of people buying and reading printed material were male all combined to create a press culture in which depictions of women, often topless, where quite common. The very bluntness with which male journalists regularly objectified women in the pages of magazines and newspapers from this era simplifies the historians task. Discussions of female bodies and beauty standards were incredibly candid, often crass, allowing writers to be quite clear about the way they viewed women’s physical characteristics and other attributes in relation to Turkey’s Westernization campaign.

---

47 See, for example, Zehra Arat, ed, Deconstructing Images of The Turkish Woman (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998)
Accompanying the photograph which appeared on the front page of the Democrat Party paper Zafer, was a caption that read:

The Far East’s Beauty Measurements – We always interest ourselves in the beauty contests of Western societies. But there is also the Far East, with its own unique rules and measurements. Above you see the selection of Miss Japan. The winner was Ms. Yokosuka, standing to the right of the girl being measured. Experts say that Japanese tastes are sliding Westward.48

The paper’s editors were certainly not exaggerating their interest in Western beauty pageants. And at a time when it did indeed seem that the world’s tastes were sliding toward the West, the editors where bound to notice when it appeared that Western tastes might actually be getting closer to Turkey’s. In 1951, the paper showed a picture of that year’s newly crowned Miss America alongside the winner of the previous year’s competition. An accompanying article expressed delight at the fact that recent winner, in contrast to her predecessor, appeared more balıkteli, a phrase literally referring to fish but meaning plump in an entirely positive sense. The author concluded that this development showed that American tastes had begun to reflect a greater appreciation for the natural and maternal qualities that defined Turkish women.

In this context, cartoons such as the one at left [Figure 5] from the early 1950s became a commonplace way of presenting male tastes, along with female characteristics, as defining national characteristics. Popular press provided a form for (male) authors to emphasize their appreciation for Turkish women’s wholesome attractiveness, claiming that this set them apart from Western women, who were paradoxically characterized either in reference to their excessive sexuality or, alternatively, their course modern masculinity. Though this approach flourished in the 1950s, it had its roots in an earlier

48 Zafer, January 19, 1957.
Kemalist appropriation of female beauty as a way of articulating national identity. 1936 society and lifestyle magazine, for example asked:

What eyes could prefer a Bavarian German woman, plodding along like a camel [deve gibi lap lap yürüyen] to that handsome Istanbul woman? Can the Viennese beauty who pronounces even her finest sounds gutterly speak as kindly as this Turkish maiden? Look at our beaches and look at the world’s beaches. Where in the world would the beautiful bodies sunning themselves on the Florya sands face any competition. And even if any of theirs were taller or more beautiful than any of ours, could they be better people than ours? More close to the soul [ruha yakın] than ours? As our own than ours? [bizimkiler kadar bizim olabilir mi?] 

The Turkish woman is identified as objectively superior to Europeans in the most superficial sense, while the author than goes on to praise her moral and spiritual qualities before also asserting that in a more transcendental way simply being Turkish makes her superior. The article also, by extension, makes men’s appreciation for the beauty of Turkish women a quintessential aspect of their patriotism.

The article then went on to associate the negative qualities of European women with their experience with excessive modernization: These women entered into a “new lifestyle” with “natural grace, elusive beauty and good-natured, sincere bearing” but the conditions of their new lives created “a completely new type of European woman.” By contrasting this transformation to the ability of Turkish women to maintain their positive qualities, the article highlights the role of nationalism in the preservation of national essence in the face of changes brought on by modernity. As will be seen below, the Kemalist approach to modernization and Westernization, seen here through a gendered lens, took pains to

---

49 A different magazine, with no apparent connection to the one of the same name discussed about. *Istanbul*, Issue 3, “Istanbul’s Modern Woman and Europe’s. [Istanbul’un Bugünkü Kadını ve Avrupadaki],” Nizameddin Nazir, 15 March 1936.

50 Ibid.
identify itself as remaining true to a Turkish “national and historical frame” rather than heedlessly abandoning this tradition in pursuit of radical, revolutionary imitation of the West. For example in a 1950s cartoon from the mainstream satirical weekly Akbaba [Figure 6], a woman, modestly but modernly-dressed in the polka-dotted dress, identified with the label “Turkish Woman,” says of a woman in a bikini and another in a full chador: “I’m ashamed of both of you!” The Turkish woman is identified as both modern, in relation to oriental or Islamic backwardness, but also as chaste and modest in relation to the excesses of European or American sexuality.

In addition to defining Turkish modernity through a discourse about the attributes of the nation’s women, Turkish magazines from the period also sought to articulate a form of nationalized modernity through male attitude towards women. Perhaps the most striking encapsulation of this approach came from the 1947 magazine Çapkin, meaning literally rake or womanizer [Figure 7]. In the first of what was intended as a regular feature, titled “From the Rake’s Binoculars” and signed “Baba Çapkin” or Papa Rake, the magazine’s editor explained that “in the old days women’s skinniness or fatness so dominated male taste that it was rare to find anyone who deviated from conventional standards.” He went on to give examples of how Sultan Ibrahim’s preference for heavy women created such a fad among high-ranking members of the court that “even in our fathers’ time they loved large lively women who they called “Ottomans.” Conversely King James I was so adamant in his preference for skinny women that his courtiers were forbidden from appearing in the company of women who were too large. As similar evidence of varied national taste, the author went on to say that the Chinese were rumored to be disgusted by

Çapkin, “From the Rake’s Binoculars: the matter of beautiful women” 28 February, 1947.
blond women but the Laps loved them. He then added, “What is to be understood from this is we are the most broad-minded nation. We are infatuated with beautiful women of all colors, sizes and features.” Concluding with remarkable earnestness, he wrote that the Turks had indeed turned rakishness into an art form.

The remarkable aspect of this introduction is that it completely transcends the use of female physical features to define Turkish identity and explicitly affirms that it is the Turkish man’s attitude towards these physical features that define his national character. The implication is that unlike the Ottomans, 17th century British, ancient Chinese or primitive Laps, modern Turkish men were sophisticated and cosmopolitan enough to appreciate all forms of female beauty. At a moment in time when modernity in Europe, America and the third world was increasingly described in terms of mobility, travel and internationalism,\(^{52}\) the Turkish çapkin proved his modernity by being familiar with and able to appreciate all the world’s women.

In examining popular Ottoman history, we will encounter the hero of Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi’s novel *Hayrettin Barbarosa is Coming [Heyrettin Barbarosa Geliyor]*.\(^{53}\) Tülbentçi’s Barbarossa travelled the Mediterranean drinking and carousing while serving Sultan Suleiman. He effortlessly seduced foreign women, Arab and European alike, all while saving them, and his country, from the evil schemes of the papacy. He was not too different, in other words, from a 16th century Ottoman James Bond, with the crucial difference that his enemy was not Communism but Western, Christian imperialism.

---


\(^{53}\) Tülbentçi, *Heyrettin Barbarosa is Coming*, (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitapevi, 2008).
The 1950 popular press promoted a vision of modernity that alongside many other influences, was deeply indebted to the same fantasy of conspicuous consumerism and even crasser sexism that many American readers embraced as a form of post-war cosmopolitan sophistication when they encountered it in, say, Ian Fleming’s novels. Yet this idea of modernity has largely disappeared from mainstream accounts of Turkey’s modernization. Despite some excellent work problematizing modernist rhetoric about the “liberation” of women, the gender politics of the 1950 have often proved too retrograde for contemporary liberals, and too indecent for contemporary Islamists. The following chapters seek to look beyond present-day narratives to understand mid-century modernization, and its contemporary legacy, on their own terms.

In conclusion, Turkey’s artistic genius, its physical location, the beauty of its women and the way its men stared at them all gave the country a position that transcended the border between East and West. According to intellectuals of the 1950s from diverse ideological backgrounds, this unique status offered Turkey the promise of cultural superiority and political power if the country embraced the possibilities provided by its rich heritage instead of rejecting them for a superficial imitation of the West. In contrasting their vision of Turkish modernity to a simplistic Western model, 1950s Turkish thinkers were no different from Kemalists in the 1930s or anti-Kemalist Islamists today. In the remaining chapters I hope to show the unique elements of their vision as well as the continuities with other visions that preceded and followed it.
Chapter 2. God is Modern: Popular Islam in a Democratic Era

After a century of Westernization, Turkey has undergone immense changes -- greater than any outside observer had thought possible. But the deepest Islamic roots of Turkish life and culture are still alive, and the ultimate identity of Turk and Muslim in Turkey is still unchallenged. The resurgence of Islam after a long interval responds to a profound national need. The occasional outburst of the tarikas, far more than the limited restoration of occial Islam, show how powerful are the forces stirring beneath the surface. The path that the revival will take is still not clear. If simple reaction has its way, much of the work of the last century will be undone, and Turkey will slip back into the darkness from which she so painfully emerged. But that is not the only way, nor the most probable. In Turkey, as in other Muslim countries, there are those who talk hopefully of achieving a synthesis of the best elements of West and East’. This is a vain hope – thevlach of civilizations in history does not usually culminate in a marriage of selected best elements – rather in a promiscuous co-habitation of good, bad, and indifferent alike. But a true revival of a religious faith on the level of modern thought and life is within the bounds of possibility. The Turkish people, bu the exercise of their practical common sense and powers of improvisation, may yet find a workable comprimse between Islam and modernism that will enable them, without conflict, to follow both their fathers’ path to freedom and progress and their grandfathers’ path to God.

So wrote Bernard Lewis, evaluating the state of religion in Turkey during the country’s first full year as a multi-party democracy. In what appears to be his first published reference to the “Clash of Civilizations,” Lewis was in fact suggesting that Turkey was on track to solving the matter for once and for all. Amidst the overlapping metaphors and outdated sexual politics, Lewis argues that while the “clash” of Eastern and Western civilization, and by extension faith and modern thought, will not result in a “synthesis” of their “best elements,” the “promiscuous cohabitation” that could stand in for this unworkable “marriage” may at least be a “workable compromise” and, crucially, one “without conflict.” In short, on a continuum between “clash” and “synthesis,” Lewis

seems to thinks the “probable” outcome of Turkey’s attempted mediation of Islam and modernism is something much closer to the latter.

This chapter argues that Lewis’s cautious optimism reflects a now-overlooked degree of consensus that existed at the time in Turkey and abroad about religion in mid-century Turkey. Viewing this era retroactively through the lens of present-day debates between “Islamists” and “secularists” prevents us from seeing the extent to which democratic debate and private print media collectively articulated lasting elements of “popular Islam.” Given a chance to express their views, individuals and intellectuals embraced some elements of Kemalist secularism and rejected others, shaping a unique vision for Turkish modernity that for many seemed entirely coherent. Crucial elements of this vision, I argue, endure today, present most obviously in the Islamic modernism of the AKP and the Glen movement. Other elements have been challenged by those with a more secular, more religious, or simply different view of what “popular Islam” and the social role of religion should be, but this should not prevent us from recognizing how many of Turkey’s contemporary debates take place within a long-standing consensus.

Recent scholarship has at times suggested that the Islamism of the Justice and Development Party represents the contemporary manifestation of a popular religiosity suppressed by the authoritarian modernization of the Kemalist regime. In doing so, they explicitly contrast this strand of “alternative modernity” emerging from the late Ottoman period with the teleology of Western modernity implicit in Kemalist historiography. This approach to Turkish politics and history relies on the idea of a “popular” Islamic

55 See the historiographical discussion at the outset of the previous chapter.
sentiment or practice in Turkey that Kemalist modernizers both repressed and ignored, but that subsequently found expression in grassroots resistance to Kemalism. Thus the triumph of the Democratic Party in 1950 was a first step toward the contemporary emergence of this repressed religious consensus.

Yet this argument is itself dangerously teleological, and also misrepresents the extent to which Kemalists or Western historians ever believed in the vision of modernity they are now said to embody. Taking the religious debates of the 1950s on their own terms forces us to confront the more troubling fact that many people writing at the time thought society had already moved past simplistic binaries pitting religion, particularly Islam, against modernity. If some of Turkey’s early Westernizers truly believed that “Islam and modern life could not be reconciled,” this was a minority view in post-war Turkey.56 Today, when we contrast “alternative,” “Islamic,” or “non-Western” visions of modernity to a crude form of outdated high-modernism, we are merely rediscovering an insight that already seemed obvious to many more than half a century ago. Reading the optimistic assessments of post-war scholars, it is hard not to look back with discouraged humility and ask what went wrong.

This chapter views the religious transformation that occurred in 1950s Turkey in their global and cold war contexts by examining the efforts of Turkish thinkers at the time to present their country’s ongoing or hoped-for religious revival in a global or cold war context. The majority of those advocating a greater role for religion in society at the time

positioned themselves not only as part of a domestic response to several decades of official secularism, but also as part of a much broader trend, a newfound sense of worldwide spirituality that also could be clearly seen in the Christian West. Religious thinkers – those who might later be seen as Kemalist and Islamist alike – attributed this spiritual rebirth to a range of factors, including World War Two, the Cold War, the Atomic Age, and recent scientific breakthroughs. More pointedly, though, many of these writers claimed they were responding to a growing disillusionment with positivism, humanism or other broad aspects of traditional Western modernism. “It is certain that Western civilization underwent a crisis in the 20th century” declared the magazine *Turkish Thought*:

> In our opinion this crisis has without a doubt completed [the era of Renaissance humanism] and brought it to a close. *Why without a doubt?* Because the crisis of Western civilization is a crisis that arose against the classic humanist understanding [and arose from] humanity’s awareness that its belief in and reliance on itself could not save it.⁵⁷

Against this surprisingly widespread assumption, it was easy for religious writers to claim that their promotion of faith was not “reaction” but rather a move towards an even more contemporary appreciation for the role of spirituality in the world. Indeed, by insisting they were responding to the same spiritual turmoil as the Christian West, they insisted Turkish society was sufficiently modern to experience the same crises of modernity as Europe and America. While often explicitly rejecting a model of religious reform rooted in Luther or the Protestant experience, they remained open to finding solutions to this crisis in the writing of post-War Christian thinkers, insisting that Turkey could emulate their recommendations in developing a more harmonious and modern

---

relationship with the Islamic faith. That is, the aspect of Western or Christian modernity these thinkers took the most interest in was not 16th century sectarian disputes but contemporary challenges emerging from what they saw as the recently-manifest inadequacy of early 20th century materialism.

Drawing on a range of religious publications from the late 1940s and 1950s, this chapter demonstrates the degree of consensus around particular elements of Islamic modernism during this period. By examining discourse alongside specific practices, such as the increasing consensus on the acceptability of translating the Quran, I hope to contribute to the efforts of scholars who are already “complicating” categories like “Islamist” all too regularly “invoked to describe the intellectual divisions” running through Turkish and Middle Eastern history.58

In order to appropriately place Turkey’s 1950s religious revival in its Cold War context we should begin by rethinking the relationship between the two. That is to say, for scholars writing today and at the time, increased religiosity often seemed like a necessary or sensible antidote to “Godless Communism.” Yet at the outset of the Cold War, some Turkish secularists were quick to reject this assumption, and even denounce it as dangerous. In parliamentary debates and the popular press, particularly during the late 1940s, many people expressed the fear that Communism and religious fundamentalism, the red and green menace respectively, were working hand in hand to destroy Turkey. Ultimately I argue that the Cold War conflict with Communism led Kemalists to try to

58 Recent works by Sukru Hanioglu such as Ataturk: an intellectual biography (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011) and A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c2008 ) provide some of the best evidence of this trend.
rearticulate their vision of secularism in terms of religious freedom rather than materialism, and increasingly try to spell out what a sincere version of “secular Islam” would look like in practice. But it is important to recognize this development both as an extension of a strain of Kemalist thought already present before the Cold War, and also as an alternative to the vision of those who argued that confronting Communism required the state to double down on its suppression of public religiosity.

The CHP stalwart Recep Peker, for example, was emphatic in rejecting any Cold War concessions to religious reaction. Delivering a speech before the Turkish parliament in response to a proposal for “teaching religion as an anecdote to Communism,” Peker claimed that religion was “too dangerous” and the “risk of exploitation” too high to take such a risk. Seizing on the idea of religion as an ‘antidote,’ Peker argued:\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{quote}
I would like to stress the fact that to look upon the setting up of a religious life to spread gradually beside communism as a measure of protecting our structure from this social poison, is more or less similar to believing that a deadly poison can be cured by another poison at least as deadly….
\end{quote}

Peker did not, however, restrict his arguments about religion to Islam. Like many others arguing about the role of Islam in mid-century Turkey, he freely invoked examples of Christianity in the West as relevant to the broader question of religion in society.

\begin{quote}
It is entirely incompatible with the facts of the present day to claim that a Moslem who is pious, and loyal to all spiritual principles, cannot be a communist, or that any religious creed can assure resistance to communism. Are not the Greeks of today pious orthodox Catholics? Yet look at the effect of communist movements in Greece today. Was not Spain, which only yesterday was the scene of great bloody adventures, a country influenced by the Church? Did this creed carry any
\end{quote}

definite worth as regards preventing communism ruining the country in many parts?

Peker then concluded by saying that Turkey stood on a plateau: “This plateau has precipices in front, behind, on its right and on its left. The one on our left is red, while the one on our right is the precipice of black and dark retrogression.” US embassy staff, reporting on the speech, focused less on the substance of Piker’s remarks than the pertinent fact that a once taboo topic had been debated in the assembly at all. And indeed it would soon become clear that this, rather than Peker’s objections, proved more indicative of the direction of Turkish opinion. In 1946 Peker suggested that the subject of religious education “should be brought up again” in the future but “not at a time when it might create the impression ‘that we are troubled by a lack of religious feeling and that our society suffers from this lack.’” As discussed in the rest of the chapter, the next decade would prove that the majority of Turkish voters, and even the majority of those in the CHP, disagreed with Peker. Many were in fact troubled by the lack of religious feeling and thought that the time to address it had already come. But if in hindsight Peker’s argument was clearly a rear-guard action against changing public opinion, at the time it never the less represented a prevalent strain of Kemalist thinking.

Alongside Peker’s endorsement of this view, one of the best indications of how deeply entrenched it was in the traditional Kemalist establishment comes from a secret report on the Communist menace conducted by the Turkish Secret Police and provided to the OSS

---

60 Ibid.
in 1945.\textsuperscript{61} Taking as its starting point the “obvious” fact that “Soviet Russia has coupled her destiny with the spreading of communism throughout the world” the report begins by arguing that “Soviet activity in the Near East presents a special problem because these nations are Moslem, and the Moslem religion is like that of the Jews in that it has somewhat of a socialist basis.” The only thing mitigating this concern, the report suggests, is the fact that “Until recently there have not been many people who have had an understanding of Mohammedanism and Communism at the same time.”\textsuperscript{62} After laying out this fundamental resonance between Islam and Communism, the report then goes on to discuss specific aspects of the Communist threat in terms that explicitly referenced the Kemalist language about religious reaction. Explaining the totalitarian ambitions of the Soviet government, for example, the report states “Those who have lived in Turkey during the period of the Red Sultan, Abdul Hamit, know this form of government very well.” More explicitly, youthful recruits to the communist cause are compared to dervishes, “monks of a Moslem Monastery” in the translator’s term.

In addition to appearing in top-secret reports, this view was prominent enough in public media discussions that it even served as the subject of cartoons. [Figure 8], from the front page of the November 20, 1947, edition of the “political humor magazine” \textit{Diken} [The Thorn], shows an individual dressed in the stereotypical costume of a religious reactionary from the time standing outside the gates of a heavily guarded fortress labeled Turkish Republic. In the caption, he is labeled “Communism” and says “I wonder if I can

\textsuperscript{61} RG 84 Foreign Service Posts of the Dept of State, Turkey, Ankara Embassy, General Records, 1943-1949, Box 92, October 9 1945, From John Megaw to Richard Gnade.

\textsuperscript{62} What’s more, “in the Arabic countries with their low standard of culture and in countries with a Persian tongue Soviet Russia has always been regarded as a European Nation.”
get in without revealing myself.” Indeed, this suggestion was sufficiently widely voiced that foreign observers picked up on it as well. Lewis, for example, wrote in 1951:

> How far the religious revival is in fact an insurance against Communism is a subject of some discussion. The accusation is often made, in secularist quarters, that the revival, at least on the level of popular, dervish religion, is inspired by Communist agitators.63

Moreover, these same observers found such accusations credible. Lewis continues:

> The Anatolian brotherhoods have in the past been no strangers to a form of primitive religious communism which clever propagandists might exploit for political ends. Developments in other Muslim countries show that Communism is not averse to collaborating with movements of mass fanaticism…64

Another assessment from Richard Robinson states that:

> Charges have been made that the Soviet Union is using reactionary Islam as a political weapon to create social unrest. The charge has yet to be documented publicly, but coincidental religious activity of this nature in Turkey, Iran and Pakistan – all apparently aimed at upsetting the status quo – at least arouses suspicion.65

In the early 1950s, it became clear that the majority of the Turkish people, as well as the Turkish government and many Americans, did indeed believe that religion, of the right sort at least, should be mobilized as an antidote to Communism. But this backdrop should make clear the extent to which this represented a conscious choice, motivated by a particular view of Islam, rather than an automatic or over-determined response to the outbreak of the Cold War.

---

63 Bernard Lewis “Islamic Revival in Turkey.”
64 Ibid.
In writing about religion in post-war Turkey, Turkish and foreign observers alike consistently noted a trend toward religious revival. While noting concerns about the danger of “religious reaction,” the majority agreed that this revival was a healthy and timely corrective to the perhaps necessary but nonetheless extreme strictness of early Kemalist secularism. Noting that with the passage of time many of the religious leaders who had been trained in the late Ottoman era were dying, Western scholars like Bernard Lewis, Richard Robinson, and Howard Reed concurred with their Turkish counterparts in suggesting that with a new emphasis on religious instruction, the state would in fact prevent reactionary forces from filling the void left by two decades of official neglect. Moreover, the work of Western scholars writing about Turkey’s Islamic revival during this period reinforced the efforts of Turkish writers to present trends as part of a broader religious revival that could be seen in Western societies as well. Like the US diplomats we will hear from in the final chapter, many Turkish writers agreed that Turkey’s participation in a global trend toward increased religiosity was part of a thoroughly modern response to the excesses of secular modernity across the Western world. In the words of Howard Reed:

For the time being, and probably for all time, conservative, reactionary Islam has not been able to assert itself decisively in Turkish politics. Most Turks want it this way. In the long run, this clear separation between the Turkish state and Islamic religion may encourage the evolution of more mature democratic government and a more profound spiritual development among secularized Turkish Muslims. In dealing with this problem of Islam in its new political and social life, Turkey is answering a crucial question of its modern history. In doing so, it may point a way for other Islamic countries and may contribute toward the creation of a new, vital Islam which can add substantially to its already great heritage and contributions to world culture.

---

66 Howard A. Reed Revival of Islam in Secular Turkey Middle East Journal Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer, 1954), pp. 267-282.
67 Ibid.
Describing Turkey’s religious revival in a 1954 article, Reed raised the hope of a “profound spiritual development” that would be fully consistent with secularism and, in its vitality, provide a model to the rest of the Islamic world. In doing so, he invoked the language of modernity and evolution in contrast to reaction, and of a “new” faith in contrast to a “conservative one.” Crucially, he identified modernization not with the victory of existing Kemalist secularism, but with the success of the religious revival underway. Reed believed this would happen in tandem with Turkey’s evolution into a mature democracy, reinforcing the idea that the culmination of Kemalist reforms will come when they transcend their authoritarian origins. And in his insistence that “[m]ost Turks” oppose “conservative, reactionary Islam” Reed justifies his belief that “popular Islam” is not incompatible with fully democratic secularism.

Later, Reed articulated this vision of synthesis with specific reference to the way Turkey’s new schools for training imams could help overcome the threat of religious reaction:

All the principals and teachers with whom I spoke assured me that they were aware of this and related problems, but confident that they would be solved in favor of producing a new type of rational, scientifically minded, informed Imam who can provide intelligent and devout leadership in the villages and towns of Turkey. They face a challenging opportunity for service and have made a creditable start. Fanaticism, reaction and the unscrupulous selfishness of ostensible spiritual leaders on the one hand, and disdain, or neglect of religion on the other, have their own powerful attractions for the devout, credulous yet ignorant majority of Turkish citizens,… But most Turks still trust in Allah and are eager to know more about Islam in new ways that the graduates of the Imam-Hatip Okullari may find to tell them.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ibid.
Here too, the secularist neglect of religion is presented as a problem on par with reaction, and the solution is to be found in a specifically modern form of religion taught by men who are both “intelligent” and “devout.” That is Reed shared the belief that the peasant’s traditional simplicity makes him susceptible to religious reaction, but he saw the solution not just in modernity but in a modern form of religion.

In a particularly striking but by no means atypical interpretation, Reed went further in suggesting that the villagers’ desire for such religious leaders, as well as their newfound ability to fulfill it, was itself evidence of the triumph of capitalist modernity:

In the villages the agricultural boom is revolutionizing rural economy and village life. Many villages which had no hoca or imam, or else acquiesced in an ignorant, frequently fanatical, and slothful imam usually emanating from the Eastern Black Sea region renowned for such Oflu imams, are now able to pay for better qualified religious leaders. The villagers are often aware of the pious frauds with have been inflicted upon them at times and are now demanding and getting better service of new, better educated, and more sincere imams. Many have told me that Islam will flourish now that people have a little economic margin and can live somewhat better than their erstwhile day-to-day struggle for survival. 69

As in US assessments of Turkish modernization that will be seen in the final chapter, the fundamental sound judgment of the Turkish people revealed itself in their desire for modernity – in this case a modern version of their faith – which economic progress would help them realize. Here, the conflation of “new,” “better educated” and “more sincere” as desired qualities in imams nicely captures a modernist vision that combines piety and rationality.

69 Ibid.
As other assessments of Turkish Islam in this period make clear, Lewis’s conclusions, as quoted at the start of the chapter, fit well with a tendency among Western scholars of the period towards viewing a religious revival as natural, and implicitly towards assuming, in keeping with trends in Western scholarship during the period, that modernity was perfectly compatible with religious piety. Western scholars from this period were often eager to challenge Turks and Americans alike whose views on modernization and secularization were too rigid. Arnold Toynbee, for example, declared after a 1949 visit to Turkey that he feared the country was “in danger of losing contact with its rich culture of the past.” Finding a way to “maintain contact and still move ahead” was one of Turkey’s most important challenges.70

Western observers who believed that the excesses of Kemalist secularism had deprived the Turkish population of a necessary religious element were in turn more inclined to imagine that the natural hunger of the Turkish population for more religion would lead to a revived spirituality rather than a fundamentalist backlash. This remained a story of modernization to the extent it assumed that even if society may have temporarily lost its faith in an initial flurry of positivist self confidence, the new faith that re-emerged following the subsequent crisis would be a much improved one. Thus Reed concluded his report on the reasons behind Turkey’s religious revival by citing “the frank, general recognition that too much time has gone by without enough attention to these matters,” leading to the conclusion that “it behooves individuals and the community to re-evaluate their spiritual heritage and rededicate themselves to an Islam which can and should properly demand more of their wholehearted allegiance.”

70 Quoted in Robinson, “The Lesson of Turkey,” 434.
It is striking that while many Western observers saw Turkey’s mid-century religious revival as completely in keeping with the mechanics of modernity, they failed to recognize that many Turks saw, and sought to present it, in the same way. Indeed, the limited recognition of any self-consciously modernist rhetoric in Muslim religious thought from the period is entirely condescending. Lewis, for example, comments on the inferiority complex that “induces learned Muslims to seize on chance remarks by one or other Westerner in praise of Islam and inflate their importance beyond all reason.”71 He goes on to note that while intellectuals in many Muslim countries “strive unnecessarily to justify their own civilization in Western terms” this tendency has “some novel variants in Turkey.” Reading religious magazines from the period, including several Lewis explicitly mentions, makes it clear this tendency most certainly existed. But it was never as central as the far more prominent methods of synthesizing religious revival with Western thought and modernist discourse that are the focus of this chapter.

Ironically, while there was a consensus around the need for a ‘revived’ and “modern” Islam, the word “reform” itself served as a point where many Turkish authors sought to differentiate themselves from what some saw as the “Christian” terms in which the issue had often been presented in Western and Kemalist discourse alike. Central to some present-day discussion is the idea that the Kemalist reform movement had “attempted to emplot [itself] on a path of historical evolution that took Europe as a model and considered the Protestant Reformation and its vernacularisation of the Bible exemplars of

71 Lewis, “Islamic Revival in Turkey,” 45.
religious reform.” By the 1950s, at least, even many of those who endorsed the substance of Kemalist “reforms” took issue with this emplotment.

In 1958, *Turkish Thought* asked a number of Turkish thinkers a question that had been the subject of considerable debate over the previous decade, and indeed previous century: Is Reform [Reform] Needed in Islam? An array of answers appeared over the course of two issues, each author getting a few pages for his views and a quick pen-and-ink sketch by way of introduction. What emerges most clearly from these answers is that many thinkers felt it would be most appropriate to conduct a serious debate about the nature of modern Islam without recourse to the word “reform.”

Ismail Hakkı Danışmand, whose historical novels about the conquest of Istanbul are discussed in Chapter 3, began with the most forceful articulation of a position held by several respondents:

[Reform] is neither necessary or needed. Because Islam, from the perspective of being the final and most perfect religion, can already make the necessary improvements [islahat] itself.

In Danışmand’s view, the concept of reform, specifically the use of the borrowed word “reform,” was inextricably linked to the Christian experience of the Protestant reformation. Inherent in Luther’s idea of reform, Danışmand explained, was the belief that the Catholic church had strayed from a correct or pure form of Christianity. But

---

74 The prize for most modest response certainly went to Professor Ahmed Ates, who wrote simply: “This is truly a serious issue. To say either yes or no one would truly have to be qualified in every sense…Considering all of this, I do not believe myself to be sufficiently qualified to speak on such a topic. I’m sorry.”
75 Ibid.
Islam, Danişmend maintained, had not been distorted enough to need such drastic measures applied to it. Explaining the inappropriateness of the parallel with reference to Islam’s superiority, Danişmend wrote:

The Quran is truly God’s word. If it were, like the Bible, an invented and adapted book, in that case reform could be a matter for discussion. As a result, in the Bible and Christianity, reform occurred.

Since the Quran was a much more perfect sort of book, there could be no talk of reforming it. Rhetorically, at least, Danişmend joined a number of other authors in trying to minimize the importance of the changes that were needed within Islam, seemingly in order to dispel any implication that the need for change represented a shortcoming of the faith. That any call for “reform” implied a fundamental inadequacy of Islam was perhaps best articulated by another contributor to the debate, Ali Fuat Başgil:

For almost fourteen centuries Islam, as shown and explained by the prophet, has endured without any changes. Neither in its creed or its operation has Islam become “deformed” [déformé] such that we can speak of reform [réforme].

Several other authors added to this critique by pointing out that the “reforms” of Martin Luther had in fact tended toward fundamentalism. Ziya Ülgen thought that it was this parallel that made talk of ‘reform” in Islam inappropriate. As he explained:

Reform – as it is seen in Islamic history – gives way to violent fundamentalism [taassuba]…. If reform unites religion and temporal power… it destroys secularism: it takes the form of Haricilik or Wahabbism.

Discursively, these authors were setting themselves against the approach that had characterized much Kemalist writing on Islam, which sought a more direct parallel with the Protestant experience. In this approach, Islam as it was understood in 20th century

---

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Turkey was indeed deeply flawed, in both practice and theology, and thus, like Catholicism at the time of Luther, needed to be purified. Yet even 1950s authors who continued to embrace this approach and endorsed the term “reform” nonetheless quite frequently couched their belief in the superiority of Islam. Many also insisted while the reform Islam needed may have been parallel to the reform Luther introduced in Christianity, Islam certainly did not have to borrow the idea of reform from Christianity. In fact, several authors argued, Islam’s history and doctrine were conducive to just the sort of reform the religion needed. Thus if Danışmend believed that Islam contained the seeds of its own “improvement” other authors were just as sure it contained the seeds of its own reform.

Ziya Ülgen – a scholar who became well known in the 1930s for his work on the history of Turkish thought – articulated the common ground underlying these semantic debates when he explained while for a number of reasons “reform” was the wrong word, “modernism” [modernism] would be perfectly appropriate. “Modernism, as it could accommodate secularism, could also accommodate the ideas of nationalism and contemporary civilization.” Just as cultural change, even of the sort that made Turkey more like the West, could be “modernization,” not “Westernization” Ülgen suggested that changes in Islamic practice, even those that made Islam more like Protestantism, need not be “reform.”

Beneath the debate over what term should apply to any changes that might be carried out, there was considerable consensus both about some of the ways Islam could be improved.

78 Ibid.
As will be seen, for example, many thinkers of the period found this dismissal of a Protestant model for Islamic reform perfectly compatible with supporting the translation of the Quran into Turkish or making frequent comparisons between the contemporary and historical Christian experience of modernity with the challenges facing Islam in Turkey.

Had a reader picked up a printed copy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ 1954 radio broadcasts, and, curious about the Ministry’s intellectual reference points, flipped through the index, they would have found an indicative overview.79 Appearing in alphabetical order between C and D, for example, were Cebrail [the angel Gabriel], Celalu’d-dini Devvani, Con Devenport [John Davenport], Dr. Conson [Dr Johnson], Cum’a Suresi, Darvin [Darwin], Darus Selam, Davud, Dekart [Descartes], and Duvmetu’l-Cendel. Darwin, readers learned on page 17, was a man who believed in God, and believed that the cosmos was created by him. Just further evidence of the fact that “the Cosmos itself testifies to God’s existence.”

Many of the Ministry’s radio addresses from this period featured Western scholars speaking on harmony of modernity and faith and sought to apply what they said in a Christian context to the subject of Islam in Turkey. It was an approach that had found its most energetic articulation several years earlier in the official writing of Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, the Minister of Religious Affairs under both the Inonu government and the Democrat Party (he served in the post from 1947 until his death in 1951). Akseki

provides one of the most concrete examples of the continuity in religious thought between these supposedly contrasting eras, and thus serves as a starting point for investigating how the Turkish state, in an official capacity, invoked American scientists, Christian theologians and Western critiques of materialism to promote the revival of Islamic piety in the post war era as part of a global phenomenon.

In December 1950, for example, Akseki submitted a report on “Religious Instruction and Institutions” to the new Democratic Party Prime Minister’s office. He began by explaining that “[f]rom now on, I assume that nations will feel more fully the need for religion [din ihtiyaci.. kendini daha ziyade hissettirecek] and every nation will occupy itself with this more seriously.”80 Before going on to deal with the question of training Imams and opening a religious faculty in Turkey, he provided evidence for his assumption:

Here let’s take America as an example. According to 1946 statistics there are today in America over 23 million Catholic and 77 million Protestant churchgoers. It can be said that in America this attachment to the church grows a little stronger each day. In 1935 there were 199,000 churches of the protestant sect with 55 million members but by 1945 it had grown to 253,000 churches with 73 million members. Which means that in ten years 54,000 churches were built and church membership rose 18 million. According to what was written in the January 5, 1947 issue of Time magazine, 550 million dollars has been appropriated for new Protestant churches to be built in 1947. All of this is clear proof of how America’s religious life is advancing with dazzling speed.81

While subsequent scholarship has had a great deal to say about the nature of the religious transformations that occurred in post-war America, Akseki reflected the prevailing view at the time among many intellectuals in Turkey and America, namely that this was a

81 Ibid.
period of spiritual renewal for the West. Lest it seem that American or other Western examples were invoked simply to protect religious revival in Turkey from accusations of fundamentalism, Akseki engagement with other Western thinkers shows a deeper desire to integrate Turkey’s social and religious experience into a wider understanding of 20th century history. Perhaps the most systematic evidence of this from the period appears in the Ministry of Religion’s 1950 book *Knowledge, Wisdom and Faith according to Scholars and Scientists of the Past Century*.  

The book is a collection of essays, translated into Turkish, in which Western scientists, historians, sociologists and psychologists argue for religion’s importance in human affairs. In prefacing the work in his introduction, Akseki takes the opportunity to present a history of Western thought in which the intellectual proponents of Godless materialism had always been challenged by intellectuals who recognized the value of spirituality. Akseki begins with the claim that “God and the religious idea” are among the “foundational ideas” that are “born alongside man himself.” His introductory essay then weaves together the work of diverse thinkers from the Islamic and Christian tradition alike in support of this argument, with a particular emphasis on the contemporary geopolitical moment:

As a great Western philosopher said, everything that we love, all of life’s sweetness and blessings, could disappear in an instant. The uncontrolled application of science, intelligence and industrial strength could bring ruin. Such things are possible. There is only one thing in this world that is not possible: to

---


84 Bir takım esas fikirler vardır ki bunlar insanın kendisiyle beraber doğar. İste Allah ve din fikrin de bunlardanrndır. Page, 1.
fully destroy the idea of devotion [tedeyyün], to remove faith from the heart and discard it. This cannot happen; faith, in spite of everything, will be eternal. This will constitute the clearest proof belying the shocking and perverse ideas of those blind and deaf materialists who cannot see beyond the tips of their own noses, who want to force the force human thought and belief into the realm of living mud.

Following this dramatic preface, Akseki moves on to discuss the “reasons for religion’s necessity.” Under this heading, he offers a lengthy three-page quote from “the French philosopher and famous theologian” Auguste Sabatier. Akseki offers Sabatier’s explanation of “why I am religious” as an overview of the nature of faith and power of religious instinct, with no specific mention of Christ or Christianity, leading Akseki to conclude that “religious feeling is eternal, natural and god given.” Shifting reference points, Akseki then begins quoting from the Quran to show that “from the day mankind understood himself” he turned to the prophets to give meaning to this primitive religious feeling.” But when mankind turned from the path shown and began to worship idols, it facilitated the development of superstitious religions.

The true target, for Akseki, is the modern incarnation of this degraded religiosity. He argues that the new form such idol-worship began to take in the 18th and 19th century was godlessness. “Wrapping itself in a veneer of science, godlessness increased in severity, spreading in all directions and infecting the enlightened classes like the Spanish flu.” Amidst repeated references to the plague-like spread of radical French atheism, Akseki highlights a number of philosophers such as Jules Simon who, “without fear,” bravely challenged this false belief. In citing European challenges to secularism, Akseki emphasizes the point that in time, materialism actually strengthened religious feeling
when it became clear to people that science could not solve everything. “William James expressed this well,” he says. While science gave us the telegraph, lighting, electricity and the cure for many diseases, religion brings people “tranquility of mind [sükunet-i ruh] and moral balance [muvazene-i ahlakiye],” which “for some people are a greater balm than science.” In contrast to those who would pit them against each other, “religion and science are two equally important keys for unlocking the secrets of the universe,” he concludes. Lest the reader was left in any doubt, Akseki adds, “These are the words of Europe’s greatest philosophers and scientists. They prove that the propaganda of “there is no room for religion in a scientific age” is merely empty words.”

Akseki is also attuned to the way such claims play out in social life. Europeans, with their long experience of godlessness, worried about effects of atheism on family life and society: “The tragedies that began with the First and Second World War still continue. Today, every person of sound mind does not hesitate to accept that the root cause of the destruction, of the black nightmare that has descended upon the world, is our loss of spirituality.” This provides an opportunity to discuss the revival of spirituality in America, as well as the appearance of similar movements in France and England. Then, as a final example of the power of faith, he points to the fact that Soviet Russia, which like revolutionary France tried to destroy God, “has once again sought to preserve its very existence by wrapping itself in religion in the aftermath of the second world war.” Thus in this political context, Akseki concludes, there could be no doubt that in light of the consequences of Godlessness it would be obvious to all open-minded people that a return to religion was necessary to restore international peace and brotherhood.
Finally, Akseki returns to the work he is prefacing. A collection of translated works by Western authors carries a “great importance” in showing the “return to faith” currently underway in the West:

Naturally some of these authors approach the subject of faith with a certain ‘bias,’ measuring it according to their own sometimes faulty or superstitious beliefs. If this is felt, it is important not to forget these writings pertain to Christianity and the superstitious shape Christianity has taken on.

With this in mind, Akseki explained, a second section had been added to the book with the works of famous Islamic philosophers. Indeed, he concludes, “we can say that in time as mankind considers their arguments with a clear mind, it will adopt Islam.”

The content of the diverse pieces that follow reflect a mid-century optimism about the compatibility, indeed the mutually reinforcing character of religion and modern science: “Religious Feeling Through the Lens of Experimental Psychology,” by Geneva University Professor Dr Th. Flourny, a five page summary of William James’s *Religious Experiences*, Dr. Alexis Carrel’s views on the psycho-physiological aspects of prayer, “Religion Through the Eyes of a Biologist, by Princeton University Professor Edward Grant Conklin, “Life After Death through the Lens of Physics” by Liverpool University Professor Oliver Lodge, Einstein on “The Intersection of Science and Religion” and “A Religious Approach that Will Ensure the Decency of Character” by Vladimir Chidionesco, a Professor at the University of Cluj, Romania.

While all appear to be translated faithfully, throughout the text, the translator offers a running commentary, reinforcing, elaborating or critiquing the authors’ claims from an
Islamic perspective. In many cases he simply provides a Hadith or Quranic verse that supports the author’s argument. The statement “All civilized nation’s religions are moral religions,” for example is followed by a footnote quoting a hadith in which Mohammad states “I was but sent to bring the completion of morality.” In other cases the translator acknowledges points of difference in a conciliatory manner. For example when the same author goes on to state that “intelligence is part of the unity of existence… part of God” the translator points out that “While Islam gives great importance to intelligence, it cannot accept that it is a part of the divine.” In another case, an author’s unduly dismissive reference to angels prompts the translator to note, “Islam’s views on angels are not of the sort that would be rejected by science.”

Taken together, these frequent annotations suggest the translator’s belief that while the difference between Islam and Christianity are real, and should be acknowledged, they are secondary to the shared aspects of human religious experience. Thus a footnote reminding readers that “according to the Quran, Allah taught bees their skills through revelation,” could be followed by another, in the same tone, noting that “According to the Quran, Jesus was neither killed nor crucified.”

85 Ibid, 128.
86 Ibid, 154.
87 Ibid, 164.
89 Ibid, 114.
90 Ibid, 205.
Akseki’s thought is of interest for his unique position as the representative of official state Islam under both the Inonu and Menderes government. And yet, by virtue of this fact, his approach could potentially represent a uniquely Kemalist attempt to justify religion on Western or scientific terms. To the contrary, though, what stands out is that Akseki’s eagerness to invoke the West’s return to faith, as well as Western scholars on the compatibility of science and religion, mirrors the approach of popular, privately published religious magazines, including some that would be thought of as more “Islamist” or, in the language of the time “reactionary.” Alongside the official publications of the Turkish Ministry of Religion, magazines and books put out by privately-run presses for popular and more devoted Islamist audiences reveal a strikingly similar discourse. Ultimately, the effort to position Turkey’s religious revival in keeping with a global trend extended to religious magazines with a wide reading audience and those with a more narrow, politically active Islamist audience.

İslam’ın Nuru, or The Light of Islam, was one of the magazines to most enthusiastically embrace a self-consciously scientific approach to Islam. Published beginning in 1951 by Ali Kemal Belviranlı, it was a self-proclaimed “Religious, Scientific, Moral and Literary Magazine” coming out monthly for the price of one lira an issue (six issues for 5.50 or a full year for 11). While it addressed political topics, its main focus was inspirational and devotional writing, meditations on faith and poetry, all intended for an educated audience but not necessarily one with extensive religious training.
From early on, the magazine highlighted its efforts to show the compatibility of Islam and science, as well as demonstrating how Western intellectual currents reinforced Islam. In laying out the magazine’s agenda in one of its first issue, the editors explained that “for every living thing, from mushrooms to people, adaptation [uyuma] is a necessity.” In this light, the magazine itself represented an attempt to adapt to the conditions of modern life as laid out by sociology and biology. The *Light of Islam*, the editors explained, “will work within the confines of science and promote Islam in accordance with science and in keeping with our national endeavor.”

And, as promised, scientific motifs and metaphors appeared inside regular devotional features. An article on moral degeneration and regeneration\(^{91}\) began by explaining that just like “microbes created in a laboratory can lose their ability to infect with the passage of time” people and animals can degenerate morally and physically if they don’t live in a “hygienic” and “natural” way. Alongside such passing references were features that, like Akseki’s work, enlisted Western intellectuals not in defense of Islam per se but faith more generally. For example, a piece titled “The Century’s Men of Science Are Religious,” ran alongside another called “Alert Westerners are Aware” [Uyanı̈ş Garblilerde Dikkat] which quoted the arguments that men like Kepler had used to demonstrate the existence of God. Other articles stressed the compatibility of Islam and scientific knowledge more explicitly. An article titled “Islam and Scientific Knowledge,” for example, began by stating that “The Islamic faith was undeniably founded on scientific knowledge [ilim]. Its first command begins [with the word] ‘read!’” As the article explains, Islam “gives value and importance to all branches of knowledge” and

\(^{91}\) *Islam’in Nuru*, Issue 4, page 36.
“[i]n the era when Muslims stayed true to this principle and valued knowledge and learning they spread the light of Islam throughout the world.”

In addition to sharing the scientific discourse found in Diyanet publications, writers in *The Light of Islam* also shared the desire to position the religious revival they were supporting as part of a global response to the shortcomings of modernity. In an article titled “Global Issues and Islam,” for example:

We are living in the Atomic Age. Today the world’s present accomplishments and tools have reached such a remarkable degree that humanity, the pinnacle of creation, is worthy of being called the conqueror of nature. In the last centuries several truths contained in the Quran which have not lost their meaning have become manifest. Natural forces, created by God in a holy manner, are daily yielding to man’s wit and will. Distances have shrunk and continents drawn near one another. Physics and chemistry’s positive discoveries have been given to man’s command. On every side technical marvels are seen, generally greeted with mute wonder, and later we grow accustomed to them and continue on with our lives…. But in the face of such material wealth and monuments to wealth we do not find ourselves or our world living in peace.92

The solution to this situation, needless to say, could be found in a return to faith.

But today humanity is not on the right path. It has fallen into a dangerous state where all those technical and material accomplishments could be erased in a single action… There are many who seek the cause of this. But we see the cause in two basic factors: Lack of faith [Imansızlık] and social injustice.93

Another mainstream reflection of this same discourse came in the magazine *Selamet*, or *Salvation*. In discussion the relationship between Islam and science, for example, several articles in the magazine focused on the golden age of Turkish and Muslim scientific achievement. Alongside pieces such as “Scientific Currents in the Umayyad and Abbasid Eras” and “One of the First Independent Universities in the World Was Founded in

---

92 Year 1, Issue 17, September 1952, p 28-29.
93 Ibid.
Istanbul in 1470” other features argued that if after a promising start the “positive sciences” had not been abandoned, “Ottoman-Turkish” scientific life would not stand so diminished alongside that of contemporary nations.”94

Salvation’s coverage also highlighted the global religious context in which Turkish Muslims sought to locate themselves. An article published after Gandhi’s death in 1948, for example, and subtitled “the Eastern World’s Great Loss,” began by describing Grande as one of “our century’s greatest and most distinctive figures:”

He was both a saint and a man of politics, and one of his life’s most noteworthy features was his combining and unifying religious life with political struggle. The source of his ideas for seeking personal perfection were diverse, not singular. Just as he took inspiration from within Hinduism, he also took from Islam, Christianity, and European authors like Tolstoy.95

That is, in addition to positioning Turkey’s experience in a global context, they went one step further in identifying with other non-Western figures, from non-Muslim religious traditions, who had themselves embodied a non-sectarian awareness of the global religious currents of the era. Which, in Gandhi’s case, conveniently corresponded with their own domestic agenda of promoting the integration of religion into politics.

A more direct comparison to the Dyane’s translation series discussed above comes from a book prepared by Salvation’s editor, Ömer Riza Doğrul. As the son in law of the famous poet Mehmet Akif Ersoy and a graduate of Al Azhar University, Doğrul had earned both praise and condemnation for his earlier involvement with translating the Quran into Turkish. In the early 1950s, he set out to translate, less controversially, Henry Link’s

94 Ibid, Issue 10, 1957
95 Selamet, 1948.
1936 work *A Return to Religion* [translated as *Dîne Dönüş*].

In the introduction, Doğrul praises the book for explaining the lifelong importance of teaching children religion. As a caveat, he explains that “of course the writer’s focus was on Christianity,” but the book was not by any means “Christian propaganda.” Rather it would “awaken religious spirit and religious desire” in the presumably Muslim reader. Of course, in light of the need to “explain the superiority of our own principles” Doğrul writes that “in addition to trying to translate faithfully, we have added notes” to that effect. The book would have been even better, he adds, if it had been written about Islam but “we hope psychology will take hold in this country, and people will see Islam accords even better with modern psychology” than Christianity. Doğrul’s footnotes serve as a running commentary on the superiority of Islam on modernist terms. When Link mentions historic tensions between science and Christianity, for example, Doğrul adds in a note that while this applies to Christianity, it is necessary to distinguish Islam because Islam “encouraged scientific discoveries in all fields… and commands Muslims to serve science.”

When Link offers tips for living a successful life based on the psychological traits Jesus exhibited, Doğrul noted “For us the best example in this regard is our Prophet Mohammad. We encourage our readers to learn about his life.”

Indeed, emphasizing Islam’s compatibility with science could easily be carried to the point of proving that Islam was actually more rational, modern or scientific than Christianity. In an article for *Dîn Tarihi Dünyası*, or *Religious History World*, titled “A Comparative Reflection On Islam” Semahaddin Cem explains that:

---

96 *Dîne Dönüş*. (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Kitabevi, 1949).
97 Ibid, 2.
98 Ibid, 83.
According to Islam, religious ignorance is no difference from civilizational [medeni] or scientific [ilmi] ignorance. Charles Mismer says “Christianity’s uninformed and Islam’s informed are the pious and faithful.” That is [in Islam] the imitation of faith and the investigation of faith are separate. But in Christianity imitation is faith and in Judaism it is largely the same. A literate Westerner would have his faith shaken encountering the discrepancies and irrational contradictions in his sacred books with this belief. Without being able to reach rational appraisement of investigative faith with his heart and spirit he would fall into rejection and profanity…. If he had not feared learning about Islam, he could have achieved scientific and investigative faith. Because they do not believe a prophet will appear between John and the “descent” of Jesus, they remain in endless profanity [kufur] and error [dalalet].

In short, the period’s prevailing Islamic modernist discourse allowed statements of synthesis and superiority to exist side-by-side, or often, as this example shows, cleverly intertwined.

It is impossible, absent more detailed evidence about circulation statistics, to evaluate which of these magazines were most popular, or, absent written responses from readers, truly understand how their treatment of faith and modernity was received. But the appearance of a similar discourse across a range of the best-known publications from the period nonetheless remains indicative of the fact that, to whatever extent “popular Islam” can be identified or discussed in this period, this was the approach that it took in positioning itself with regard to Western modernity. In the eyes of its promoters, Turkish Islam was, like Western Christianity, experiencing a revival prompted by its society’s belated recognition of the limits of secularism.

It seems appropriate, however, to also include several examples of this widespread discourse from sources that both then and today would have been seen as unabashedly

---

Islamist. Our first comes from Ibrahim Kafesoğlu, a conservative thinker famous as a founder of the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis.” Kafesoğlu’s subsequent role in the articulation of modern Islamist political thought helps underscore its formative and enduring influence.

With Pascal, Einstein and other geniuses we can see their rationality coexisting perfectly well with religion and mysticism [mistiklik]. Has religion disappeared or been eliminated in America or Europe, which have reached the highest point of science and technology? Only Communist Russia has made religion an enemy in the name of science and technology…. What destroyed us was not, as is thought, religion. Rather along with the shift of the world’s economic mihver and the destruction of its civilizational centers, our collective civilizational level and religious level declined. The examples of Europe and America show that, along with the development of civilization, religious thought and feeling also develop. This does not hinder scientific and technological progress. If anything, they fill the void these things leave in the human heart with a sublime feeling.100

While it would become clear, in time, that thinkers like Kafesoğlu focused far more on faith than science and technology, the fundamental belief in their compatibility remained central to Turkish Islamist thought up through the present.

Having begun with the official rhetoric of the Ministry of Religion, let us finally look at the way Serden Geçti, an Islamist publication whose editor was repeatedly arrested during the 1950s, employed a similar modernist discourse. It is precisely because Serden Geçti – the name refers to the designation of Ottoman soldiers supposedly resigned to martyrdom – existed beyond the scope of “popular” religiosity that these points of discursive convergence stand out. In short, even those who positioned themselves at the more radical end of the anti-Kemalist spectrum remained committed a thoroughly “modern” form of their faith compatible with Western ideas of secularism.

In an early issue, *Serden Geçti* editor Osman Yüksel identified modernization in the abstract as one of the redeeming elements of Kemalism.

One of the most important successes of the Turkish revolution was to bring an affirmative, dynamic, deterministic worldview, understanding of life to replace the east’s static, fatalist worldview... Asia was the land of a thousand and one nights, Europe the land of Robinson Crusoe. According to one prosperity [saadet] comes from chance and the whims of mysterious forces, according to the other men seize it with their own effort. After defeating the nation’s enemies, Mustafa Kemal began a relentless war against the Asian mentality and ideas behind this kind of mysterious chance and fatalism.101

In his subsequent critique, he goes on to attack contemporary Turkish culture for having failed to live up to the modernist promise of the Kemalist revolution.

Everything changed. Just one thing didn’t. The mentality. Before long the old eastern laziness and impassivity [vurдум duymazlığı] showed itself again. Cafes replaced dervish lodges. Hizir Aleyhisselam’s102 spot was taken by lotteries, horse races and poker tables. Green tombs, closed; blue ticket offices, open.... To be contemporary or reactionary is a matter of choice... haven’t you seen the lifting her child from the cradle then rushing off to buy a lottery ticket for him saying “maybe something will come of it?”103

“Only the words changed,” he concluded, as “old fashioned” words for fate and destiny like “Mukadderat,” “alin yazılışı” and “kader” gave way to new ones like sans [chance] and sürpriz [surprise].104

This fit well with a large critique that *Serden Geçti* would go on to articulate throughout much of its commentary, that in their hyper-westernization contemporary Kemalists had failed to grasp the true meaning of West:

---

101 “Değişmeyen Zihniyet,” Year 1, Issue 1, 27 April 1947, p 5.
102 A popular saint whose intercession was often sought by those looking for wealth or success.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
The west is not only a world where every misdeed is permitted during carnival, where Mambo maniacs stop passers-by on the streets and youth frothing at the mouth with rock and roll epilepsy stomp about. In the West at the same time Wagner, Mozart, Beethoven and Schumann’s kingdom of sound, Goethe, Hugo, and Schiller’s literary kingdom commands millions…. The West at the same time is a land of universities, museums, books, working factories, thinking minds and sweat-covered brows.  

As a result misunderstanding, modern Turkey had failed in its efforts to Westernize:

For centuries no matter how many cylindrical hats blue fox-fur garments or brand new cars we’ve imported we have never made it to civilization. The reason is our greedy desire to pluck the fruit without any effort. As long as our understanding of the West remains flawed we will never get one step closer to it….  

As with the other religious magazines of the period, Serden Geçti positioned itself as supporting a fundamental compatibility between modernity and faith that was rooted in a more accurate understanding of the Western experience. In this effort, Serden Geçti relied heavily on the example of the United States. In an article entitled “Americans Are More Muslim Than We Are,” for example:

Turkey did not send any men of religion to accompany troops going to Korea. The Americans asked us “Do you not have a religion? Where are your men of God. We are here in Korea fighting against the Godless.”  

Then, in “Priests in America and Men of Religion Here” the author discusses the complete freedom and overwhelming respect enjoyed by leaders of all faiths in America, as well as examples of them taking firm stands against all sorts of social immorality. At times, he seems to offer a slightly exaggerated vision of America in making his point:

Teachers in secular America work together to explain Christianity and Jesus’s life…. In America, considered the cradle of religious freedom, everyone expects from others a compulsory [cebri] respect for their faith, and on holy days would

---

106 Ibid.
even intervene if someone from another faith took the opportunity to play the piano in their own private apartment.\textsuperscript{108}

The article continues, explaining that in America parents begin religious instruction for their children at age for our five, priests give sermons on the television and radio, and every family baptizes their kids without even thinking about the matter of germs.

The essence of the \textit{Serden Geçi\'s} critique, then, revolves around the fact that instead of appreciating and appropriating the essence of European and American modernity, itself fully compatible with religion, Turkey has instead fallen victim to the worst sort of cultural imperialism. Thus the magazine’s true critique of Westernization is on explicitly nationalist, not religious grounds.\textsuperscript{109}

We lagged behind, we have to become more European, for these reasons we were going to take science, technology and procedures from Europe. Because these had not nation or nationality. They were the property of all mankind. The doors we closed tightly against political occupiers we opened wide to spiritual imperialism (manevi emperyalistlere) and cultural colonialists [kültür istismarcılar]…. We were shocked, moved, beside ourselves. Just as in the past we bowed before Arabs from the desert today we bow in the same way before every plain thing that comes from Europe.\textsuperscript{110}

Focusing on America, he goes on to complain that when Wendel Wilkie visited Turkey he reports spending a wonderful evening at a reception in Ankara “dancing to American music, drinking English whiskey and eating Russian Caviar.” “Why don’t we honor a guest the way we would a Turk with Turkish food?” he then asks.\textsuperscript{111} In a striking parallel

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{109} At times of course the two are conflated, for example when he indignantly declares: “We aren’t a nation living in Africa or the pacific islands who see their first white men in the firm of some Christian missionaries…”
\textsuperscript{110} Manevi Emperyalizm, year 1, Issue 3, September 1947, p 3.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
to the writing of Bülent Ecevit, which we will examine in subsequent chapters, *Serden Geçti* ultimately articulated a critique of Turkey’s relationship with America rooted in cultural nationalism rather than religion or politics:

We have never been against Turkish – American political friendship. We understand the present state of the world. Turkish-American friendship and military cooperation is necessary for our freedom and survival in these circumstances. But this friendship should remain in the political and military, even economic realm. Our criticism is not of guns but of tricks, not of dollars but of bridles. [silaha değil, kulağadır. Dolara değil yularadır]. Our relations must be pursued with equal rights and equal conditions. We Turks are strange people. We become friends with someone and suddenly we curse, deny and abandon ourselves. We disappear. We allow our friends into our most private places and surrender everything to them...

Turkey’s mistake, in essence, had been in appropriating Western materialism rather than Western spirituality.

In addition to considering how the religious press positioned itself discursively in relation to popular culture and modernity, we should also consider stylistic elements as well. Specifically, in looking at the nature of “popular” Islam in the 1950s it is striking to see the efforts that many religious magazines of the time took to make their religious message “popular.” Indeed, as the editors of the *Light of Islam* explained, the press, “like mushrooms and other living things,” had to adapt in order to thrive.

Most superficially, these magazines often relied on the same visual and stylistic repertoire that defined the popular non-religious press at the turn of the century. The content of these magazines was generally presented through one or two page articles or recurring features, often headed with elaborately written, sometimes illustrated banners,

---

112 Ibid.
as in the image above. Arabic calligraphy also served to add a visual component, and sometimes color, to the page while introducing a line of scripture for elaboration or discussion.

*Religious History World* was perhaps the most clearly inspired by the non-religious press. [Figure 9] It featured illustrated covers with historic scenes – usually buildings but sometimes people or historical scenes. It also seems to have relied most heavily on advertising, with ads for watches, shoes, electric supplies and a country living magazine filling its pages. Like many of the popular history magazines we will explore in future chapters, it relied heavily on sensationalism as well, with pieces on inquisition tortures or “the pirate priest” serving to denigrate Christianity and maintain reader interest at the same time.\(^{113}\)

*Light of Islam*, in turn, was perhaps more typical in offering a uniquely religious take on many of the elements that made the popular press popular. The magazine’s covers featured pictures of Istanbul’s mosques framed by elaborate and colorful floral décor. The editors offered instructions for removing the covers, explaining that they could be “hung in a home or office, set under glass in frame whose light color would offset the blues of the image.”\(^{114}\) As the editors explained, “the houses and museums of wealthy Americans and Europeans were full” of this style of Islamic design. There was “no equal to our national artistic talent anywhere in the world” while the photographs gracing the

\(^{113}\) Volume 2, page 16.

\(^{114}\) *Islam’in Nuru*, Issue 1, page 43.
magazines covers were taken specially for The Light of Islam and would not be published anywhere else.

*Serden Geçti*, meanwhile, had a plainer and more somber aesthetic, in keeping perhaps, with that of other self-consciously serious or political publications in the non-religious realm. [Figure 10] Like some other political magazines, though, it devoted a feature called “Our Humor Page” to brief, paragraph-long jokes and anecdotes making fun of rival publications, editors and politicians. In one, for example, a man tells another that Hasan Ali Yücel, the Minister of Education under Ismet Inonu, had once been a member of the Mevlevi order. Comparing Yücel’s perceived lack of integrity and susceptibility to political pressure with the Mevlevi’s tradition of whirling dervishes, the other man responds “Yes and he still really knows how to turn.”115

But perhaps the one feature of religious magazines from the late 1940s and early 1950s that more than any other combined their populist, modernist and pious elements was Hajj travelogues. In 1947 Turkish citizens were, for the first time, given official permission to go on the Hajj after a two-decade hiatus. The excitement of many who had long been pushing for this change was reflected in a series that appeared in several religious magazines over the next several years recording the first-hand experiences of individual pilgrims.

The magazine *Doğru Yol*, [True Path], for example, introduced each installment of their series, titled ‘Hajj Memories,” with the image above [Figure 11] showing cars and planes

---

115 Year 1, Issue 2, May 1947.
racing through the dessert toward the Kaaba. The series was written by A. Saynaç, who presented his trip in a manner reflecting the genre of travel literature that had become a staple of newspaper reports from the era:

The hour is one… our ferry is slowly rounding the point at Sarayburnu and entering the sea of Marmara. The weather is calm, clear. A gentle breeze is caressing [okşamak] the surface of the sea. Istanbul is more beautiful than ever. The waters of the Bosporus are even bluer, more sparkling… We’re on the front deck. Soon we will bid farewell to Istanbul and its white minarets and go below to stow our baggage and our cameras.

As the Saynaç goes on to recount his stops in Izmir, then Athens, he continues in language similar to that which accompanies the opening phases of other newspaper correspondents’ trips to Paris or New York. Even the specifically religious aspects of the journey get incorporated into the travelogue style:

Apparently, our boat had shifted course before Madill and in the morning we say our prayers facing in the wrong direction. We correct ourselves. In the night we must have passed Gallipoli. The weather is a bit windy.

Athens is hotter than Izmir. “What big water glasses they have here. We buy postcards from in front of the post office.” Saynaç’s companions are tired and want to go back to the boat, but Saynaç is eager to explore the city’s history. A man selling pears thinks Saynaç is English, then seeing his beret guesses French. Discovering the truth, he shakes his hand and greets him in Turkish. He had come from Turkey in the population exchange. Reaching the top of the acropolis, Saynaç marvels at the birds eye view of Athens. He runs into two Turks from Athens he’d met that morning. Realizing they haven’t said their noon prayers, the pray in the shade of the one of the Parthenon’s

---

117 *Doğru Yol,* Year 1, Issue 22, December 1947.
118 Ibid,
standing columns. Then as “[t]he wide shadows of the columns spread across” the ruins they realized “its time to return to the boat.”

That these Hajj narratives drew so heavily on the language of midcentury tourist memoir is not necessarily surprising. There was, indeed, a long history of Hajj accounts that blended travel writing and religious experience. Yet there are also numerous facets of these travelogues that consciously frame the traveller and his travels in modern terms. In addition to detailing the religious aspects of the trip, narrators could use accounts as an opportunity to display their modernity, and often that of their country as well. The author of *Light of Islam*’s “Hajj Memories” feature, for example, was a parliamentarian and bacteriologist named Talat Vafsi Öz. Öz starts his journey on a more reflective note, comparing the sadness he felt saying farewell to his family at the Erzerum airport with the joy he felt meeting them there several months earlier when they returned from a trip to Sweden and Denmark. But as soon as he is in the air, Öz takes only a minute to glance out the window before he begins comparing the experience of flying on a Lebanese airline to his previous experiences on Scandinavian planes. “I was immediately struck by the great difference… The ventilation was not good at all. There was no in-flight service and the plane reeked of fuel. The leather seats didn’t even have seat covers.” Then, seeing the tattered and varied garments worn by his fellow travellers he lamented that “within the borders of our grand and sacred homeland we had not yet established a uniformity of dress.” The low quality of their baggage and belongings also

---

119 Ibid.
120 An internet search reveals no record of Öz’s devotional or travel writing, but provides several links to his work on the endotoxin Tularemia.
“gnawed at his insides like a worm.” If nothing else, he was “confident they all could at least have obtained a proper suitcase” for a journey abroad. Then, looking out the window again, he began discussing the mineral wealth of the country spread out below. In addition to the potash and sodium hydroxide factories already in existence, there was the possibility of finding oil beneath Anatolia’s salt flats. His friend Dr. Aschner, at least, had argued as much….

Later, Öz marveled at the scenery of the Taurus mountains: “the many colors seeming to compete with each other… the peaks adorned with deep green forests that kissed the clouds.”\(^{122}\) It was, if nothing else, a welcome respite from the passenger in front of him “who was wiping his nose with his hand, then wiping his hand on his pants.” Unfortunately, reaching the Mediterranean they were “caught up in sea of clouds.”

As always happens in these situations, the airplane began to shake like a malarial patient. But neither the steward nor the pilot gave us any warning. I wonder if my poor fellow passengers were even aware of the inconsiderate treatment they had received. In every previous airplane journey I’ve made, passengers are given regular updates about the conditions inside and outside the plane… Was this, I wonder, a sign of our travelling east?\(^{123}\)

For Öz, a journey into the Arab world, even one undertaken for religious purposes, became an opportunity to evaluate Turkey’s modernity and indulge in anti-Arab prejudice.\(^{124}\)

\(^{122}\) Ibid.
\(^{123}\) Ibid.
\(^{124}\) As will be seen, this language was reminiscent of Bekir Tunay, a Turkish diplomat who, when travelling to his post in Baghdad could not help but remark on the squalor he saw around him.
Calling home from his first stop in Beirut, Öz discovered his family had just arrived home from seeing him off at the airport and remarked “How modern [medeni] transportation has shortened travel.” It was a sentiment that would be repeated in different forms throughout the trip. After checking into his hotel, Öz, like Saynaç in Athens, commented on his childlike desire to see the city before rushing out to explore.

I stopped in front of the fruit sellers, with their great stacks of bananas, oranges, mandalinas and fresh dates, and I bought myself some fruit. In Beirut it's possible to meet a Turkish speaker at every step so there was no difficulty on that count. It is a rich and active city with good shopping [bol alışveriș]. In Beirut, a city where people of all religions and nations are assembled, it is impossible to be bored. There are many vehicles. Cars line up behind one another. And then the tramways and buses enter the scene, truly congesting the city. Among the aspects of the impatient [tez canlı] and hard-working [çalışkan] Arabs that most struck me was their irritable [hirçın] and talkative [geveze] nature. I guess in Egypt this temperament is even more developed. I remember the people there bickering at every step.

Trying to change money leads Öz to comment further on the nature of Arab businessmen, but also on the Turkish government’s faulty economic decisions, which he blames for reducing the strength of the Turkish lira. Nonetheless, Beirut’s modernity impresses him, and he comments on the broad avenues and new villas along the water. Lebanon’s shoreline also compares favorably to Scandinavia and the Baltic countries, which leads to a lengthy digression on the wonder and majesty of God, who created such beauty in the world.

When they were told their departure form Beirut would be delayed till the following morning, Öz took it as an unexpected opportunity to spend more time in the city:

---

125 *Islam’in Nuru*, Issue 4, August 1, 1951 p. 27-29.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
Shouldn’t mature individuals… accept unexpected events? Our forefathers gave this such a good name: *kismet*. People are so impatient. We just left Ankara yesterday. Tomorrow by noon we’ll be in Jeddah. Could there be a faster Hajj than this? This claim could be justly criticized. It is possible to leave Ankara and after a brief stop in Beirut be in Jeddah the same day. Yes, but should we not remember those who endured all the travails of this simple journey over the course of months? We had such a good time that day… We wandered around. We saw old friends, visited mosques, and sampled Lebanon’s many foods.\(^{128}\)

At a time when US observers were discussing the Turkish peasant’s enduring belief in *kismet* as a sign of their traditional and pre-modern fatalism, Öz was already romanticizing it as the legacy of a bygone era before Turks had been swept up by the pace of modern life. By lamenting the fact that impatience prevented the modern traveller from appreciating the pleasures of travelling, Öz, consciously or not, was giving voice to the most “modern” elements of contemporary European and American travel writing.

Öz’s narrative became more explicitly religious after the travellers entered sacred space in Saudi Arabia.\(^{129}\) Throughout the rest of the journey, Öz interspersed his reflections on his religious experience with what could be read as moments of explicitly modernist framing. At the pilot’s instruction, Öz and his fellow passengers don their ihram in the air at the appropriate point when approaching Jeddah. Öz described how moving the it is to see the pilgrims perform this sacred act together mid-flight, one of the several occasions he comments on the specific role of technology in his experience of the pilgrimage. In one installment, for example, Öz said he felt the need to pause in his narrative and explain the organizational triumph that the Hajj represents:

> Everyone knew their duty, orders were carried out to the letter, and no thought was given to personal or subjective opinions or concerns. We were dealing with a


planned operation…. In the end one of the points I admired most was the organization of countless vehicles and travellers without mishap. I didn’t encounter a single accident. While of course there may have been incidents we did not learn about…

Hajj narratives like those of Öz and Saynaç offered readers an image of Turkish pilgrims as sophisticated and indefatigable travellers, off to Sweden one year and Mecca the next. These were men who could both be brought to tears by their love of God but also critique the poor service of Lebanese airlines while waxing eloquent about the charms of their splendid homeland.

If there were trends in the way mainstream Turkish discussions of Islam positioned themselves rhetorically in reference to the West, technology and modernity, it is also important to consider what, if any, were the non-rhetorical consequences of these trends. One of the most concrete changes to emerge from the rhetoric of Islamic reform and revival in the 1950s was a new consensus on the appropriateness of translating the Quran into Turkish.

Today, Turkish citizens and historians alike have come to see the Turkish call to prayer, abolished in 1950, as an example of Kemalist overreach. Yet at the same time the once equally controversial idea of reading the Quran in Turkish is taken for granted by many an essential part of their religion. While insisting that Turkish language books represent a “translation of the meaning of the Quran” rather than a translation of the book itself, even the most conservative Turkish Islamists do not object to the existence of these texts, for use by those who have not had the opportunity to learn Arabic. As discussed in Brett

Wilson’s *Translating the Quran in the Age of Nationalism*, the achievement of this consensus “is remarkable given that, at the dawn of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Muslim scholars considered Qur’an translations to be impossible, impermissible and even impious.” Against this backdrop, I argue that in almost unanimously supporting Turkish translations of the Quran during the 1950s, Turkey’s private religious press helped solidify a crucial element of popular Islam that endures to this day.

As Wilson explains, unlike other more controversial Kemalist reforms, from its inception in the Ottoman period, the idea of a “Turkish Quran” “actually responded to the concerns of devout intellectuals to produce a dignified, accurate translation.” Yet despite this, the privately produced translations that appeared in the early years of the Republic were met with widespread criticism and dismay. The criticism was not directed against the idea of a translation, but against the poor quality of the translations themselves. In response, the state took it upon itself to organize an official translation. On textual terms the results were considered to be of higher quality, but the success was undermined when Ataturk seemed eager to have the new translation replace Arabic in oral readings in the country’s mosques. While many supported the idea of a translation that could be read by literate believers, few wanted Turkish to assume a dominant role in religious ritual. As a result, while the idea of a translated Quran had already been accepted, the implementation of this idea remained mired in controversy throughout the Republican period.

---

132 Ibid.
The debates of the 1950s, by contrast, were shaped by the fact that the Quran was already being translated, and these translations were already selling. There was no longer any talk of replacing the Arabic Quran in rituals by government diktat. Instead, as will be seen, religious publications were calling for the state to take a more active role in policing the spread of unlicensed translations. In this regard, one of the most striking critiques came from True Path, whose explanations for why it was appropriate to translate the Quran were secondary to their ongoing criticism of the government for failing to ensure translations were printed with sufficient accuracy and care. The editors argued that “to go along explaining it is impermissible to print the Quran with Turkish letters is to refuse to recognize the legitimate rights of those millions of people deprived of the blessing and opportunity to read the Quran in Arabic.”

Likewise, the paper pointed out that in the past in Turkey sermons had been delivered in Arabic, a practice that resulted in Turks who didn’t know Arabic “being addressed in a language they did not and would not understand.” In some cases, the paper defended traditional practices, but in doing so sought to offer practical reasons for them. Refusing to countenance the trend toward performing prayers bare-headed, for example, the editors approvingly cited the argument that this was symbolically disrespectful to god: just as one would not appear in the presence of a superior without cleaning your body and head and arranging your attire, this should not be done with God. Too many bare heads, they added, also made mosques smell. But an insistence on Arabic sermons, like an insistence on Arabic Qurans, lacked such logic. Instead it was a regrettable example of conservatives “binding the future to the past.”

---

133 Year 1, Issue 8, September 5, 1947.
134 Ibid.
Of far more concern to the editors than the question of whether the Quran should be translated though was how it should be translated. Pointing out that in the past the government checked Qurans for accuracy, the True Path editors called on the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to do the same for Qurans printed in Turkish letters. Specifically, the editors took great offense to the “made up letters orthographic marks” appearing in unsupervised translations on sale: “Printing the Quran cannot be left to the whims of nature like an ordinary book.” [tabiinin keyfine bırakılmaz]

Describing the current flood of freely printed Turkish Qurans, the editors declared: “Are they wrong? Right? Are there missing letters? Words? Or entire verses? Or not? No one stops to ask.”

Wilson writes that the early Republican translation efforts were motivated by the belief that “translation does not involve interpretation and that [the translator’s] task is to seamlessly transfer information from one language to another.”

By the 1950s, however, critics of Quranic translations were already themselves this assumption on modernist grounds, citing what Wilson calls the “contemporary axiom that every translation is an interpretation.” Writing in Turkish Thought, for example Ibnutayyar Semsedin Cem criticized the idea of translating the Quran in terms that combined long-standing religious concerns with language that was already emerging in Western critiques of modernity.

---

135 Ibid.
137 “Kuranın Tam Tercümesi Meselesi,” 15 April, Issue 25, Turkish Thought.
asserting the superiority of their own translations, arguing they display an even greater arrogance than those who translate Western literature.

When a poem of piece of literature is translated into a foreign language it always loses, either partially or completely, its essential meaning and feeling. For this reason many individuals, in order to read the original of a great work learn the language. The works of great names like Goethe, Baudelaire, Sadi, Khayyam, Mevlana or Cami possess such deep prestige.\(^{138}\)

Cem goes on to argue that the language of the Quran was never “the Arabic language” but rather the “Language of God [allahca], and it was racism [ırkçılık] that motivated efforts to translate it into Turkish. While translation might be appropriate for the Bible or Jewish books that lacked an original, it could never be appropriate for the Quran, he explained, adding for good measure that the whole idea started with Luther, who was a Jew. Thus rather than trying to translate the Quran, he concluded: “we should nurse learning in our students without looking to east and west, teach them their religious language alongside western languages.”

Yet while these debates continued, the popular religious press was pushing the matter beyond the realm of debate entirely. Many publications were already printing translated passages as a regular feature in their pages. The *Light of Islam*, for example, in addition to promising Arabic lessons for children, offered two pages of Quranic verses, translated and explained, at the beginning of every issue. *Salvation* also included a regular feature called Inspiration from the Quran with translated Quranic passages, and, in response to a reader’s enquiry, recommended a translation of the Quran entitled “God’s Command.”

\(^{138}\) Ibid.
The debate over translating the Quran also offers a striking example of the common ground that emerged during this period between supporters of a more conservative religious revival and a group of thinkers who were, for their own ideological reasons, seeking a form of faith that was at once Kemalist and genuinely pious. That is, some of the most enduring trends of the era emerged from a consensus between the forefathers of today’s Islamists and those who were genuinely trying to articulate a form of thoroughly Kemalist Islam.

There was, of course, nothing new about Turkey’s most zealous secular reformers claiming to be advocates of a true or purified Islam. An early example from İnönü, quoted in relation to subsequent debates, came from a May 5, 1925 address in which the Pasha explained “Ten years hence, the whole world, and those who are now hostile to us or who, in the name of religion, are anxious because of our policy, will observe that the cleanest, purest and truest form of Islam will flourish in our midst. (Prolonged applause).”  

Indeed, twenty years hence, Turkish officials remained sufficiently confident in this sentiment that they felt comfortable lecturing the Saudi Ambassador on the similarities between Kemalist reforms and Wahabbism:

Parallel with Turkey’s social decline, religious scholars descended into indifference and ignorance, truth gave way to superstition, and a set of ignorant individuals inserted themselves between the individual and god. As a result, tarikats and a coteries of saints [evliya] were popular, and so Atatürk, just like Saudi Arabia, felt the need to eliminate their lodges and tombs. Atatürk in one move separated religion from worldly affairs. After a generation passed religious

---

139 Reed, “Revival of Islam,” 270.
classes were instituted in primary schools and a Theology Faculty was opened that would provide training suitable to true faith [hakikati diniye].

Moreover, in this case the speaker, Şükrü Akkaya, reported the ambassador was “remarkably pleased” with his explanations. In the 1946 speech quoted above, Recep Peker too voiced his commitment to this official view of Kemalist faith:

For one thing it is a self evident fact that the conception of religion in Turkey has reached the highest peak of sublimity, so much so as to leave no room to look with envy upon the conditions in any other place on earth. Religion has assumed its noblest meaning in Turkey. Religion in Turkey has been cleaned of its character destructive to society, as is still the situation in many places; It has been rendered harmless to society; it is no longer an instrument for low worldly interests, and it has taken its sublime and heavenly place. A citizen's own conscience, his faith and his creed have reached a most sacred stage in unblemished freedom.

In defending this view, Peker went on to offer a telling statement: “In my work in the Council of Ministers or in the Assembly, I do not oppose my colleague sitting next to me who is a pious worshipper” and in turn “my indifference to worship does not bother my colleague next to me…” To date, discussion of Kemalist religious claims have, understandably, been defined by the fact that men like Recep Peker were not interested in praying and, whatever Akkaya claimed, the Saudi Ambassador was most likely not actually impressed by his description of Kemalist Islam. Yet in overlooking the work of those who took the idea of Kemalist faith more seriously, we ignore the resonance between their efforts to give this idea more substance and the broader, enduring religious trends of the period.


For a typically atypical example of the eccentric, personal appeal of Kemalist faith, consider Ahmet Yawner’s 1949 book *God’s Commands and the Creation of Mankind*. The book is resolutely Kemalist in its framing, published by İnkılap or Revolution press, and dedicated to Ataturk’s “esteemed spirit.” Yet the contents of the book quickly reveal an unexpected synthesis of piety and Kemalist themes.

Among other arguments, the author presents a spirited defense of translating the Quran. Claiming that the prophet himself would have praised Ataturk for beginning this effort, Yaşnar claims that expecting moral advice from someone who cannot read the Quran is like expecting treatment from a doctor who doesn’t know how to mix medicines. Similarly, he suggests, medicine does not lose its power when its formula is translated. Alongside this argument, however, within the book itself the author makes a point of referring to god as the traditional Arabic *Allah* in place of the Turkish *Tanrı* which appears on the cover.

But Yaşnar is more expansive on the relation between true Kemalist faith, nationalism and the challenge of maintaining independence in the Cold War era. Arguing that “success in this world is only possible through spiritual purity,” a claim for which he later cites Gandhi’s success against the English as an example, Yaşnar writes that the Ottoman Empire was destroyed by “spiritual corruption” and “fanaticism,” after the “Sultans betrayed Islam.” Ataturk, by contrast, was a defender of true Islamic faith, which he restored through his reforms. Thus, he claimed “Ataturk was an example for all

---

Muslims,” as well as “the teacher of revolution and development to all colonized nations.” In fact, if not for him “Turkey would have become a slave like other Eastern nations.” Now, by preserving a unity rooted in faith and democracy (and Islamic value displayed by Faith Sultan Mehmet and the prophet himself), “Turkish soldiers and future Mustafa Kemals” would thwart Russian designs by making the Bosphorus into “a Fortress of the East [Şark Kalesi].”

Finally, in a subsequent chapter of the book, Yaşnar goes on to condemn the possibility of a manned moon-landing, suggesting that having already “ruined earth” mankind should not now “stretch his dirty hand toward the moon” in order to ruin it too. Flying to the moon, he suggested, would replicate the folly of the Babylonian King Nimrod, who tried to travel to space in a chariot drawn by ravenous eagles/vultures and was punished by God for his arrogance.¹⁴³ Which is to say that despite his wholehearted embrace of Kemalist modernism, Yaşnar also shared the ambivalence about certain aspects of modernity manifest in many other religious publications from the period.

In the popular press, one of the most striking examples of this trend came from Osman Nuri Çerman’s 1957 Dinimizde Reform Kemalism, or Kemalism, the Reform of Our Religion. [Figure 12] Çerman had been known from 1928 on as outspoken advocate of reform. As a parliamentarian he introduced parliamentary resolutions on the subject in the early 50s and in 1956 wrote a book prefiguring much of what would appear in his

¹⁴³ If the idea of a manned moon landing inspired more widespread religious opposition, in the Christian or Muslim world, during the decades preceding 1969, I have yet to find evidence of it beyond a striking example from the Mormon Church: http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_science/Joseph_Fielding_Smith_claimed_that_man_would_never_walk_on_the_Moon#cite_ref
magazine. Much of what appeared in journal appeared in book of the same name in 1956. And just as his ideas had been largely dismissed in the one party era, he repeatedly faced prosecution in the 1950s for the suspect nature of his beliefs. Yet despite this, the era of relatively free press, and religious debates flourishing in the 1950s gave him a chance to publicize his ideas in a way that would not have been possible earlier. Indeed, his praise of Menderes and the Democratic Party is striking, specifically in that he credits them with giving him the freedom to promote his ideas. For the purposes of this chapter, it is also telling that his fixation with translating Quran, as well as other elements of his approach, fit so neatly with prevailing religious trends, yet other aspects would prove to be beyond the pale of what anyone at the time would accept as popular.

From the beginning [Figure 29] when he outlined Kemalist Islam’s Sacred Principles, Çerman built his ideas on a profound statement of synthesis that fit with the discourse of the era. What he advocated, he claimed, was “neither a new religion or the lack of religion.”

“Whatever is in Ataturk’s words is also in the Quran. Without a doubt the sacred principles of Kemalism are a work of divine inspiration.” “If Ataturk had not had divine inspiration” he went on, “could Turkey have once again been a proud presence on the world’s state again after Sevres?”

In his defense of the Turkish Quran, Çerman offers many of the same modernist and nationalist arguments of his more traditionally religious contemporaries. In the first two items in his statement of principles for his Kemalist faith, Çerman explains that

---

144 Issue 1, December 1957.
145 Ibid.

86
“worshipping God in the national tongue” will “save and protect the word religion from being a tool or mask for the enemies of Turkish civilization, as well as for treason, hypocrisy, and slavery.” At other points he argues that for someone who only speaks Turkish, an Arabic Quran is little more than an idol or totem. If the people wanted to go to San Francisco or London, he asks, and only the theological faculty or our imams knew the route, should they simply tell the people how to get there or just give them the map?

Yet in other aspects, his commitment to a Kemalist faith clearly went beyond mainstream limits, conflating the Anıtkabir, Ataturk’s burial place, and the Kabba, for example. In going outside the confines of mainstream thought, Çerman perhaps deserves comparison with no one more than his arch-rival Osman Yüksel, the editor of Serden Geçti. With the subsequent rise of Turkish Islamism, scholars have often, and understandably, taken works like Büyük Doğu and Serden Geçti to have been the defining examples of 1950s Turkish religiosity. I hope in this chapter to have made it clear that at the time it would have been impossible to identify these publications as harbingers of things to come. Based on the admittedly limited data available to us about circulation and reception, these magazines and their authors represented the Islamist end of a spectrum which also included, as a counterpart, magazines written by individuals whose Kemalist religiosity was no less deeply felt. That many of the Islamist papers from the period faced official censorship, of course, makes it difficult to determine how popular their message might have been in a truly free marketplace of ideas. But while we cannot rule out the

---

146 Ibid.
possibility they would have enjoyed much greater followings, we should not automatically assume this either.

Manifest in the pages of *Serden Geçti*, as well as other religious publications with a more explicitly political line, is evidence of both the editors’ financial trouble and their continued frustration with the popularity of mainstream, “immoral” publications. *Kommunism Karşı Mucadele*, or The Struggle Against Communism, for example, a paper that combined religious themes with anti-Communist tirades and ads for both *Serden Geçti* and the *Light of Islam*, regularly published plaintive announcements reminding “Friends” that “[o]ur magazine is published amidst a thousand indignities,” and claiming “[i]n order to continue our mission we need money,” or “if you would like us to continue please pay your debts.”148 *Serden Geçti*, in turn, revealed its distinctly non-populist message when its critique of contemporary culture entered the realm of specifics: Condemning “Ahmets, Mehmets, Ayshes and Fatmas” for their love of cinema, for example, or denouncing the Turkish youth for wasting their energy shouting “goal” at a Galatasaray-Fenerbahçe match instead of devoting it to a more noble cause.149

In this light, the heated, often personal debate that occurred in the later part of this decade between the editors or *Serden Geçti* and *Kemalism, the Reform of Our Religion*, can perhaps be seen as highlighting the common consensus on faith in this period by tracing its outer boundaries. In keeping with the profoundly nationalist tone of both publications, each consistently sough to portray the other as, intentionally or not, aiding Soviet

---

148 See for example Year 2, Issue 29, February 1, 1952 or Year 2, Issue 35, May 1, 1952.
Communism at the expense of the country. Thus Serden Geçti’s Yüksel suggested that Çerman’s secularism was tantamount to Communist atheism, while Çerman, in turn, cited examples from Ottoman history to demonstrate, the argument outlined above, that religious reaction had always helped facilitate Russian expansion. But a more subtle, though I would argue ultimately more telling, rhetorical similarity between the two publications appears in the specific language with which they both consistently attacked one another. Consistently, Çerman and Yüksel accuse each other of operating “behind the screen” [perde arkası] of their nominal values to ultimately promote a more sinister agenda. Thus Çerman regularly accused Yüksel of operating “behind the screen” of religion to promote a reactionary agenda while Yüksel accused Çerman of operating “behind the screen” of science and modernization to sabotage religion. Without belaboring the point, this seems like the best evidence that both ends of the ideological spectrum nominally supported the same set of values. Ideologues on both sides wanted readers to know that they were not opposed to religion or modernity, faith or science, but rather feared that their opponents were perverting or exploiting one of these sets of ideals.

What I hope also emerges from this discussion of 1950s religious debates is the extent to which the discussion of religious issues, and by extension an element or religion itself, had clearly become part of the private sphere through the expansion of a free and more-or-less profitable press in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Yet people operating in this private sphere were far from unified in how they felt about the role of the state in religious matters more broadly. Some called for citizens themselves to take the lead in, say, restoring religious monuments rather than waiting for the state to do it for them, or
worried that true religious reform required private, rather than state-run theological faculties. Others, though, explicitly called for more state involvement: the *True Path* editors, for example, calling for government quality control over new copies of the Quran or the widespread calls for religious education in schools. As we will see in the final chapter, in the realm of economics American policymakers expressed frustration with the fact they had no partner besides the state to rely on in their efforts to promote the ideology of free enterprise and private initiative. In this case the irony was reversed. Citizens quickly took the initiative to expand religion and discussions surrounding it into the private realm. But they did so without necessarily championing this form of initiative as an ideological goal in itself, and at times specifically denying the desirability of doing so.

Finally, the religious debates of the 1950s provide another instance in which popular critiques of Kemalist secularism must be understood alongside those aspects of the official ideology that the public, writ large, chose not to challenge. Moreover, there are specific forms of religious discourse that emerged in this period that cannot be understood as either extensions or rejections of traditional Kemalism, but rather transformations of it. Some elements of this discourse endure in contemporary Turkey. Others have lost ground in an increasingly partisan debate between more rigid understandings of Islamism and secularism. Many observers looking forward from the 1950s predicted the eventual triumph not of rigidly defined Soviet secularism but rather some form of secular religiosity. Looking back today some historians see the rise of Turkey’s contemporary form of Islamism to have always been the more likely possibility, while also forgetting just how open to religion many 1950s modernizers
were. If nothing else, at a moment when many people think we are belatedly abandoning out-dated notions of unilinear, secular or western modernity, we should take note of the fact many believed this to have happened half a century ago.

At the same time, we should remember that in the 1950s, some in Turkey worried that if reaction prevailed, Kemalist reforms would vanish; that hat and the Latin alphabet would be replaced by Arabic and the fez. The uncontroversial popularity of the Turkish language Quran today should serve as a reminder that much of what could be labeled “Western modernity” has in fact been so thoroughly accepted that we forget it was ever up for debate.

A series of pictures from the 1944 edition of the prayer manual *Namaz Hocasi* – published by Bozkurt Press under the direction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs – at first glance seem like the perfect illustration of a particular late-Kemalist fantasy: a young man dutifully performing his prayers in a skull cap and smoking jacket. [Figure 13] Yet this particular sartorial style might be recognizable today as the veritable uniform of Fethullah Gülen, now famous in Turkey and abroad as a tireless preacher of his own brand of Islamic modernism. [Figure 14]
Chapter 3. Multi-Purpose Empire: Reinventing Ottoman History in Republican Turkey

Great Fatih... May your spirit rest in peace. Your noble ideals will live forever - along with the Turkish nation and the Turkish Republic - upon the sound foundation laid by Atatürk. Is it even necessary to elaborate? Look at Korea. Look at the Atlantic Pact.

Professor Fahreddin Kerim Gökay, Mayor of Istanbul, May 29th, 1953

For too long, Ottoman history in Republican Turkey has always appeared as a battleground between pro-Ottoman Islamists and anti-Ottoman Kemalists. It is time for a new account of the relationship between Turkey and ‘its’ Ottoman past, one recognizing that all historical symbols, particularly those like the Ottoman Empire that spanned three continents and six centuries, are amenable to multiple, often nuanced and contradictory, interpretations. While early Kemalists did indeed denounce the Ottoman Empire for its backwardness and religiosity, they used the term *Ottoman* not to describe an entire society or era, as many do today, but only to refer to the narrow political elite from whom they had recently seized power. Beginning in the 1940s and culminating with the 500th anniversary of Istanbul's conquest in 1953, Turkish politicians, academics, artists, novelists, and journalists engaged in a thorough Kemalist appropriation of Ottoman history. Powerful Sultans from the Empire’s golden age like Fatih Mehmet II became secular, pro-Western revolutionaries while Turks of all political persuasions celebrated the Ottomans for their military might and supposedly self-evident Turkishness. Under the influence of a new post-war rhetoric emerging from the United States and the UN, Turks also discovered the rhetorical possibilities of the Ottomans’ now famous ‘tolerance’,

92
especially when seeking allies in the Balkans and Middle East. A new account of the relationship between Republican Turkey and its Ottoman past must be attuned to the malleability and political influences inherent in public memory, popular history and academic historiography. Recognizing this malleability helps reveal how the founders of the Turkish Republic saw their own state-building project. It also highlights the important parallels between their efforts write nationalist history in the 20th century and the contemporary efforts of international political actors in a globalized economy to promote a transnational reading of Ottoman history.

According to the narrative found in the growing number of works on the politics of Ottoman history, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk built his new national republic on a vigorous rejection of the Ottoman past. He condemned the Ottoman sultans as foreign interlopers, accusing them of promoting religious bigotry, suppressing their people’s Turkish identity, and cravenly collaborating with European powers. Completely ignoring the Ottoman past, the story goes, Atatürk gave his people a glorious and invented history of Central Asian Turks to serve as a basis for their national pride. Then, beginning in the 1990s, a newly pious, newly democratic Turkey ‘reconnected’ with its Ottoman ‘roots’, finally embracing the national history Atatürk had denied them. This trend culminated, of course, in the full-blown, Islamically-rooted Ottoman nostalgia – not to say Ottomania – of today.

Relying largely on state-issued textbooks, scholars have thus drawn a straight line connecting the dots between Atatürk’s criticism of Ottoman Empire in 1920s and Islamists’ appropriation of it today. When they did look at the period in between they forced the evidence they found into this simple narrative. To the extent anyone has noticed Turkey’s renewed interest in Ottoman history during the 1950s, they have presented it as a result of the Democratic Party’s challenge to secular Republican taboos. This reading not only makes it impossible to understand Turkey’s current enthusiasm for ‘Ottoman’ culture but also compounds the problematic tendency to view all of Turkey’s Republican history as a simple contest between early Kemalist reforms and the popular reaction they inspired.

The inadequacy of this reading begins with its failure to recognize that the quotes most frequently cited as evidence for Atatürk’s uncompromisingly hostile view of the Ottoman Empire – his description of the Sultans as ‘madmen and spendthrifts’ for example – come from 1922 and 1923, when there was in fact an Ottoman Sultan still enthroned in Istanbul who represented a clear political threat to Atatürk’s power. By 1927, the most intensely anti-Ottoman claims in Atatürk’s famous speech Nutuk occur when he is quoting his own statements from the debate over abolishing the Sultunate in 1922. Once it was no longer necessary to condemn the Ottoman dynasty for short-term political reasons, Atatürk and his successors could re-work their relationship with Ottoman history in a way that provided voluminous new evidence of past national glories. The

---

152 A Speech by Gazi Mustafa Kemal, 1929 Leipzig translation, 586.
rehabilitation of the Ottoman Empire began almost as soon as it was out of the way, and gained new impetus after Atatürk’s death in 1938. By the early 1940s, there were scores of publications about Ottoman history. Yet many of them have escaped notice because historians have not fully appreciated the extent to which the meaning of the word Ottoman itself has changed over time. As used in the Republican era, it referred much more exclusively to the royal family itself, as well as the people, policies and practices most closely associated with the court. In time, as the term itself began to have more positive connotations, its meaning expanded accordingly, eventually coming to refer more generally to all of the institutions and social practices that existed during the Ottoman period. To ask today how the Republican government could have renounced so much of the ‘Ottoman’ past is to ignore how little of it they actually saw as Ottoman.  

To take the most striking example, what today would be called the ‘Ottoman Army’, was, in Republican parlance, almost always the ‘Turkish Army’. Nationalist rhetoric lauded soldiers and often commanders from Osman’s time through World War One as ‘our heroes’ who had courageously fought for ‘our fatherland’ whether they won or lost. Typically, such rhetoric blamed the Sultans’ incompetent leadership for betraying the valor of the Turkish troops: ‘While Turkish heroes sacrificed their lives to take Crete,

---

153 It would be similarly anachronistic to ask how Turks in Istanbul today could deny the enormous impact of Armenians on their city’s history when they are surrounded by enormous mosques designed by an ‘Armenian’ architect like Mimar Sinan. The discourse denying the existence of an Armenian past is inextricably linked with the discourse denying the ‘Armenianness’ of Mimar Sinan and his works.

154 Typical was a work from the Military Press in 1933 which described the ‘Crete Campaign’ as one of the most difficult in Turkish military history, but in which the Turks succeeded through ‘their strength of will’. E. Yüzbashı Ziya and Rahmi, *Girit Seferi* (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1933).

155 Almost a third of the entries in the 1945 encyclopaedia *Famous Turks [Türk Meşhurları]*, for example, were Ottoman Pashas, as were a substantial number of the entries in the more expansive Famous Men [*Meşhur Adamlar*] from 1935. İbrahim Alaettin Govsa, *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, Yedigün, 1945); İbrahim Alaettin Govsa, *Meşhur Adamlar*, (Istanbul: Yedigün, 1935).
Mad Ibrahim took amber as an aphrodisiac so he could better busy himself with the women’. Cultural elements show a similar change. The shadow puppet Karagöz, for example, is now one of the three subheadings appearing in the Turkish Wikipedia entry for ‘Ottoman Culture’, presumably because of the play’s widespread association with traditional 19th century Ramadan celebrations. In the 1930s, by contrast, Karagöz was a folk tradition [Halk Oyunu] whose populist spirit and even vulgarity defined it as everything the Ottomans were not. Similarly, the familiar wooden ‘Safronbolu’ houses with protruding balconies now often referred to as ‘Ottoman houses’ were, as seen in Cengiz Bektaş’s classic The Turkish House [Türk Evi], once thought of differently.

Even the bridges, fountains and medreses that now epitomize ‘Ottoman architecture’ were in the 1930s considered ‘Turkish.’ Historian Ismail Hakki Uzunçarşıloğlu also stressed that the Empire’s many mosques were ‘social foundations’ where, in addition to worshipping, citizens could hold meetings, reach collective decisions, and find out community news. As will be seen, by the time all these diverse things became ‘Ottoman,’ decades of nationalist rhetoric had already thoroughly convinced people of

---

156 Faridun Fazıl Tülbentçi, Geçmişte Bugün, (Ankara: Akba, 1943). Building on Zeki Taştan’s summaries of popular history books from the period, Murat Kaciroğlu concludes that while works by authors such as Turan Tan and Nizamettin Nazif were often quite critical of even famous sultans such as Fatih or Suleiman, their heroes were men such as Heyreddin Barbarosa or fictitious soldiers whose bravery secured victory for the Ottoman army and state. Zeki Taştan “Türk Edebiyatında Tarihî Romanlar İstanbul Üniversitesi, Unpublished Phd thesis, Istanbul, 2000, as cited in Murat Kaciroğlu’s “Cehennemden Selam’ Romani Örneğinde İlk Dönem (1927-1940) Tarihi Macera Romanlarda Kronik Söylem Yahut Angaje Eğitim,” Turkish Studies, Volume 5/2 Spring 2010.

157 http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osmanl%C4%B1_k%C3%BClt%C3%BCr%C3%BC, accessed 3/14/2013.

158 Consider, for example, Selim Nuzhet’s Turkish Entertainments: Storytellers and Karagoz Theater [Türk Temaşası: Meddah – Karagöz Ortaøyunu] (Istanbul: Matbaa-I Ebuzziya, 1930).

159 Cengiz Bektaş Türk Evi, (İstanbul: Yapı Endüstri Merkezi Yayınları, 2013).

159 Istanbul’s fountains were a product of ‘Turks’ benevolent spirit’ (İbrahim Hilmi Tanışık, İstanbul Cesmeleri I, Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1943). Fatih Camii was a ‘beautiful and powerful example of Turkish artisans’ aesthetic’ that also showed ‘the development of national genius’ (H. Baki Kunter & A. Sasim Ulgen, Fatih Camii ve Bizans Sarnıcı, Istanbul, Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1939. Page 5) In the Bursa Halkevi Journal, Sedat Çetinaya wrote that the Ottomans had developed a modern and advanced architecture… without falling under the influence of any foreign civilization’. Uludağ, ‘Türk Mimarı Tarihizide Bursa Eserleri’ Issue 32, 1935.

159 Ismail Hakki Uzunçarşıloğlu Osmanlı Tarihi, Volume 2, 284.
the fact that everything Ottoman was fundamentally Turkish anyways. What is more, by
the time this happened, the Ottoman dynasty was no longer a political reality. Ignoring
the extent to which Atatürk’s anti-Ottomanism was directed at a narrow political elite
rather than an entire society or era masks the fundamentally populist nature of this
element of republican rhetoric and makes it easier to interpret Turkey’s eventual
‘reconciliation’ with its Ottoman past as the natural reemergence of a long-dormant
popular affinity. By denying the “Ottoman” label, Kemalist historians were, like other
nationalist movements, attempting to replace dynastic history with a version of social
history that they could appropriate for their own ends.

Almost all of the varied works on Ottoman history published during the one party era can
be read as efforts to prove that Turks deserved credit for the glorious parts of Ottoman
history. Aziz Şevket Kansu, for example, is perhaps most famous for the effort to unearth
Mimar Sinan’s skull in order to anthropometrically prove the architect’s Turkishness. In
1940, however, he published the results of an equally bizarre project, in which he used
1927 Republican census data and Bursaşı Mehmet Tahir’s ‘Ottoman Authors’, to
calculate the number of Ottoman intellectuals that came from each Anatolian province, as
a ratio of that province’s population. He then compared these results to average skull
measurements from each region in order to prove that the regions first settled by
members of the Turkish race were the ones with the most per-capita Ottoman geniuses.
Other authors worked to prove diverse but similar claims about the role of ‘Turkishness’
in other Ottoman achievements: Turkish military genius deserved credit for defeating

---

162 Şevket Aziz Kansu ‘Anadolu’da Türk Mutefekkirlerinin Coğrafi Yayılışı Uzerine Bir Araştırma,’
Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakultesi Dergisi, Volume 1, Issue 1, September 1942.
Napoleon in Egypt,\textsuperscript{163} Ali Pasha, the Lion of Yanina, was not only a Turk but a Turkish patriot,\textsuperscript{164} Piri Reis, a Turkish cartographer, discovered America,\textsuperscript{165} and the exploits of Ottoman’ mariners forced ‘historians of every nation to confess that the Turkish race was the world’s most militant race.’\textsuperscript{166} The Turkish Military Press, meanwhile, republished books like Celal oğlu Mustafa’s \textit{Tabakatü'l Memalik ve Derecatü'l Mesalik} as \textit{The Turkish Army’s Wars in the Time of Ottoman Expansion}.\textsuperscript{167}

During this period the Turkish Foreign Ministry also reported on the way Turkey’s neighbors treated the Ottoman past with the clear sense that this treatment reflected on Turkey’s national image. In 1933, for example, the Turkish Embassy in Sophia reported with alarm the production of an ‘anti-Turkish’ film showing the ‘unlimited oppression’ Bulgarians suffered during the ‘era of Turkish administration’.\textsuperscript{168} In 1942, a Turkish diplomat in Albania reported on the dilapidated state of Sultan Murat’s tomb, while an Italian official sought to curry favor with the Turkish embassy by informing them that when the region had been under his control he had tried to see to the tomb’s upkeep.\textsuperscript{169} Several years earlier, by contrast, the poet M. Faruk Gürtunca had reminded Italians coveting Anatolian soil that, in addition to riding on Rome with Atilla, the Turks had sunk Andrea Dorea’s fleet under Barbarossa and were ready to do so again. ‘Ask,’ he

\textsuperscript{163} Ziya Sakir, \textit{Türkler Karşısında Napoleon} (İstanbul: Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1943).
\textsuperscript{164} Gabriel Romeran, \textit{Tepedenli Ali Paşa}, Alı Kemali Aksut, translator. (İstanbul: İkbal Kitabevi, 1939).
\textsuperscript{165} Afet İnan, ‘Bir Türk Amiralı XVinci Asrın Büyük Coğrafya,’ \textit{Belletin}, Volume 1, 1937, p 317.
\textsuperscript{166} Ali Rıza Seyfi, \textit{Akdenizin Kurtları, Resimli Şark}, No 8, August 1931.
\textsuperscript{167} Celal oğlu Mustafa, Sedadettin Tokdemir, trans., Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Yükselme Devrinde Türk Ordusu’nun Savaşları ve Devletin Kurumu, İç ve Dış Siyasasi. (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaasi, 1937).
\textsuperscript{168} Cumhuriyet Arşivi, 030-0-010-000-000-2410631-37. Hariciye Vekaleti to Yüksek Basvekalet, December 20, 1933.
suggested with reference to Ottoman incursions in southern Italy, ‘which lion Janissary rests in your great-grandmother’s heart?’

But Republican historians incorporated the Ottoman Empire into their nationalist narrative in ways far more sophisticated than this sort of blunt appropriation. Using what Buşra Ersanlı has called the ‘theory of fatal decline’, they identified a ‘Golden Age’ lasting until the time of Suleiman followed by a period of stagnation and decline from the 18th century on. They then went on to argue that through its Golden Age the Empire had maintained its fundamentally Turkish character as well as the more enlightened approach to religion that the Turks had brought with them from Central Asia. Decline, when it came, resulted from the influx of ‘foreign elements’ and the increasing power of the reactionary ulema. This strategy allowed the Turkish nation to take credit for the early Ottoman Empire’s cultural achievements and battlefield victories while escaping blame for the later failures. As importantly, it positioned the Kemalist reform as curing the diseases that had crippled the Ottomans.

Perhaps this theory’s most concise and official articulation appeared in Afet Inan’s ‘A Study of Turkish-Ottoman History’s Characteristic Features’, written for the second issue of the Turkish Historical Society’s journal in 1938. She begins by emphasizing that there was a Turkish ‘ethnic foundation’ [etnik zemin] for Ottoman expansion in Anatolia,

---


172 Afet Inan, ‘Türk-Osmansı Tarihinin Karakteristik Noktalarına bir Bakış,’ *Belletin*, Volume 2, 1938. As one of the founders of the Turkish Historical Society, Inan played a major role in articulating official Kemalist history, including preparing the "Fundamental Outline of Turkish History [Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları], which would serve as the foundation for Turkish history textbooks."
and that ‘Empire’s lives are linked to the strength of their foundations’. Then, in explaining the empire’s phases, she highlights the fact that Selim ‘added the title of Caliph to his ancestors’ imperial legacy’. This ‘made the Ottoman Empire a theocratic state and bound its political statesmen by doctrine to the unchanging rules of a religious book’. With this periodicization in place, İnan goes on to praise the positive characteristics of the early empire. The Ottomans provided the still feudal Europeans with their first example of a centralized monarchy: ‘the central administration [merkezdeki idare] knew the income potential of every small town in the entire empire and determined how it would be spent in an orderly manner’. Ottoman ‘military power and technical superiority’ was also based on the Empire’s intellectual life – ‘A school [mektebe] was found in each village’ until a ‘retrogression [gerileme hareketi]’ in in the entire Islamic society during the 16th century prevented the further development of Turkish madreses. İnan also praised its etatist policies, pointing out that until the 16th century, all financial activity was ‘under the state’s organization and control [devletin hakimiyeti ve nizammi içindedir]’. In the late 16th century ‘the microbes of decline [inkiraz mikroplari] began to appear in the state’s healthy structure’. Subsequent reform efforts failed because ‘Tanzimat men remained too bound to religion and opposed to free-thought’, while the Young Ottomans too were crippled by their commitment to sharia. İnan thus concluded that it fell upon ‘the greatest of all Turks to teach us through his actions that harmful practices could only be fixed with revolution, not reform’.

---

173 Ibid, 125.
174 Ibid, 126.
175 Ibid, 130.
176 Ibid, 132.
State history textbooks reflected Inan’s interpretation of the Ottoman period. The 1931 edition of Tarih, a high-school textbook often cited as the defining expression of Kemalist historiography, begins by explaining that Osman’s rise was a result of his being able to bring good government to the people where Byzantine princes had failed, “in addition to the unique heroism and militarism of the Turks.”\(^{177}\) In addition to pointing out the one of Osman’s first acts was to cancel “capitulations [iltizam] given to foreign merchants, the book repeatedly stresses the Ottoman government’s capacity for state-building and administration during the golden age,\(^{178}\) and goes on to cite two separate instances when Germans expressed a desire to receive the blessings of Ottoman rule.\(^{179}\) Sefika Akile Zorlu-Durukan’s study of Tarih, bolsters this interpretation, claiming that while Atatürk’s state-building project ‘required the construction of the immediate past as worthless, corrupt, and unredeemable [italics mine]’, this did not apply to the early Ottoman period.\(^{180}\) ‘Criticism of the Ottoman Empire in general starts’ in the late 16th century, she concludes, before which early textbooks suggested that ‘Eastern civilization maintained its superiority’.\(^{181}\)

This same narrative was prevalent outside of textbooks as well. In the poetic realm, Hüseyin Hüsnü published Sultan-by-Sultan history of the Ottoman empire in verse, ‘written from feeling of Turkishness, in plain Turkish’, dedicated to the Turkish nation’s

\(^{178}\) Ibid, 3, 5, 28.
\(^{179}\) Ibid, 32, 52.
\(^{180}\) Şefika Akile Zorlu-Durukan’s ‘The ideological pillars of Turkish education’ (Unpublished dissertation. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2006), 158.
\(^{181}\) Ibid.
‘exalted savior’, and published on the 10th anniversary of the republic. Hüsnü wrote that the Ottoman Empire began when ‘Osman unfurled the banner of Turan and caused Turkishness to come alive once more’. He then contrasted the Empire’s early days, when ‘The Turkishness-rejecting men of God / Got a heavy dose of Osman’s rod’ with a later era when its rulers forget the basic truth that ‘Religion should not a nation steer, nor should a ship with prayer recklessly veer’. Alongside poets, diplomats also used this narrative when stressing the importance of Republican reforms to a foreign audience. In 1929, Abdullah Zeki (Polar)’s ‘Essai sur les causes du Decadence de l’Empire Ottoman’ began by stating that before the 17th century the Empire’s wealth and power were legendary, but decline set in because ‘RELIGION DOMINATED THE STATE’.

At the same time, other more prominent historians focused on the Ottomans’ early success as a source of justification and inspiration for their own state-building project. Fuat Köprülü’s famous Origins of the Ottoman Empire, for example, can be read as an extended effort to define the success of the Ottoman state as both secular and Turkish. Rejecting the European argument that religious zeal had motivated Ottoman expansion, he wrote that the ‘purest and most vigorous elements’ of Turkish Anatolia who formed the Ottoman state ‘were generally Muslim, they were free from all fanaticism and adhered more to a simple from of their old native traditions’.

---

183 Ibid, 95.
184 “Türkü bozan dervişlerle hocalar / bu hakandan yedi hayli sopalar”, “Hocalarla devlet işi yürümez / Dua ile hiç bir gemi yürümez,” ibid,
185 A. Zeki Polar, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Cokuş Sebepleri (İstanbul: Ak Kitabevi, 1962), 10.
187 Ibid, 51.
When Ottoman histories are read as commentaries on the Republican project, they can in turn reveal new dimensions of it. That early Republican leaders saw centralized authority as crucial to the Ottoman Empire’s rise is not in itself surprising, nor is the fact that Republican historians condemned some Sultans for sullying Turkish with Arabic words, and praised others for maintaining the vitality of the language. Yet their interest in the Ottoman Empire’s ‘Turkification’ policies suggests that they were more aware of the ‘artificial’ nature of their own nation-building project than is often recognized. That is to say, Republican statesmen could not openly discuss their efforts to ‘Turkify’ any of the countries non-Turkish peoples, because this would involve admitting there were non-Turkish people to begin with. But they could readily praise the early Ottomans for their efforts to Turkify Anatolia’s population or criticized the late Ottomans for not pursuing a more assimilationist national policy. Köprülü, for example, attributes Ottoman success to the fact that ‘Christian immigrants’ and ‘the Muslims of Semitic or Iranian origin who found themselves among a Turkish majority’ were quickly Turkicized.

The narrative of fatal decline remained central to all popular, official and academic history from the beginning of the Republican period through the Democratic Party era. Beginning in the late 1930s, though, the number of books published on Ottoman history by official and private presses rose noticeably, and there was a newfound enthusiasm for celebrating the Ottoman Empire’s Golden-Age achievements rather than condemning its later failures. At least one author has speculated that Atatürk’s personal hostility toward

---

188 See for example, Samih Nafiz Tansu’s *Osmanlı Tarihi Özu* (Istanbul: 1944).
all things Ottoman facilitated a historiographical shift immediately following his death.\textsuperscript{190}

Yet it also seems possible that with the passage of time Republican leaders became increasingly confident in the permanence of their revolution and the transformation they had achieved. By the late 1930s, there was no longer any reason to fear the re-establishment of the old empire. Nor was there any reason to suspect that Europeans, whatever prejudices they still might harbor about the Turks, had failed to notice that Turkey had changed dramatically since the empire’s collapse.

Against this backdrop, in the midst of World War Two Ismet Inönü began preparations for the 500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of one of the Ottoman Turk’s most glorious achievements: the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In both form and content, nationwide celebrations defined Fatih’s achievement as a victory for secularism, a victory for Western enlightenment values and, most of all, a victory for the Turkish nation. In form, the celebrations followed the self-consciously modern Kemalist repertoire for commemorating important national anniversaries in a civilized, European manner, with commentators looking at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, taking place at the time in London, for additional ideas.\textsuperscript{191}

Over the course of ten days, students and faculty of Istanbul University hosted lectures, conferences, and seminars where countless historians discussed the importance of Fatih’s

\textsuperscript{190}Orhan Koçak, ‘Westernization Against the West: Cultural Politics in the Early Turkish Republic’ in Celia Kerslake, Kerem Oktém and Philip Robins, 

The students also hosted a soiree [suare], a garden party [gartenparti] and a ball [balo], the last of which lasted till dawn and included a fashion show with dresses inspired by Ottoman costumes. The Turkish Theatre Company performed ‘Tosca’ in Fatih’s honor, as well as a special play written about the Sultan himself. The government opened new schools and libraries on the outskirts of Istanbul. With fighter planes soaring overhead, the military paraded to Fatih’s tomb in the center of Istanbul’s old city. There, a mufti said prayers for Fatih’s soul, which were subsequently broadcast on the Turkish state radio. The Beyazit Library exhibited almost 500 children’s drawings of the conquest. Other exhibits highlighted fine art from Fatih’s time or displayed the Sultan’s personal effects. Schoolchildren read poems written by the conqueror himself. The word ‘Fatih’ was on everybody’s lips; Sir Edmund Hillary was hailed as the Fatih of Mount Everest while advertisers insisted their nylon dresses would conquer [feth etmek] Istanbul [Figure 14]. In addition to state-sponsored wrestling tournaments, gymnastics competitions and horse races, there was also a special Fetih soccer match played to mark the occasion (Beşiktaş defeated Fenerbahçe 2-1). Mosques and historic buildings throughout Istanbul were illuminated at night. Fireworks were launched and cannons were fired. In New York, the city’s 3,000 Turks gathered to celebrate the conquest with a cocktail party in the Empire State Building. Here, the New York Times said, they would

---

192 Newspapers gave detailed information about these festivities, for example, ‘Fetih yılı programı’. Milliyet, 21 May 1953.
193 Ferdi Öner, ‘Fethin 500 uncu yıldönümü Tören ve Şenlikleri başladı.’ Cumhurriyet, 30 May 1953.
194 Ibid.
196 ‘Beşiktaş Fenerbahçeyi dün 2-1 mağlup etti’. Milliyet, 1 June 1953.
celebrate by drinking Rakı and ‘Istanbul Magic,’ a cocktail made by mixing this spirit with lemon juice and crème de menthe.\textsuperscript{197}

More explicitly, the content of all these events repeatedly emphasized Fatih’s Turkish national identity, his revolutionary, pro-Western outlook, and his secularism. Certainly Fatih’s most striking characteristic in 1953, was his Turkishness. Fatih was not an Ottoman emperor, but the ‘great Turkish ruler [büyük Türk hükümdarı]’ of a ‘great Turkish empire’. Istanbul, in fact, was his ‘eternal gift’ to the Turkish nation. In addition to this terminology, more concrete rhetoric bound Fatih to the modern Turkish state. Watching Turkish soldiers marching past Fatih’s tomb “with bristling mustaches and a lion’s gait,” a writer for the newspaper \textit{Cumhuriyet} concluded, these ‘heroic children of the Great Fatih” were proof that “heroism was truly this nation’s ancestral inheritance and the legacy of its forefathers.”\textsuperscript{198}

More than just binding Fatih to modern Turkey, these displays wrote him into the narrative of the Turkish War of Independence, forging a link between Fatih’s victory and Turkey’s ongoing struggle to preserve its national sovereignty in the face of Russian territorial claims. One of the most popular slogans to appear in newspapers and speeches proclaimed, ‘Istanbul has been Turkish for 500 years and will remain Turkish for 500 more’. More pointedly, on 29 May official delegations brought silver vases full of

\textsuperscript{198} Ferdi Oner, ‘Fethin 500üncü yıldönümü Tören ve Şenlikerli başladı.” \textit{Cumhuriyet}, 30 May 1953.
‘border soil’ from Kars and Edirne – cities on Turkey’s Soviet and Bulgarian borders respectively – and deposited them on Fatih’s grave.199

Politicians and journalists were quick to wrap the mantle of Fatih’s heroism around Turkish soldiers serving in Korea. Speaking to crowd assembled on 29 May, the mayor of Istanbul, Gökay declared:

Great Fatih... May your spirit rest in peace. Your noble ideals will live forever - along with the Turkish nation and the Turkish Republic - upon the sound foundation laid by Atatürk. Is it even necessary to elaborate? Look at Korea. Look at the Atlantic Pact... We, Fatih’s children, show our greatest display of being worthy of him through serving the cause of world peace with our soldiers’ blood in Korea today. Now we bow with honor before all of our holy martyrs who, beginning with Fatih, have died for their country and who now give their lives for world peace under the United Nations in Korea today.

Columnists, too, made similar comparisons, with one asking ‘what difference is there between Ulubatlı Hasan, who first raised our flag over the walls of Istanbul, and the commander who went into battle in Korea wrapped in the Turkish flag?’201 Soldiers returning from Korea even reported that when surrounded by Communist forces they had been visited by the spirit of the Sofu Baba – one of Fatih’s ‘happy soldiers’ killed in the siege of Constantinople – who calmed and inspired them before disappearing into the battlefield smoke.202

‘Among the Ottoman Sultans, Fatih was undoubtedly the most secular [laik kafahi],’ Cumhuriyet declared. In 1953, secularism, stood alongside nationalism as one of Fatih’s

200 ‘Fatih ve Topkapı’da ki torende yüzbinlerce İstanbullu bulundu’. Vatan, 30 May 1953.
202 The full version of this legend is related by the Turkish Ministry of Religion outside the tomb of the Sofu Baba, located on the Fındıklı yokuşu in Istanbul’s Cihangir neighborhood.
defining virtues. The oft-repeated phrase used to articulate the historical importance of the conquest in papers of all political persuasions was that in conquering Istanbul Fatih had ‘brought an end to the Middle Ages’ – marked by ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘sectarian conflict’ – and ‘opened a new era’ in human history. A particularly ambitious, but by no means uncommon, formulation of this achievement credited Fatih with kicking off the Renaissance: ‘The West was shocked by Istanbul’s fall, but it was also awakened. Shaking off the yoke of religiously bigotry, it turned again to the life-giving source of Ancient Greek free thought’.203

There was an explicitly pro-Western dimension to Fatih’s enlightenment as well. In capturing Istanbul, the former Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) Education Minister declared, Fatih definitively ‘turned his face toward the West’, both culturally and geographically.204 Fatih showed this Western orientation through patronage of humanistic arts and sciences.205 Fatih made Istanbul a center of scientific research by establishing its first university and brought about a ‘renewal’ in Turkish art and culture by, among other things, ignoring the religious prohibition on representing human figures. Fatih revealed himself to be Western and cultured through the respect he showed his teachers, through his employment of Renaissance artists like Giovani Bellini, through his knowledge of Italian, Latin, and Greek,206 and, finally, through the ‘rationality’ of his ideas.207

Learning from the West had also supposedly been crucial to Fatih’s military success:

203 ‘İstanbul Fatih’i kucaklıyordu’. İstanbul Ekspres, 29 May 1953.
207 ‘Fatih’e ait seminerler devam ediyor’. Vatan, 6 June 1953.
Belief and personally righteous forces were not enough for the victory. The Ottomans learned [the Byzantine’s] lifestyle and military techniques well. We knew well that victory cannot be achieved in a war between two nations without using the same techniques.  

Indeed, the innovative military tactics that Fatih used to conquer Istanbul were one of the many things that earned him the title of ‘revolutionary [inkilapçı]’. The adjective appears regularly, if not frequently, in descriptions of Fatih, who revealed his innovative spirit by dragging his fleet overland in order to circumvent Byzantine defenses on the Golden Horne. This rhetoric was particularly pronounced in Ulus, the semi-official paper of the opposition Republican People's Party. According to one writer, Fatih’s approach ‘shows he was a totally new kind of person, one who believed in newness and in the innovators [türetler] of the age. He was not satisfied with the methods of his ancestors. He was not tied to old ideas’.  

In this context it is no surprise that many writers made the comparison between Fatih and another enlightened, secular, revolutionary and pro-Western Turkish leader explicit. ‘Fatih’s portrait, like Atatürk’s, should be hung in our houses and offices with respect’, claimed one Cumhuriyet columnist, adding that if the government subsidized the distribution of these portraits, it would gladden the spirits of both men. Many other authors drew a parallel between the service both men had provided to the Turkish nation: ‘It was the Istanbul Fatih took that Atatürk saved twice, once by stopping the enemy at Çanakkale, once by driving him back after Dumlupınar. At each end of Istanbul’s five

---

century existence as a Turkish city is a great Turk’. Frequent comparisons between these two great Turks were not evidence of an effort to supplant, if only partially, Atatürk with Fatih, and therefore Kemalist values with the more religious ideals Fatih supposedly stood for. In a climate where praise for anyone besides Atatürk often carried a caveat, most authors specified that in making this comparison it should be understood that they were in fact praising Fatih for all the ways he was like Atatürk. Indeed, to eliminate any doubt that there was no contradiction, authors of all political persuasions quoted Atatürk’s response to a colleague who had belittled the sultan: ‘Quiet. Who is Fatih? And who are you? Take that great man’s name to your lips with reverence [apt test alip da ağzına öyle al].’

Much as Atatürk anecdotes have become a stable of contemporary Turkish discourse, Fatih’s legacy came complete with an array of rumors and legends that could be used, at times straightforwardly, at times with some contortion, to prove or refute any aspect of his character. Testifying to Fatih’s secularism was the oft repeated story about his confrontation several holy men who claim that God answered their prayers by giving Istanbul to the Turks. ‘This’, Fatih says gesturing to his sword, ‘is sharper than your prayers’. Other stories testified to Fatih’s respect for education, for the law, or, for his elders. One of the best, explicitly told to demonstrate Fatih’s commitment to the positivist ideal of artistic verisimilitude, begins with Gentile Bellini presenting Fatih with a canvas showing a dead man’s face. Fatih tells him the face is not waxen or droopy enough to be a dead man’s. Then, to prove his point, Fatih took the artist to see the head of a recently

211 ‘Times’in Fatih ve Atatürk yazıısı vesilesile,’ Cumhuriyet, 10 June 1953.
212 See Gavin Brockett, How Happy, Chapter 6.
213 Zafer, 30 May 1953.
executed criminal. Bellini was shaken but enlightened.\textsuperscript{214} The range of these anecdotes allowed authors to pick and choose, including whatever set of stories best gave Fatih the ideological character they found appropriate.\textsuperscript{215}

Finally, in addition to holding a modern-style celebration emphasizing Fatih’s modernity, many people were eager to use the occasion to show off all the progress the Republic had made in the last three decades. A map from the Highways Directorate, for example, depicting all of the country’s newly paved roads, included a laurel-framed seal of Fatih directing his navy’s overland transportation.\textsuperscript{216} Even more explicit were government publications like \textit{A General Look at Public Works on the 500\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the Conquest}, which insisted that the DP government were doing just as much to serve the Turkish nation as Fatih had.\textsuperscript{217}

Many authors have assumed that whatever new enthusiasm the Ottoman past enjoyed in the 1950s must have been a product of the Democratic Party, elected in 1950, and its more tolerant approach to public religiosity.\textsuperscript{218} Not only was the thoroughly Kemalist tone of the 500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary was beyond partisan debate, though, but the Republican People’s Party was as eager to exploit the political potential of the occasion as their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{214} Sami Nafiz Tanus, ‘Sanatkar Fatih’. \textit{Cumhuriyet}, 31 May 1953
\item \textsuperscript{215} Promoting a secular reading of Fatih’s accomplishment required not just telling the right anecdotes but policing those who told the wrong ones. On 29 May 1957, for example, the Istanbul police detained a “youth by the name of Mesud Yavuz Bilgin” for reading a poem at an unofficial ceremony in Eminonu which used “emotional language” to criticize Ayasofya’s transformation into a museum. ‘Fethinin 504. yıl dönümü dün törenle kutlandı’. \textit{Cumhuriyet}, 30 May 1957.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Karayolları Haritası, 1953. Atatürk Kitaplığı Map Collection, Hrt_003544.
\item \textsuperscript{217} \textit{Beş Yuzuncu Fetih Yılında Devlet Çalışmalarına Umumi bir Bakış}, (İstanbul: Parsadan Basın, 1953).
\item \textsuperscript{218} For example Feroz Ahmad, \textit{Turkey: The Quest for Identity} (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003) or most explicitly Yılmaz Çolak, ‘Ottomanism vs. Kemalism: Collective Memory and Cultural Pluralism in 1990s Turkey,’ \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, Vol. 42, No. 4, 587 – 602, July 2006.
\end{itemize}
opponents. In fact, CHP members repeatedly complained that the Democratic Party’s ‘dull’ and ‘wretched’ ceremonies were an insult to Fatih’s memory on this ‘sacred’ and ‘lofty’ occasion. The CHP spent much of the 1950s criticizing the DP for failing to follow through on Ismet Inönü’s elaborate anniversary preparations. In a June 7th speech, CHP district president İlhami Sancar described the ‘great sadness’ Turkish citizens felt over the government’s trivialization of 29 May. He promised that, if elected, the CHP would put on a ceremony worthy of Fatih himself. Cumhuriyet wanted to celebrate the conquest with a ‘new and modern Istanbul’. Instead, the streets that Fatih’s army marched over were not even paved with asphalt. It could have been a chance to show the world how civilized and advanced Turkey was; ‘like Cannes, one author mused, the Venice Biennale or a French Colonial exposition, complete with a beauty pageant in Fatih’s honor. Cartoonists, meanwhile, showed Istanbul’s mayor instructing his doorman “If Fatih calls, tell him I’m out”, or contrasted the Prime Minister’s presence at Elizabeth’s coronation in London with his empty chair in Istanbul.

CHP supporters even went as far as to suggest that the DP had deliberately downplayed the 500th anniversary in order to placate Greece and America. ‘Why was Ayasofya not lit up like every other mosque or museum in the city?’ ‘Do we get indignant when the Greeks celebrate the independence they won from us?’ The Istanbul University Student’s Union published an official complaint in Vatan warning that those who

---

220 ‘Fetih Şenlikleri dün sona erdi’. Cumhuriyet, 8 June 1953.
222 Cumhuriyet, 28 May, 1953; Cumhuriyet, 3 June, 1953.
223 ‘Fetih yına dair Meclis’e iki takrir verildi’. Vatan, 2 June 1953.
224 ‘Terbiyemiz bakımdan Fetih’. Cumhuriyet, 8 June 1953.
downplayed the celebration of Fatih’s victory in order to ‘win or placate friends’ committed a mistake that might ‘endanger the future’ by calling Istanbul’s Turkishness into question.\textsuperscript{226} A cartoon, meanwhile, showed a Janissary listening from heaven as Turks debated how to hold a sufficiently inoffensive celebration while a Byzantine soldier at his side says ‘I told you they would avenge us’.

In fact, the critics’ suspicions appear to have been well founded. Reporting on a meeting with President Celal Bayar in January 1953, Patriarch Athenagoras told the US Consul that:

\begin{quote}
[T]he Turks were a ‘kind people’ and were certainly intelligent enough to realize that now was not the time to offend Christian nations. Consequently, the present government would play down the celebration this spring and handle it in a tactful manner.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

When the Patriarch added that he himself would be willing to participate in the ceremonies, Bayar ‘was most gratified’ and told him that ‘it would, of course, be necessary to hold the anniversary celebration, but it would not be on a large scale and the Greeks should not feel sensitive about a matter of such ancient history’.\textsuperscript{228} True to this promise, government rhetoric went out of its way to minimize any element of Turkish-Greek rivalry. The Ottomans' defeated foe was always referred to the Byzantines, never the Greeks or the Rum. Newspapers were quick to remind ‘our Greek friends’ that the

\textsuperscript{226} ‘Fetih yıldönümü törenleri bitiyor’. \textit{Vatan}, 7 June 1953.
\textsuperscript{227} Frederick Merril, ‘Phanar and Five Hundredth Anniversary of Conquest of Constantinople,’ Despatch no 445. 15 January 1953, Turkey, Istanbul Consulate General, Records Re The Patriarchate, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
alternative to the Turkish conquest of Istanbul was never continued Byzantine rule but rather Slavic domination and Byzantine incorporation into the ‘State of Moscow’.\textsuperscript{229}

Turkey’s geostrategic needs are crucial for understanding one of the most distinct and enduring developments in Ottoman historiography that occurred in this period: the emergence of ‘tolerance’ as a widely discussed feature of Ottoman rule. [Figure 16] A number of factors came together to fuel the popularity of ‘Ottoman tolerance’ as a discourse during this period. First, the United States and Great Britain had been intensely critical of Turkey’s neutrality during the Second World War, and had even raised this as possible grounds for denying Turkey the chance to become a UN member. In addition to rebutting accusations that Turkish neutrality had been motivated by ideological sympathy toward fascism, the rhetoric of tolerance sought to justify Turkey’s place in the new international order the victorious allies were promoting with the rhetoric of international cooperation and the four freedoms. Of the many publications the committee overseeing the anniversary celebrations produced, one of the few it translated into English was a pamphlet called ‘The Importance of the Conquest of Istanbul for Mankind and Civilization’, which explained that ‘[t]he respect of the Turks for all religions, even in the days before Mohammedanism, is no[w] proved by recent research’.\textsuperscript{230}

\textsuperscript{230} Ismail Hami Danismend, ‘The Importance of the Conquest of Istanbul for Mankind and Civilization,’ translated by E. A. and B. M. (Publications of the Istanbul Society for Celebration of the Conquest No 15). This rhetorical outreach was sufficiently effective that the New York Times noted ‘[t]he modern Turk believes his was the first country to establish a legal basis for the co-existence of all religious and racial groups’. Morris Kaplan, ‘Turks Here Will Sip ‘Lion’s Milk’ To Mark Victory of 500 Years Ago’. \textit{New York Times}, 29 May 1953.
Returning from a 1950 UNECSO conference consisting of ‘professors from all the world’s democratic countries’ that he had attended on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Osman Turan wrote of the need to:

facilitate the teaching of a broader historical viewpoint in keeping with UN ideals, resting on the reality of nations ever-growing economic, political and civilizational ties and dependence on one another in place of our previous flat [inika], narrow [dar] and extremist [müfrit] national views and teachings.\footnote{Osman Turan, ‘Milliyet ve Insanlık Mefkurelerinin Tarih Tedrisatinda Ahenklestirilmesi,’*Ankara Universitesi Dil ve Tarih-Cografya Dergisi*, Volume 10, Issue 1-2, March-June 1952, 209-239. p210}

Among other things, this effort (which, he noted, also required other countries to purge their schoolbooks of anti-Turkish prejudice) would promote world peace, end national rivalries, and, most importantly, help defeat the spread of Communism. Turan cited American history textbooks written without religious prejudice’ as examples that could serve as a ‘guide’ in the creation of a ‘united world’.\footnote{Ibid, 212.} He then lamented that ‘if we had had the power in the Seljuk and Ottoman eras we ourselves could have served as exemplars of the humanitarian ideal’.\footnote{Ibid, 225.}

The discourse of Ottoman Tolerance also echoed US attacks against Soviet ‘religious persecution’, suggesting that whatever Turkey’s democratic credentials, its history marked it as a part of the free world. Thus, in 1948, Ankara University’s *Faculty of Language, History and Geography Journal* argued that Ottoman Christians had always been happy compared to Russia’s Muslims,\footnote{Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, ‘Sark Buhrani ve Sabah Gazetesi,’*Universitesi Dil ve Tarih-Cografya Dergisi*, Volume 6, Issue 4, Sept.-Oct. 1948, 219-258. p252.} and explicitly contrasted the lack of religious compulsion in Islam with the mandatory atheism prescribed by Communism.\footnote{Ibid, 233.}
He also concluded that the Ottoman Empire had never been at war with Christianity, only the Slavs. In the sphere of public rhetoric, Celal Bayar gave voice to these sentiments when he declared ‘Fatih began the practical application of the ideas of religious freedom and freedom of conscious for which people still struggle today’.  

The regional politics of the early cold war also played an important role. Among other justifications used to bolster Soviet claims to northeastern Anatolia was the argument, advanced by two Georgian scholars in 1945 that Ottoman Turks had’ spread violence and death’ across Georgia, ‘imposing their religion and language by sword’. Şinasi Altundağ set out to rebut these claims at the Fourth Turkish Historical Society Congress, held in November 1948, with a vigorous defense of the Ottoman Empire’s tolerance. Citing the ‘emotion and loyalty [his ve bağlılık]’ the Georgians felt toward the Ottomans, Altundağ went to explain that the Ottomans’ culture policies were clear: ‘Today, are languages like Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Albanian not still around..? Did the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Georgians re-learn their languages Christianity after leaving the Ottoman Empire?’ ‘A tolerance reigned in the Ottoman Empire that was the envy of other nations…. To steal a Christian’s chicken or pasture a horse on a Christian’s field was equivalent to a murder and punishable by death…. Once ten Janissaries were executed for the unjust killing of a Christian’. In this rhetoric Ottoman

---

236 Çalışmalarına Umumi bir Bakış  
238 Ibid.  
239 Ibid, 79.  
240 Ibid, 81.
multiculturalism took on a more ambiguous role, with tolerance serving both as a source of the empire’s greatness but still as a potential source of its decline.

The discourse of ‘Ottoman tolerance’ was also made quite compatible, even interchangeable, with the discourse of Ottoman secularism. Several authors went as far as to suggest that in making Ayasofya into a mosque, instead, presumably, of destroying it, Fatih was showing his respect for Christians and their culture. Despite the ruined state in which the Byzantines left Ayasofya, Fatih admired its mosaics of the Virgin Mary and violently intervened to stop a Janissary from damaging the marble-work. In turning the building into a museum, Atatürk was acting on the same impulse that had inspired Fatih’s action. In a particularly striking effort to recast Fatih as an exemplar of religious tolerance, Ecevit offered American readers the following anecdote:

In [Aya Sofya] were some of the finest mosaics that Byzantine artists had executed, depicting scenes from the bible. Yet representation of the human form was forbidden by the Mohammadan religion. So the new rulers of the city, who were of the Mohammadan faith, had no choice but to destroy them. Could Mehmet the Conqueror, the liberal Sultan who was later to bring over the famous Italian artist Bellini to his court to do his portrait allow such an act? For nearly five centuries the whole world believed that he did! But a few years after Turkey became a secular republic in the first half of this century and restoration work was started in Santa Sophia, which was to be turned into a museum, it was discovered that Mehmet the Conqueror had only had those mosaics covered with sheets of durable cloth, upon which thin layers of plaster had been applied. So when the plaster and the sheets of cloth were removed, the mosaics were there – as fresh as they were in 1453.

Just as Conquest Day [Fetih Günü] had been an opportunity to celebrate nationalism, secularism and tolerance, it also became a prime opportunity to express previously stifled

---

feelings of Istanbul nostalgia that had begun to emerge in the previous decade. Yet this was not the nostalgia of pious Anatolian peasants. Rather it was that of the Republican elite for Istanbul’s yalıs [waterfront mansions], meyhanes [wine bars], coffeehouses and other vanishing charms. As present-day writers like Cengiz Çandar and Orhan Pamuk vividly remember, the unrivalled purveyor of old Istanbul’s charms was Reşat Ekrem Koçu and the illustrator Münif Fehim Özarman. During the 10 days leading up to the 29th, for example, Cumhuriyet ran series by Koçu filled with legends and anecdotes romanticizing Istanbul life in the previous centuries, while Hafta magazine published pieces such as ‘Entertainments of Old Istanbul.’ The success these features enjoyed helped inspire Haluk Y. Şehsuvaroğlu’s Istanbul Through the Centuries, which declared that ‘In our houses, our possessions, our costumes and our means of transportation we always chose the best and most beautiful. There is no doubt that among these many beauties the elegance and dress of our women occupied the most refined place.’ Interestingly, in a similar feature put out by the bank Yapı Kredi, author Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar described how Istanbulites had discovered pleasures of the Bosphorus a century ago while waxing eloquent about the Princess Islands and the beach at Şile.

---

243 See Orhan Kocak on the emergence of such nostalgia in the 1940s in ‘Westernization Against the West,’ in Kerslake et. al., Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity, 315.
244 Cengiz Çandar, Muhteşem Tehlike, Radikal, 28 November 2012. In Istanbul, Pamuk devotes a reverential chapter to Koçu’s work, but nonetheless depicts him as a failed imitator of the Western encyclopedic style who never realized the importance of prioritizing fact over anecdote. Alternatively, Koçu could be seen as a consummate imitator of the Western popular history style, perhaps even someone who improved upon the genre defined by works like Ripley’s Believe It Or Not, by interspersing serious archival research in with his historical curiosities and tales of the macabre. Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul: Hâtilar ve Şehir, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003), 157-158.
246 Şehsuvaroğlu, Asırlar Boyunca, 173.
The 1953 anniversary also saw the publication of a great deal of poetry, building on a pre-existing genre which combined Republican, nationalist themes and nostalgia for elite life in late Ottoman Istanbul. Compilations like Bosphorus Poems, A Turkish Treasury, The Legend of Istanbul’s Conquest and Constantinople the Red Apple offered a sometimes unexpected mix of references and metaphors. In a poem, called Switzerland on the Bosporus, for example, A Turkish Treasury, describes the towns of Arnavutkoy, Hisar and Kandilli as the East’s Switzerland, “full of music and fun in the summer.”\(^{248}\) A subsequent poem about Rumelihisari begins on a similar note, describing the two shores of the Bosphorus kissing, arguing, smiling and shouting like jealous lovers. Then, after a few lines about nightingales, the poem ends on a more nationalistic note. After describing the castle itself as an unequaled symbol of sovereignty, literally, one that causes the [Turkish] race to taste the city’s conquest [tattırır ırkına fethin tadımı], the poem concludes by nationalizing Islamic symbolism, stating that the castle is the Ka’ba stone of Turkishness [Türklüğün bir de budur Kabe taşı!]. A subsequent poem about Camlica described it as a the starting point for the road to the Altai Mountains, to the land of Turan and “our Asia,” invoking a string of nationalist reference points, while the next poem described the area around Kadikoy as the Marmara’s cornice, resembling Nice in its temperateness and being “an open window to Europe.”

The eclectic synthesis of reference points found in such poems can also be understood as part of the a broader discourse on Ottoman history that had emerged in historical fiction, movies and popular magazines during the late 1940s, and early 1950s, when increased

\(^{248}\) Arnavüköyle Hisar, Kandilli / Doğu Isviçresidir besbelli / Andırlı dört Kantonu ünlü Boğaz / Calgısı eğlentisi bol her yaz.
print freedom and rising national prosperity combined to create an explosion of new media.

Perhaps the most famous writer associated with this trend was Feridun Fazil Tülbentçi. In addition to his popular historical radio show, Tülbentçi was known for his many works of historical fiction. In 1948 the CHP’s party newspaper *Ulus* serialized his novel *Hayrettin Barbarossa Is Coming* [*Hayrettin Barbarosa Geliyor*]. For the equivalent of four hundred and fifty odd pages, Tülbentçi’s ‘ruddy Turkish mariners’ fight constantly to protect the Muslims of North Africa, many of whom are refugees from Spanish cruelty in Andalusia, from the machinations of Christian states by trying to incorporate them into the Ottoman state. Yet the emirs and sheiks who rule North Africa repeatedly betray their Turkish would-be saviors by conspiring with the Christians to ‘sell out’ their country for petty personal gain. At a time when Turkish politicians were first suggesting that Turkey could lead an anti-Communist alliance of Eastern Mediterranean states, Tülbentçi’s novel depicts Ottoman Turks bravely defending their Arab co-religionists against European imperial adventures.

On a more personal level, the Barbarossa brothers enjoy drinking wine - in moderation - and carousing – chastely - with slave girls, even while fighting a ‘jihad’ on behalf of their ‘religious brothers’, the Arabs. Meanwhile, the Barbarossa brothers have a loyal Christian ally, a former priest named Danilo. Danilo provides comic relief as something of a coward and a boor, but also uses his quick thinking and foreign language skills to save

---

249 Tülbentçi, *Barbaraso*, 7
250 Ibid, 95.
the Turkish heroes. He eventually undergoes a half-hearted conversion to Islam, after which his companions acknowledge he is ‘not a full Muslim… but a good man’. 251

[Figure 17]

This mix of Turkish nationalism, Muslim solidarity and scantily-clad women also informed a new genre of popular history magazines that served as one of the most visible venues for Ottoman history in the 1950s. Diverse titles such as *Turkish History* [Türk Tarihi], *Voices from History* [Tarihten Sesler] and *Resimli Tarih Mecmuası* [Illustrated History Journal] wove together Ottoman nostalgia, tributes to Ottoman modernity, glorification of Ottoman military might and investigations of Ottoman religiosity, all the while trying to appeal to buyers with bizarre tales and muted eroticism. Among these magazines, *History World* [Tarih Dunyası] and *History Treasury* [Tarih Hanesi] stand out as the two most deserving of further analysis, both for their enduring commercial success throughout the decade, heated, often personal antagonism with one another and distinct ideological approaches.

*History World* was the creation of publisher Niyazi Ahmet Banoğlu. Banoğlu had begun his career writing a few short, salacious pieces of Ottoman-themed historical fiction such as ‘The Slave-Girl Galleon’ for *Istanbul Magazine* in the 1930s, then collaborated with Münif Fehim to tell the stories of Ottoman and Republican era men in the *Turkish Heroes* [Türk Kahramanlar] series during the 1940s. 252 Working with better known historians such as Ismail Hakki Uzunçarşılıoğlu and Ahmet Refik, Banoğlu went on to cover such

251 Ibid, 366.
252 ‘Esir Kızlar Kalyonu,’ 12 Teşri Nisan, Sayi 23. This was followed by ‘The Girl from the Sky [Gökten Düşen Kız]’ on 19 Teşri Nisan (Sayi 24), and on 25 Sonteşrin (Issue 36) a story about a heart-broken Circassian dying for his beloved.
topics such as: ‘Sultan Mecit and the Intrigues of the Palace Women’, \(^{253}\) ‘the Anniversary of Coffee in Turkey’, \(^{254}\) ‘Abdulhamid and Women’, \(^{255}\) ‘The Sultan’s Hamam in the Harem’, \(^{256}\) ‘Poison and Poisoning in History’, \(^{257}\) and ‘Marie Antoinette’s Secret Love’. \(^{258}\) In keeping with their contents, Banoğlu’s covers generally featured either heroic portraits of Sultans, battle scenes with valorous Turkish soldiers, or European depictions of harem slaves and dancing girls.

In one of his first pieces for the new magazine, Banoğlu retold the story of an adulteress’s stoning from Ahmet Refik’s *Women’s Sultanate [Kadınlar Sultanati]* in colorful fashion, complete with a ‘young and beautiful wife,’ her ‘shrill and soul-piercing cries’, and a bloodthirsty crowd intent on killing the ‘dirty, treacherous… harlot’. \(^{259}\) [Figure 18] The exploits of Ottoman Kadis gave Banoğlu another opportunity to combine serious historical research, Kemalist ideological critique and prurient detail: ‘After the end of the Ottoman Empire’s Golden Age the Kadis… [did] whatever it took to weaken and destroy this multi-continent empire’. \(^{260}\) An account of all the Kadis ‘hair-raising’ verdicts would ‘surpass even a twentieth century murder novel in bloodiness’. In fact, Banoğlu planned to offer his readers just this, with stories of Kadıs ‘feeding human flesh to dogs, hanging women from their breasts and men from other parts, and chaining men by the nose as if they were bears….”

\(^{253}\) *Tarih Dunyasi* [bound volume], (Istanbul: Şaka Matbaası 1950), 404.
\(^{254}\) Ibid, 400.
\(^{255}\) Ibid, 443.
\(^{256}\) Ibid, 448.
\(^{257}\) Ibid, 435.
\(^{258}\) Ibid, 450.
\(^{259}\) Ibid, 37.
\(^{260}\) Derviş Karamanoğlu, ‘Osmanlı Tarihinde Kadı Şekavetleri,’ ibid, 40.
But while he titillated readers with these accounts, Banoğlu also acted as the voice of national virtue. In discussing odalesques, for example Banoğlu made sure to add caveats, pointing out that these women were ‘no different from mistresses in western palaces.’ And if there were any differences they were in the odalesques favor, as these women were not married to anyone else. Banoğlu also took issue with the content of historical films. Under the headline ‘They Are Killing History’, he wrote: ‘If these people had a love of history, if they had a pride in their Turkishness inspired by the past, they wouldn't grasp at these themes... To reduce men who made history like Yıldırım Beyazit, Fatih, Yavuz Sultan Selim, Barbaros, Kanuni Süleyman to indecisive characters on the silver screen is an unforgivable sin’. Worse yet, ‘Hürrem Sultan's headgear makes her look like a gypsy dancing girl’. (Indeed, many of these films prioritized sex over history to such an extent that even Akbaba – a satirical magazine with its own fondness for toplessness – could not help but poke fun [Figure 19]).

But Banoğlu’s moments of moralism were not enough for Ibrahim Hakkı Konyalı. After collaborating with Banoğlu’s for six issues and authoring such articles as ‘Cariyeler and the Slave Bazaar,’ Konyalı left to start his own magazine, History Treasury [Tarih Hazinesi], citing ideological differences. From the outset, Konyalı, who worked for the Turkish Military Museum while also contributing to the controversial Islamist paper Büyük Doğu, took a more religiously nationalistic tone. ‘Every Turkish state or political organization was a link in the timeless chain of Turkish history,’ he declared in the magazine’s first issue, but the Ottoman State was the ‘most civilized,’ sparkling jewel set

---

261 Ibid, 1512.
262 Tarih Hazinesi 26 November 1952.
263 Ibid, Issue 1, 15 November 1950.
in this chain. The ‘necessary anger [husumet]’ that must be felt against the last few ‘degenerate [dejenere]’ Sultans should not sully six and a half centuries of ‘glowing [parlak]’ history.

Alongside pieces about Istanbul’s prostitutes and ‘The Drunkard’s Holiday’, Konyali published a number of articles that others at the time would have characterized as ‘reactionary’. He wrote that Turkey’s ability to stand on its feet after World War One was a tribute to its faith in Islam, and that the Turkish nation had finally come to itself with the 1950 ‘Democratic revolution’. He praised Abdulhamid for chastising the CUP leaders who suggested he flee Istanbul during World War One, and suggested in a later article that had Abdulhamid stayed in power he would have been to wise to enter the war in the first place. In subsequent issues he blamed the Republican regime and its reforms for the dilapidated state of Istanbul’s mosques and Tombs (‘if Turks are not afraid before God they should at least be embarrassed in front of tourists’), and reminded readers that Fatih had wanted Ayasofya to remain a mosque for all eternity (‘and asked god to curse those who didn’t fulfill this order’).

On May 29, 2010, Istanbul celebrated Conquest Day with speeches, re-enactments and a laser light show. Along the city walls, men dressed in Janissary costumes and fake mustaches marched alongside uniformed military academy students and scantily clad drum majorettes. Kadir Topbas, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) mayor of

---

264 Ibid.
265 Ibid, 281 and 254.
266 Ibid.
268 'Abdulhamid’in İttihatcilara ve Sultan Reşada Verdiği Ders,' Tarih Hazinesi [Bound Volume], 8.
269 Ibid, 512.
270 Ibid, 828.
Istanbul, stressed the fact that within three days of taking the city Fatih ordered the Janissaries back to their barracks to restore order. Fatih, it seemed, supported the AKP in its struggle to establish civilian control of the military. A Turkish military officer, by contrast, spoke about the many characteristics Fatih and Atatürk shared. Later that night, tens of thousands of people gathered along the Golden Horn as a laser light show began with a rainbow, symbolizing Fatih’s tolerance, projected over the city.

As the subsequent debate over the Ottoman-era soap opera Muhteşem Yüzyıl revealed, the Ottoman legacy remains very much up for debate in Turkey. Islamic politicians have done their best to solidify the Empire’s reputation for piety. Meanwhile many liberals have embraced it as a multicultural model for a more pluralistic Turkey, while many nationalists still see it as a proud symbol of Turkish military might. If nothing else, all of this makes clear that Turkey’s newfound enthusiasm for all things Ottoman not just the rediscovery of an authentic past from which the country was severed in the Republican Era. Rather, it is a new act of religious, transnational or national appropriation, or in many cases a blend of all three.

Contemporary political debates have often pushed historians, whatever side they support, toward seeing Republican Turkish history as a struggle between Kemalist reform and popular resistance. Rejecting the now-discredited teleology of secularism, authors such as Gavin Brocket and Şükrü Hanoğlu have instead moved toward a teleology of contemporary Turkish Islamism, in which the past half century has been a gradual progression away from the Republican radicalism towards a more authentic, Ottoman-
inspired alternative modernity. This narrative often relegates the 1950s to being little more than an unstable transitional period, in which the excesses of Republican nationalism and secularism had been challenged but not yet reversed.

Instead, during this decade democratic competition brought both political parties toward an increasingly coherent cultural vision that deserves to be recognized as an ‘alternative modernity’ in its own right, and one with surprisingly longevity in Turkish discourse. The collective popular-culture understanding of the Ottoman Empire that emerged during this era has itself proved remarkably durable, whether in the numerous Ottomans-versus-Byzantines films of Cuneyt Arkin or even Mutehşem Yüzyıl. Not only were the nationalist and liberal discourses about Ottoman history products of this era, but even the current Islamist appropriation of the Ottoman past cannot be understood independent of what happened in the 1950s. Simply put, when contemporary Islamists argue that Ottoman piety should serve as a model for the contemporary Republic, they take it for granted that Turkish citizens see the Ottoman Empire as a powerful, civilized Turkish state worthy of emulation – that is, as they learned to see it during the Kemalist appropriation of the 1940s and 1950s.

Finally, recognizing the political roots of ‘Ottoman tolerance’ forces us to consider the role of political forces in the subsequent development of that discourse. While historians have been quick to identify the relationship between knowledge and power among 19th and 20th century nationalist historians, they have never acknowledged that a similar

---

relationship drives the contemporary critique of nationalist historiography. The Ottoman Empire’s transformation from a ‘Turkish’ power in the 1950s to an exemplar of multiculturalism and tolerance within academic circles mirrors a wider transformation in the field of history over the same period. Increasingly, historians have moved beyond the restrictive lens of national history in order to better understand cultural networks and relationships that transcend traditional boundaries. This approach has done a great deal to advance the field, yet in many cases, scholars, in their eagerness to explore new avenues of inquiry opened by this transnational perspective, have been insufficiently aware of the extent to which transnationalism, like the nationalist perspective that preceded it, is the product of political circumstances.

Just as the Turkish government transformed the Ottoman Empire into a symbol of Turkish national power during the 1940s and 1950s, beginning in the 1990s transnational institutions such as the European Union as well as a more internationally-oriented Turkish government have used their resources to transform the Ottoman Empire into a symbol of religious and cultural tolerance. At the risk of oversimplifying, where 19th century nation-states promoted the work of nationalist historians who provided embellished accounts of their nations' historic origins, transnational institutions now play a similar role in promoting the work of historians whose accounts of a pre-national, multicultural past seem to offer a model for overcoming current national conflicts. The EU, which has an obvious interest in promoting stability and international co-operation along its borders, has funded museums, conferences, universities and individual scholars that promote a vision of the Ottoman Empire conducive to this goal. Some accounts, for
example, replace the old myth of five centuries of Turkish-Greek hatred with a new myth of cooperation and Christian-Islamic syncretism. Karagöz has become ‘Ottoman’ in the sense of being part of a shared regional culture, while Mimar Sinan’s Armenian ancestry serves as evidence of Ottoman pluralism. Remaining attentive to these political dynamics is necessary to ensure that admirable political goals do not fuel the creation of dangerously romanticized history.
“[T]he old European section of Istanbul glittered at the end of the broad half-mile of bridge with the slim minarets lancing up into the sky and the domes of the mosques, crouching at their feet, looking like big firm breasts. It should have been the Arabian Nights, but to Bond, seeing it first above the tops of trams and above the great scars of modern advertising along the river frontage, it seemed a once beautiful theatre-set that modern Turkey had thrown aside in favour of the steel and concrete flat-iron of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, blankly glittering behind him on the heights of Pera.”272

-- Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love*

Before being replaced by cars, trams were one of the Istanbul’s proudest symbols of modernity. They feature prominently in countless drawings of the city’s famous monuments, passing alongside a mosque or fountain as if included by the artist as a reminder that these historic buildings were located in a modern, 20th century, not a timeless oriental fantasy-scape. The very contrast that had caused Bond such disappointment was, for many Istanbul residents depicting their city, exactly the point.273

This chapter examines the unique challenge faced by nationalists in an age of modernization who sought to celebrate aspects of their country’s history or rural geography that could also to mark them as “Oriental.” The British never had to worry that tourists would think the Beefeaters represented the pride and strength of the country's army. Non-Western countries, however, after having been long viewed through an essentialized orientalist lens, portrayed as irrevocably traditional and indistinguishable from their pasts, needed to develop special techniques for celebrating their history

273 As Sibel Bozdoğan has discussed, the Istanbul Hilton was one of the most prominent, widely acclaimed and self-consciously modern buildings built during the 1950s, making its inclusion in Fleming’s passage all the more striking. *Modernism and Nation Building* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
without being seen as a part of it. The wholesale ideological re-appropriation of the Ottoman past discussed in the previous chapter represents the most direct and comprehensive approach to this challenge, but there were a number of other responses as well, intended to establish a modern relationship between Turkey and its history.

This chapter begins by looking at the use of modern features like trams in visual representation of Ottoman-era monuments to frame them in a modern context. Civic efforts to surround these same monuments with parks, gardens and fences were, I argue, part of a parallel effort to mark them as distinct from the modern city. In magazines, authors writing about history also used literary and visual techniques to position the reader as a modern individual investigating the past from a self-confidently modern perspective. Indeed the frequent use of 19th-century European Orientalist motifs was one of these techniques.

In the realm of geography, this chapter examines two different approaches to depicting Eastern Anatolia and proclaiming its Turkishness in mainstream, almost exclusively urban publications. The first presented Eastern Anatolia through the lens of scholarly investigation, using academic inquiry as a pretext for visiting the region and academic findings as grounds for asserting its Turkishness. The second approach presented the region through the lens of tourism. During the 1950s, many publications presented Eastern Anatolia destination for recreational travel, using features which had touristic appeal – from elements of natural beauty to the physical appeal of local women – in proclaiming it Turkish.
As with other chapters, this one focuses on the evidence of a shared discourse that transcended partisan political divisions. In part because the world of Turkish publishing was particularly close-knit during the late 1940s and 1950s, authors frequently moved between journals and editors would often publish writers whose views differed considerably from theirs. Thus in order to generalize about popular print culture from the period, I have sought to pick examples from individuals and publications representing opposing backgrounds. Considering men like Ahmet Banoglu and Ibrahim Hakki Konyalı side by side helps reveal the extent of the unified vision for Turkish modernization that existed in this period.

Before examining the visual and architectural strategies used by Turkey’s mid-century writers, artists and urban planners to present their country’s history from a modern perspective, it is worth briefly outlining what they were up against. As many Turks were acutely aware, particularly those elites who most regularly interacted with foreigners, the perception of Turkey as an “oriental” country in the full meaning of the word was still widespread in the 1940s and 50s. Whether articulated by Ian Fleming or the anonymous creator of [Figure 20], Turkey’s “oriental” essence was still regularly described with explicit reference to the Arabian Nights well into the opening decade of the Cold War. While initial contacts with American soldiers and diplomats might have gradually changed American perceptions about Turkey, they quite often provided Turks with further evidence, whether it was needed or not, of how their country was viewed.

---

274 One striking example of how personal relationships transcended ideological divisions came in a handwritten letter from Zakeriya Sertel preserved in Ibrahim Hakki Konyalı’s personal papers. Sertel, in jail for his communist sympathies, had sent Konyalı a letter asking for help in arranging for a doctor’s visit.
This image was owned as a piece of mid-century “folk-art” by a collector at the US Naval War College. The slightly washed out caption reads “Pardon effendi Charles, but all my goods are black… please… the only blonde is coffee-hanume!!! But if effendi wishes so, she will also be available…” The sign in the lower right reads “Istanbul, 10 miles.” In 1947, the USS aircraft carrier Missouri returned the body of Ambassador Necmettin Ertegun to Turkey for a funeral, or, in the words of one diplomat “whatever the Turks do upon such an occasion.” At the level of high politics, the Missouri’s visit marked an important show of American support for Turkey in opening stages of the cold war. But at a social level it also provided an opportunity for an unprecedented level of personal interaction between ordinary Americans and residents of Istanbul. Reflecting positively on the occasion in an article titled “While Bidding Farewell To Our Esteemed Guests, the American Naval Units” a Vakit journalist nonetheless observed:

> It cannot be claimed that there no longer exist today Americans who think that the Turks still wear the shalvar and the fez. As a matter of fact, a picture in one of the sailors’ cabins of the Missouri shows a sketch of Istanbul with baggy trousered and fezzed people on it.

Indeed, an article from the same day quoted a sailor from Chicago saying:

> We have been living in fairy tales for the past three days. When I was a small boy, my mother used to tell me stories and one of them was about a country where one had only to whistle to make all his wishes come true. Here, your wishes seem to come true the moment you start thinking about them. It really is a dreamland.

It seems that the State Department was neither exaggerating nor romanticizing the situation when it began an instruction manual for incoming staff – “Guide to Turkey: A

---


Land for Pioneers” – by saying: “Turkey may make you think of sultans and veiled women, of men in baggy trousers and red fezzes, of Turkish delight, Turkish coffee and Turkish baths.” Indeed, this seems to be what many among the incoming staff were initially thinking. Bülent Ecevit offered a light-hearted take on the way American soldiers and diplomats responded when these expectations were dashed:

To many of them the name Turkey implied an exotic oriental country, with low divans covered with oriental rugs, hookahs, large braziers with burning charcoal in the middle of rooms, round brass trays on low stands with shining brass pitchers on them containing the attar of roses, walls decorated with tiles and miniatures, women wearing long pants in the harem style, and so forth… Well we did not have any of these any more. Nor did we have the long trails of camels passing through the streets that most Americans wanted to see... Our friends from the New World would not stand so much disappointment. Something should be done about it. With no help coming from the Turks, they took the initiative in the true pioneer spirit. They cleared the old bazaars of all the articles left on the shelves from the old days. They bought old rugs, hookahs, brass pitchers, braziers and trays, they toured the whole country to buy the clothes that women used to wear during the imperial period. They bought tiles and miniatures…. Now when a Turk wants to show his son the way his forefathers furnished and decorated their homes, he takes them to some of his American friends in Ankara.

It is only against the prevalence of these associations that we can understand the care Turks took in presenting their past. As Ahmet Banoğlu explained in his preface to the first issue of his re-issued *History World*:

> In foreign countries there are hundreds and hundreds of works published about Turkey, thousands upon thousands of articles, and we still haven’t been able to collect all of them. We must know how foreigners have seen us throughout all of history so that we may prepare our plan of action against them accordingly. [Yabancıların bizi, butun tarih boyunca nasıl gördüklerini bilmeliyiz ki, biz onlara karşı hareket tarzımızı idare edelim.]

---

278 Americans in Turkey Really Go Turkish. Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, October 17, 1954. Ecevit’s personal papers
279 *Yeni Tarihi Dünyası*, Volume 1, Issue 1.
In some sense, Banoğlu anticipates Said, but as a nationalist call to arms. He also offers a reprise of Atatürk’s famous conversation with Afet Inan, a conversation in which she discovers a European textbook describing Turks as members of the yellow race and Atatürk responds that in that case they must write their own history. Yet Banoğlu, rather than see the mission as a matter of correcting false scholarship with more accurate research, instead presents a more explicitly politicized mission couched in the language of visual perspective. Banoğlu articulates the challenge as one of public relations or image-management. And indeed these were the terms in which many Turkish writers, politicians and artists took up the campaign. In planning, recording and transforming Turkey’s urban fabric, in photographing historic re-enactments, designing museums and promoting tourism, participants in creating Turkey’s mid-century visual culture relied on an overlapping, mutually-reinforcing set of visual and rhetorical techniques in order to proclaim their own modernity and that of their country.

In a 1951 feature called “Istanbul Yesterday and Today” the staff of *Tarihi Dunyasi* sought to emphasize the extent of Istanbul’s transformation over the previous half-century with a celebration of all the things that ruined the city’s “Arabian nights” magic for James Bond. As can be seen [Figure 21] pairs of photographs showed identical buildings and locations fifty years apart with captions explicitly mentioning the presence of “cars” “electric trams” and “buses” as well as the civilized or “medeni” outfits on the pedestrians. One for example, states: “In front of Sirkeci station, 50 years ago was a space where drifters and stray dogs wandered.” On the right it reads “The same space today has become a car park, and nothing resembling its state 50 years ago remains.” In
these photos the historic buildings – Yeni Cami, Sirkeci and the British Consulate – serve to mark the city’s identity. They are the essence of Istanbul against which the cities modernization, as defined by the appearance of cars and trams, can be measured.

Of the many efforts to frame Istanbul’s history by presenting it in scenes alongside visual markers of modernity, one of the most striking comes from a collection of press and publicity photos taken to document one of the first performances of Turkey’s newly-formed mehter band during the 1953 conquest celebrations. [Figure 22] Ibrahim Hakki Konyali, who as an employee of the Turkish Military Museum was instrumental in reinventing the mehter tradition as a celebration of nation’s martial history, preserved a number of these photos. Tellingly, most highlight, rather than seeking to conceal, the modern context in which these historical re-enactors moved. A number of them show uniformed members of the modern Turkish military inspecting and reviewing the mehter troop. In several others, the band is posed against an urban backdrop, standing in front of a block of apartment buildings or walking to the site of one of their performances on a modern road. Finally, several photographs show the photographers documenting the band with, standing prominently in the shots with their cameras. In one of these images, the journalists are joined by two Turkish workers who have stopped to observe the spectacle with shovels on their shoulders. And in perhaps the most striking image [Figure 23] a line of janissaries parade underneath a prominent sign for Beykoz brand shoes hanging on a wall above them. All of these elements, in short, served to highlight that this was a

280 Mehter bands were a part of the janissary corps during the Ottoman golden age whose kettle-drum and bass heavy music accompanied troops into battle. They reappeared in symbolic form first briefly in the Turkish war of independence and then again for the 500th anniversary celebrations. Photos: Konyali Archive, Document Nos 280-281.
performance of Turkish military history, set off from the modern Turkish present by the actions of the observing soldiers, journalists and workers.\textsuperscript{281}

In this visual realm it is also possible to identify stylistic techniques that suggest a more elaborate form of framing, where the artist seems to be providing visual cues for how the viewer should position himself vis-as-vis the historic images, and by extension the history, he is viewing. The image with which Münif Fehim introduces the book \textit{Famous Men} [Picture 6] shows a man at his desk holding the book and dreaming of the historic figures contained within; in short, an illustration of the presumed reader himself. The man is wearing a dinner jacket. On the desk is a telephone and a bust of Atatürk, while another picture of Atatürk hangs on the wall. The images in the man’s mind are Cleopatra, perhaps Antony or Caesar, and Barbarossa, an Ottoman figure set in a pantheon of established, European historical greats. In essence, the image seems intended to position the reader of the book as a thoroughly modern Republican youth whose enjoyment of history from a 20\textsuperscript{th} century vantage point is a perfectly healthy pastime.

A similar form of framing appears in the frequent images of men standing beside Istanbul’s historic columns. I would suggest that much as such figures were a classic tool for showing visual scale, they also, with their inevitable suits and bowler hats, offer a parallel form of chronological scale. The in the image at left, shown looking up at the Kız Taşı [Figure 24] can again stand in for the viewer, a modern Istanbul resident with a

\textsuperscript{281} The photographs of the event that appeared in newspapers at the time also show similar juxtopositions, for example an image from Cumhurriyet of the Mehter troop face to face with a number of attendees at a Dolmabahçe Garden Party, including clean-cut professionally dressed men and women wearing fancy hats.
natural curiosity about his city’s history.\textsuperscript{282} This image also features a row of modern apartment buildings visible behind the column, while another image, from \textit{History World}, shows a gentleman in a three piece suit, bowtie and umbrella in front of a different ancient column.\textsuperscript{283}

There is also a parallel to be seen in the way urban design in 1950s Istanbul served to physically impose a similar frame on the city’s historic buildings. Previously, scholars have discussed the tremendous change in Istanbul’s urban fabric that took place under Menderes between 1956 and 1957. Widely criticized today for the damage it did to Istanbul’s old city, the government bulldozed large swaths of historic neighborhoods to open new, straight avenues through the city’s historic peninsula. Several dozen historic buildings, a few by Mimar Sinan, were destroyed. The gate through which Fatih supposedly entered the city was torn down to make way for the Avenue of the Nation, while a new avenue raising from Beşiktaş was named after Hayrettin Barbarosa. At the same time, the government sought to restore the more prominent Ottoman monuments that were not destroyed. This involved both renovating them and clearing away surrounding buildings to draw greater attention to them. Thus monumental architecture from the Ottoman golden age – Mimar Sinan mosques or the Rumeli Hisarı – where restored and rebuilt while the 19\textsuperscript{th} century wooden buildings around or even in them were demolished as part of the same process. With this done, the historic buildings were usually surrounded with a carefully maintained, fenced in park, setting them off from the rest of the city’s urban fabric and marking them distinct historic sites. As Nur Altınyıldız

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Asırlar Boyunca}, 11. \\
\textsuperscript{283} \textit{Tarih Hazinesi}, 171.
argues, in restoring Ottoman monuments, the government sought to “return them to their past majesty and display them in their new contexts… Each would be viewed like a carefully framed easel painting, from vistas created along the roads and between the newly constructed buildings bordering them.”284 [Figure 25] The frame, in a sense, was modernity.

After replacing wooden houses – often inhabited and built literally up against the walls of stone structures from earlier centuries – with parks, the government then highlighted their efforts in tourist brochures and election propaganda, thereby making the symbolic importance of the change seem even more worthy of analysis. Removing these buildings served to create a direct link between Istanbul as a modern city and its idealized, Westernized, nationalized Golden Age while cutting out the physically and chronologically intervening evidence of “oriental” decay and backwardness. In short the DP government decided to destroy the city’s crumbling wooden structures for the same reason they appealed to 19th century orientalist painters – because they symbolized the decline of a once great civilization, the dilapidated modern state into which the East had sunk.

Though it is impossible to marshal hard evidence for this reading, both the language through which these urban redesign projects were promoted and the reactions they inspired among foreign observers bolster its plausibility. In 1952, for example, the Ministry of Education published a book showing all that the DP government had done

---

since coming to power to modernize Istanbul and develop the “touristic importance of its historic richness.” Among other things the work mentioned was that now in the Spice Market “a variety of things” could be purchased “within a modern market setting” [modern çarsı dekovir içinde]. Publicized side-by-side were the government’s efforts to restore Istanbul’s old water fountains and develop a new infrastructure to deliver water with modern pipes and a modern dam.285

Bülent Ecevit, as was his wont, also provides one for the clearest articulations of this vision in discussing what should be done with what little historical architecture the city of Ankara possessed. Ecevit claimed it was necessary to renovate Ankara Castle while destroying the decrepit neighborhoods around it:

In Ankara’s old neighborhoods it is impossible to live in a healthy, civilized manner compatible with Turkey’s Westernization [sihhi, medeni, ve Türkiyedeki batılilasma hareketine uygun bir hayat sürulemez]. Preserving some neighborhoods or buildings because they are important from an architectural, historic or archeological perspective is one thing. Trying to preserve their livelihood [hayatyet] as an anachronism [anakronizm] is something else. However admirable the first is, the second is as useless an effort.286

Ecevit insisted that before these neighborhoods were emptied [meskun bölge olmaktan çıkarılması] ample provisions must be made for their “low income” residents to achieve the conditions of modern life. Then the castle, which “might be the site of Ankara’s best views” could have its slopes planted with tress, and, following “some work and expenditure” beautify Ankara to no end.

In its current state Ankara Castle is a poor, unhealthy marginal neighborhood trying to continue its existence despite having outlived its allotted time. But by clearing it out and making it an open-air museum [açık hava müzesi], this place

could become Ankara’s most beautiful and interesting spot, and the Republic’s
capital would gain a touristic value.  

Ecevit’s effort to enhance Ankara’s touristic appeal fits with the response of the US Consul when the Menderes government carried out a very similar program to what Ecevit recommended in the historic Fatih district of Istanbul. Commenting on the “raising and removal of hundreds of old, wooden houses that line Atatürk boulevard.” Robert Miner declared “They were, in the opinion of such old-fashioned people as myself, picturesque, but I suppose they were also unsightly, and they certainly were, or would shortly become, unsafe.” In acknowledging the illegitimacy of his own orientalist appreciation for the “picturesque,” Miner both tacitly accepts the government’s practical interest in “modernizing” this aspect of the city’s architecture, but also implicitly endorses their cultural or symbolic motives.

A cartoon from the period appearing in Cumhuriyet [Figure 26] reinforces the idea that the valuable, “historic” aspects of Istanbul were distinct from those that made the city appear un-modern. It does so, of course, by mocking the idea that one might confuse the two or mistake the “shabby” architectural legacy of late 19th century Istanbul with the truly important parts of its history. As both Ecevit and the cartoon’s author implicitly understood, taking a modern approach to one’s history required having the ability to distinguish between the ruined and the historic.

---

287 Ibid.
288 Similar in results, at least. Ecevit shared the consul’s concern, that in its haste to demolish old buildings, the government failed to find alternative housing for the displaced.
289 Letter from Robert Miner to Counselor of Embassy John Goodyear, September 12, 1956. RG 59 General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Lot File no 58 D 61, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 2.
More broadly, the idea that a careful policy of renovation could demonstrate a country’s modernity by transforming the old into the historic is reinforced by the approach found throughout the magazine Tourism World [Turizm Alemi], Turkey’s first publication devoted to promoting domestic and foreign tourism. As Tourism World declared in its first issue “Tourism is an important endeavor taking its place among our many development questions.” In this context, restoring old buildings was seen as an extension of building a modern city around them. “Included in our proposed program is taking necessary precautions to preserve our historic monuments from ruin… In connection with this it is also necessary to bring into existence appropriate and original entertainment “districts [gayet cazip ve original eğlence mahaller] where tourists will spend money freely.” More explicitly in discussing Konya, the magazine declared “Alongside modern buildings, old monuments are being restored. Behind them factories, economic agricultural and business enterprises, art schools, sports clubs, a stadium, a velodrome, parks and gardens give the city a modern, civilized countenance.”

Moreover, the magazine implied that Europeans had long understood the link between being modern and preserving one’s history:

[The French] look after the most minor structures from the Gothic period like a delicate bride. They repair Roman buildings. Ten century old buildings are as sturdy as if they were built today because of the care expended on them. Not just the big cathedrals in Amiens, Vezelay, and Roun but the churches and bridges in the smallest and most remote towns smile at passersby with their brightened faces…. This means that to protect, beautify and restore monuments is not only a condition for being a nation but at the same time one of the highest honors.

---

290 Turizm Alemi, Issue 1, Editor’s preface.
291 Turizm Alemi, Issue 1, Page 6.
bestowed by membership in the civilization. [medeniyete mensup olmanın verdiği en yüksek şereflerden biri].

*Tourism World* also promoted the idea that bridges, roads and other staples of modernization were crucial for making Turkey’s historic and natural beauty accessible to tourists. Even Lake Van, to take the most implausible example, could become a “tourist center” with the addition of a “wide, up-to-date asphalt road” ringing its shore. Visitors to Akşehir could enjoy city’s poplar and fruit trees, its wave-capped lake, the carving and tile work on the Eşref Oğulları Mosque, but also “one of central Anatolia’s most modern beaches [plaj]” that had been built on the lake’s shore.⁹² Tourism was, after all, a “matter of organization.”

Finally, documenting the country’s historic monuments for tourists offered another opportunity to embed them in a modern context. The French, for example, not only preserved their history, “but have written volumes of articles about the cathedrals in every corner of the country, and published grand, grand catalogues of them.” Thus renovation and documentation were seen as inter-related aspects of modernizing history:

“To repaint valuable wood, marble and stone carvings and prevent foolishness like the covering of the original stone architecture with ugly white coating, to block the white-washing of monuments’ walls, the spread of grass on their roofs and the disregard or dirtying of their interiors and exteriors are among the first things to be done. At the same time, for every city’s youth to recognize their own monuments, useful things like photograph or model exhibits, brochures, paintings, and post carts should be prepared, which could also be a source of revenue.”

---

⁹² Ibid.
Once again, with reference to Europe, writers insisted that taking advantage of these modern techniques for documenting and publicizing historic cities and monuments was a means to elevate Turkey’s history and culture to the level of their Western counterparts.

“Anyone with any knowledge of the world will immediately recognize pictures of Vienna, Munich, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Brussels, Edinburgh, Cambridge, London, Amiens, Strasburg, Paris or Naples. But in our own country even the most educated among us still doesn’t know our cities well enough to tell Erzurum from Sivas, Diyarbakir from Mardin, Kayseri from Konya or even Bursa from Edirne. Because nothing has been done to publicize their profiles with photographs, pictures, designs or any of the many other means available. What a pity it is not even possible to find clear and well-taken postcards of all of Anatolia’s monuments, or even those in Istanbul.”  

In order to demonstrate the stakes involved in modernizing Istanbul’s tourist infrastructure and give a Western imprimatur to its editorial mission, Tourism World included an interview with one of the directors of France’s tourism bureau. Mr. Miraud explained:

"Today for Turkey to become a tourist country is a dream. Two years earlier I went to Istanbul. It had historic and natural beauty but I only stayed two days. And I have no intention of going back. Because you can't even find a restaurant with good vegetables or a hotel with a good view.... Istanbul just has nature and history. Besides this you can't find anything... To make Istanbul a tourist city if nothing else in at least some places a few legal rights must be recognized. For example in my opinion in an area including Beyoglu, Harbiye and Karakoy: a) legal gambling b) establishments open till dawn c) permission for naked "variety" shows d) all kinds of liquor freely sold e) all hotels open to men and women f) free exchange of all money."

If nothing else Mr. Miraud’s comments offer another reminder that, even in the 1950s, the obsession with appearing modern was hardly the product of some internal Turkish

---

293 Ibid.
294 Mr. Miraud also complained "In Istanbul nothing remains of the legendary East... Think about it. In Paris there are plenty of places showing Eastern dances that are open every night. People who go to Istanbul expecting to see better ones will be shocked.
complex operating in the absence of any external provocation. But more importantly it reinforces both the limitations and the possibilities of embracing a modern, touristic vision of history. Yes, being modern required well-cooked vegetables, toplessness and freely-flowing liquor. But for people with no objection to any of these things to begin with, it also meant that as soon as your country opened a few of the right sort of bars, restaurants and clubs, its old monuments, be they palaces, or even mosques, would be transformed from relics of a decaying Oriental civilization into legitimate sources of national pride.

***

In reminiscing about his childhood experience reading the work of Reşat Ekrem Koçu, Orhan Pamuk writes that while he found the works delightful, even arousing, at the time, he subsequently realized that they represented Koçu’s failed imitation of Western modernity. Koçu, the author of such popular history compendiums as *Turkish Istanbul*, *From Osman Gazi to Atatürk*, and *The Istanbul Encyclopedia*, offered readers a broad range of historical fact and anecdote, discussions of daily life and popular dress interspersed with tales of the macabre and bizarre, all illustrated with a consistent style of pen and ink drawings.

Koçu, Pamuk claims, aspired to write in the Western encyclopedic style, but never realized the importance of prioritizing fact over anecdote. Yet a radically different reading of Koçu is possible, in which his work, and that of his contemporaries, epitomized the modern genre of popular history, and perhaps even improved upon it by incorporating serious scholarly research. Previous scholars have connected the emergence

---

of popular history as a genre in America to the spread of mass literacy and the expansion of the market for print media. This explanation certainly fits with the Turkish case, where this genre came into its own as the generation that had been the focus of early Kemalist literacy campaigns reached maturity. Moreover, with the improvement in Turkey’s economic circumstances after World War Two and a newfound emphasis on free enterprise, publishers could not only obtain basic staples like paper and ink, but also make a profit from selling newspapers and magazines to the reading, paying, advertisement-consuming public.

That Turkish popular history as a genre owed something to Western precedents is suggested not only by stylistic similarities but also by the appearance of Turkish translations of paradigmatic works like Ripley’s Believe It Not, syndicated in the paper Cumhuriyet in the early 1950s. [Figure 27] Koçu’s famous “Strange and Curious Things from History” series, which made such an impression on young Orhan, demonstrated that rather than simply import sensationalist material from the West, Turkish scholars could find even more wondrous tales in their own Ottoman archives. At a time when many American intellectuals where horrified that the aspect of their culture that seemed most appealing to foreign audiences was low-brow material like Tarzan, it is striking to see Turkish authors importing these forms and making them more scholarly.

The illustration [Figure 28] of Kara Mehmet Pasha, “the vezir whose head was used as a football,” and “the cross – a terrifying method of execution,” appears squarely in line with the Ripley’s tradition. Yet in Koçu’s work such features appeared alongside his own

---

296 See Rubin, Archives of Authority.
extensive research into more serious topics, such as Istanbul’s architectural history or detailed accounts of court life. It also appeared alongside patriotic glorifications of Ottoman-Turkish heroes, especially in connection with Istanbul’s 500th anniversary celebrations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Fatih, Ulubatlı Hassan and Barbarosa appeared regularly in Koçu’s work, and needless to say were heavily featured in the special anniversary series he prepared for Cumhuriyet. Ideologically, Koçu’s approach fit nicely with the historiographical framework of his time, and the literary approach of editors like Banoğlu and Konyali. He used the Ottoman golden age as a source of national pride while finding in its later centuries a source of titillating tales of moral decay. That this entire Ottoman past could be conveyed with the same cartoon illustrations used to discuss US boxing heroes, Indian Maharajas, or, in a later Cumhuriyet feature, the evils of Soviet political life further exemplifies the use of modern forms to discuss historical content.

The popular history genre in Turkey, of which Koçu was an exemplar, had a more local intellectual lineage going back to the earlier Kemalist emphasis on history education that preceded the widespread introduction of American visual media in the 1950s. The explosion of the popular history genre in the 1950s was prefigured by the publication of Voices from History [Tarihten Sesler] in 1943. This work, which enjoyed a relatively long lifespan by the standards of mid-century media, took a populist approach that combined illustrations, a more lively writing style and, particularly after 1945, a less doctrinaire approach to the Republic’s recent history that still affirmed the essential elements of Kemalist thought. In doing so, it showed the way for later popular history
magazines that would simultaneously challenge Orientalist tropes in order to proclaim Turkey’s modernity, celebrate Turkey’s history, and still in doing so provide readers with consistent nudity.

The first issue of *Voices from History* began with a testament to the importance of history by the “famous thinker and philosopher Leibniz [Laypniç].” Beginning with this Western scholarly imprimture, the editors went on to explicitly link their project with the enlightenment, “principles of humanist thought” and rationalism. 297 The opening editorial then explained that a historical perspective [tarihçi görüş] was the source and wellspring of a national consciousness. Thus, the purpose of the magazine was to increase the appeal of a historiographical perspective among the people. 298

*Voices from History* played a crucial role in the transition from previous academic publications like *Belletin* to the genre of popular history that became widespread in the 1950s. *Voices* publisher Iskender Fahrettin Sertelli was a member of the Eminonu Halkevi who ran the magazine as a private enterprise. Sertelli was not a professor, but magazine articles were frequently written by authors with academic degrees. Compared to what came later, *Voices* had more unapologetically scholarly tone and mission (most 1950s journals did not mention Liebnitz) but at the same time was explicit about its populist mission.

---

297 *Voices from History*, Volume 1, Issue 1, page 1.
298 Ibid.
In one of the magazine’s first articles, Professor Abadan explained “we know that working with regard to popular feeling within a populist [halkçı] perspective and life-framework [hayat çerçevesi] is both necessary and foundational for success.” In a subsequent article Abadan praised historical novels in similar terms, highlighting their ability to convey historical understanding to the public. Indeed, when the magazine’s editor unexpectedly died shortly after publication began, Abadan framed his obituary in terms of Seretelli’s lifelong commitment to promoting history among the nation’s masses.

In its content, Sertelli’s work prefigured the historical magazines of the 50s with regular features such as “Old Istanbul” and “Stories from History.” Titles included “Sair Nedim: how did he save his head from the executioner’s blade,” “Varieties of Gangsters” and “Famous Poisonings in History.” Stories such as “the Fikihci Yobazlarin Davasi in Murad the Fourth’s Era” promoted a Kemalist view of late Ottoman politics in keeping with the theory of fatal decline, while other stories championed Golden Age heroes like Barbarosa. Alongside both of these approaches, the magazine also indulged in regular bouts of Istanbul nostalgia, while also offering limited criticism of the restrictions that the Kemalst state had at times put on history-writing.

It is certainly possible to interpret works like Voices from History as a form of traditionalist nationalist historiography reconfigured for the free-market. Instead of imparting its message on students through textbooks within the confines of the classroom, this new genre used bright colors, cartoons and scantily clad women to attract...
readers to its nationalist message while making a profit in the meantime. Yet a degree of
tension also emerged from the fact that alongside sex, untold stories, scandals, behind-the
scenes revelations and conspiracies, also sold. Thus while most editors from the period
saw themselves as committed Kemalists, and saw promoting patriotism as part of their
mission, challenging some aspects of official history could be good business.

The tension between ideology and market pressures also emerges clearly in the treatment
of Ottoman sexuality in the popular history genre, in which an eagerness to sexualize the
past in pursuit of better sales clashed with the perceived need to defend the nation’s
honor by countering European tropes of Oriental depravity. Ahmet Banoğlu’s discussions
of harem life resolved this tension for him and his readers by inverting the European
Orientalist approach, whereby exoticizing sexual imagery made its presentation to
European audiences more acceptable. Scholars have long suggested that for orientalist
artists, Harem scenes offered an opportunity to show naked women while distancing
themselves from the responsibility for doing so by presenting their work as the reflection
of a sensuous, exotic, Eastern reality. Banoğlu, by contrast, regularly republished
orientalist images of naked women while distancing himself, and his magazine, from
them by explaining that he was simply reprinting inaccurate, even offensive, European
fantasies. Much as the story about a woman stoned for adultery, with which Banoğlu
opened his magazine, featured a caveat stating that this practice was un-Islamic and
exceptional, stories about harem life always included explicit critiques of the usual
European discourse surrounding the institution. In short, Banoğlu could titillate his
readers with all the exoticism of European accounts of Ottoman history while presenting himself as a responsible, objective and nationalistic critic of this approach.

One of History World’s first issues featured an article entitled “Inside the Harem” [Harem ve İçyüzü] which began “The most mysterious part of the palace, and because of its mystery the most intriguing, was certainly the harem.” The author then went on to explain that most stories about the Harem were lies, and that readers should just think of it as a place where women were “imprisoned for their whole lives.” With this disclaimer out of the way, the author then continued with the story of a eunuch who was caught having sex with one of the women he was supposed to be guarding. A later article about odalisques pointed out that these harem women were “no different from mistresses in western palaces” and in fact, “if there were differences they were in odalisques favor,” since, for example, odalisques, unlike mistresses, were not married to anyone else. As Kemal Baykal explained in another article “every great ruler from Solomon to Napoleon has had a mistress” but because the word odalisque was of Turkish origin “famous paintings called odalisques done by great artists like Ingres, Delacroix and Boulanger also featured Turkish décor.” The article, accompanied by several examples of the genre, went on to note that the word odalisque “awoke mysterious things in the minds of earlier Europeans” and in fact “has the same effect today.”

When History World reopened after a brief hiatus in 1953 as New History World [Yeni Tarih Dunaysı], its editors doubled down on their approach to covering the Ottoman

---

301 History World, Volume 1, page 67.
302 Ibid, 1512.
303 Ibid, 1545.
harem. The first issue of the new magazine featured a reprint of a European odalisque painting titled simply “Here is the harem as it appeared in the imagination of Western artists.”[İşte garp resamlarının hayalinde yaşayan harem]. Then, following shortly on the heels of “Letters from the Harem,” another article titled “Secrets of the Harem” showed that even the act of debunking harem myths could serve to reaffirm them. The author began by asking “how true were the stories about harems and women being naked in them.” He then went into great detail about lack of reliable historical sources, saying it was hard for scholars to figure out exactly what was going on. In the absence of reliable sources, he argued, one still could not trust European accounts because they lacked access to the harem, and therefore lacked accurate information about it. Yet in playing up the difficulty of the sources and the inability of foreigners to gain access to the harem, the author succeeds in once again emphasizing its mystery and exoticism. He includes details like the fact that men “couldn’t look at faces of harem women when talking to them,” and had to place their own face to the ground if they accidentally did so. In short, the article deftly transformed an explanation of why European accounts of harem life could not be trusted into an opportunity to re-affirm their essential exoticism.

***

Much as historians sought to counter Western orientalism when discussing Turkey’s history, Turkish writers exploring the eastern reaches of their country’s geography felt a parallel need. As we have seen, in celebrating the history of Istanbul, Turkish writers and politicians highlighted, as well as physically enhanced, the city’s modern elements. In

304 Ibid, 74.
celebrating Eastern Anatolia, however, they were acutely aware that many of the physical
markers of Istanbul’s modernity – the tramways, the apartment blocks, even the men in
suits – were absent. If Istanbul’s history carried the threat of Arabian Nights exoticism,
Eastern Anatolia threatened the image of Turkish modernity through its lack of
development. Here it was the Anatolian peasant, his traditional lifestyle and farm
animals, that risked confirming another Orientalist image whose popularity in the West
Turks were all too aware of: that of the unchanging Middle-Eastern peasant still carrying
on his millennia old agriculture existence.

The response of Turkey’s Kemalist elite to this challenge was not to insist on the
modernity of the Anatolian peasant – something they were seldom themselves convinced
of – but rather to take additional measures to position themselves as modern in their
relations to their country’s distinctly “un-modern” geography. This section considers two
principal ways through which they sought to do so, scholarly and tourist. Many academic
publications, from the 1930s through the 1950s, show how a scholarly approach served to
sustain the discourse of Turkish modernity by viewing the region through the lens of
academic exploration. Meanwhile, authors and publishers of more popular magazines
also sought to depict their engagement with Eastern Turkey in the language of domestic
tourism. Crucially, both approaches enabled writers to interact extensively with the
region, and also praise it effusively, while positioning themselves at a distance from it. In
the first instance they could approach it as scholars, analogous to the Western researchers
who came to study their country. In the second instance, they approached it as modern
tourists, analogous to the Western visitors who expressed endless fascination with their
country while touring it. Additionally, both of these lenses provided unique grounds for asserting Eastern Anatolia’s Turkishness. Scholars have done considerable work showing how Kemalist intellectuals used the full arsenal of anthropologic, geographic, archeological, and racial science to stake the Republic’s claim on its territory and people. Building on a separate set of literature about the relationship between tourism and nationalism, I would argue that tourist literature from the 1950s, whether aimed at a domestic or international audience, carried its own set of tools for nationalizing physical and cultural space.

In 1947, the *Ankara University Faculty of Language, History and Geography Journal* published an Expedition Report [seyahat raporları] by Afet Inan detailing a “historic trip” between Ankara and Samsun that took place from the 26th of May to the 11th of June.305 The report, and the scholarly journey it described, were in many ways typical of those that had been regularly conducted by the members of the Kemalist intellectual establishment over the previous decades. Inan led a group of twelve students and professors to visit historic monuments in the central and northern Anatolian regions. They visited castles, tombs, caravansarays, archeological digs and prehistoric sites with the assistance of local mayors and governors. Rather than being arranged by the chronology of their trip, the itinerary was written up according to the historical age of the sites visited, while Inan explained that, having prepared before the trip, at each stop “one among us lectured on the history of the place, while those who could attend had a chance to listen.” She also added that the results of their previous study were included in her

article, so that readers could “make a historic journey along with us.” Readers were also directed to follow-up reading about the sites and the article concluded: “by seeing in location the works of our own and earlier ages in this way useful information was obtained [faydali bilgiler edinilmiş oldu].

In Inan’s narrative, appreciation for Anatolia’s history, landscape and geography, as well as its specifically Turkish character, were filtered through the lens of academic study and intellectual understanding. Even the group’s emotional reactions were set in terms of intellectual appreciation:

This caravansaray, in both its comfort and monumental grandeur, was certainly a principal example of the works of Selçuk civilization… As we departed from [it] we could not restrain ourselves from looking back repeatedly.306

A subsequent announcement of an upcoming “scientific inspection trip” [bilimsel inceleme gezisi] in the 1950 issue of the same journal offers a telling example of how the academic language familiar from Afet Inan’s earlier journeys could coexist with touristic discourse:

In 1951 the Institute is planning to inspect the historic monuments [abide] and works in the south eastern portion of our country. Every year with these scientific inspection trips the history department strives to truly introduce students to the preserved [taslasmis] history of one part of our country and help them internalize it by showing them in person things they will not see in books, or will see and not understand. In this way every city’s museums, historic works and libraries will become an inspection site. Our students always return from these journeys informed and enriched. In this context it is necessary to say that wherever they go in our country, and especially those far corners where university students set foot for the first time, they receive a great interest from state foundations, the scientific community and our people. This gives both our students and the faculty further excitement and encouragement in continuing this work.307

306 Ibid.
The emphasis on the emotional component of first-hand experience became central to the touristic approach, and found full expression in Nazi Ahmet Banoğlu’s *Geography World*. Introduced in November 1950 as a follow up to *History World*, the first issue featured a picture of Atatürk resting in front of a mountain on the cover. Banoğlu declared the nationalist intention of his work by lamenting that “for too long Turks had been forced to see our own country’s historic and touristic sites presented in geography textbooks by means of pictures cut from European magazines.” The magazine emphasized the participatory aspect of its approach to travel and geography by featuring maps that laid out the route from Istanbul to different places described in the magazine. Domestic tourism, whether actually travelling to the corners of the country or simply reading about them as tourist destinations in newspapers and magazines, became a substitute for the role played by classroom geography instruction. As Behlül Özkan points out, older geography textbooks at times used the motif of domestic travel as a means of presenting a nationalized geography. But in these works the travel was hypothetical; Özkan gives the example of a textbook organized around the story of a small child going from Istanbul to Yemen. By the 1950s, however, it had become a real possibility.

Ibrahim Kafesoğlu spoke to the essence of this transformation when he declared that he used to believe fostering love of country was “a solemn duty [that] fell to history and

---

geography professors. Now, he realized that this was not an academic matter, but “truly one of the heart:”

More than by means of detailed programs in the context of school lessons, real love of the homeland is born in the minds through the ability to see and hear. By means of passing through literature, poems and art it is inspected, beautified and developed.

Thus in modernizing and nationalizing rural Anatolia, domestic tourism was extolled as a practice, in which actual participation was necessary to reap the full benefit. But in contrast to Kafesoğlu’s insistence on first-hand experience, magazines like Geography World sometimes suggested that their pages offered an alternative for the arm-chair tourist:

The name Hakkari brings to mind a distant, very distant, arid, exhausted, forgotten corner of the country. In the first issue of Geography World, a very appropriate duty will be fulfilled by introducing this corner of the country, appraising Hakkari at present and bringing it to life in front of the eyes with all its natural beauty and true value.

Crucially, in this context the act of participating in tourism – whether as a traveller or a read – became a marker of modernity. A caption below a picture of a pine nut garden near Bergama in the subsequent effort History and Geography World read, “escaping from the chaos of the city and its nerve-wracking lifestyle to relax in the embrace of nature is one of the uniquely sought-after and most intensely felt needs of modern individuals.”

[Büyük şehirlerin gurultu ve sınır bozucu hayatından uzaklaşıp tabiatın koynunda dinlenmek medeni insanların yegane aradıkları ve hasretini duydıkları bir ihtiyaçtır.] These words deftly transformed the “undeveloped” character of rural Turkey

---
310 Geography World, Volume 1, Issue 1, November 15, 1950.
311 History and Geography World, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 15, 1959.
from a source of potential shame into something that Turks can enjoy precisely because they are so modern. This was reinforced by the explicit comparison of Turkey’s undeveloped natural areas with recognized areas of natural beauty in Western countries. The Seydişehir Çamlıbel mountains were just one of the many areas to be declared a “Turkish Switzerland,” while writing of the natural beauty that could be found on the outskirts of Istanbul itself, another magazine declared “Canada, that land whose lakes and forests we’ve fainted at in films, with all its wild beauty, its greens and its sparkling blues striking slow waters… was here.”

A considerable amount of secondary literature devoted to the politics and history of tourism has identified the practice as a product of the corporate, urban, industrialized nation state. In the United States, for example, one author argues tourism was response to the anxieties of industrialization, incorporation and urbanization that were transforming the country into a complex, modern nation-state.312 Other works advance the idea that “oriental” travel in particular enabled Western Europeans and later Americans to escape the noisy intrusion of the modern by visiting a country of the past.313 That is, it fulfilled the stated desire of people from the developed world for “less-developed locales” or the desire of city dwellers find a rural “escape” from the “density, poverty and corruption of the cities.”314 The Turkish case offers a an intriguing appropriation of this approach, in which a country aspiring to be urban, industrialized and developed embraces tourism as

312 Marguerite Shaffer, See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940 (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2001), page 37. Eugenia Afinoguenova’s Spain Is (Still) Different (Lexington Books, 2008) suggests that in an inversion of this process, the Franco regime actually advertised Spain’s appeal as a tourist destination based on a celebration of it’s lack of modernity, using the phrase “Spain is different.”
an idea if not actually as a practice precisely because it is associated with the escapist desires found in more modern countries.

As in Western countries, discussing or engaging in tourism also provided a new way to express national pride and reinscribe Anatolia’s Turkishness. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the touristic lens as a means through which to nationalize Anatolia comes from author Nizam Sevgen’s popular series on ethnic minorities. Sevgen was a former colonel who had played a part in suppressing the Dersim rebellion before entering the publishing industry. In his subsequent academic research on the Kurdish question, Sevgen frequently referred to his military service with pride, citing it as the source of his interest in the topic. Yet in his articles for Geography World, History World and several other publications, Sevgen made a case for the inherent Turkishness of eastern Anatolia not through references to history, anthropology, archeology or linguistics but instead through pictures of its women.

Figure 29 comes from an article in Geography World about the predominantly Kurdish region of Hakkari. As a caption, Sevgen writes “This girl, displaying harmony in her work, dress and sweet expression, is an example of Anatolia’s unity.” Next to it appeared a picture of an old man with the caption “A typical Turkish villager who has preserved his uprightness at age ninety by struggling against all the obstinacy and difficulties of nature.” Sevgen wrote of a woman in another photo “[t]his Tahtacı girl, as beautiful in her face as in her costume, is part of a Tahtacı group that settled in Isparta’s Turan neighborhood.” Making the link between beauty and national identity explicit several times.

---

pages later, Sevgen explained that the Tahtacı men and women were “very clean” people. By not mixing their blood with others they had preserved the nobility and beauty of the Turkish race” [Başkalarıyla kanlarını karıştırmadıklarındantürkün irki asaletini ve güzelliğini muhafaza etmektedirler]. In contrast to his descriptions of the clean and beautiful Turks, Sevgen, in a later article, described Iraq’s Yazidi’s as Satan worshippers before going on to discuss several pictures of Yazidi women in much less flattering terms. Only upon discovering Yazidis in Turkey could Sevgen patriotically conclude with a picture of a “Beautiful Yazidi woman from Mardin.”

Positive descriptions of Anatolia’s inhabitants were also matched by articles in other magazines that not only reminded readers Anatolia was as beautiful as any destination they might seek out in Europe, but also told them more specifically how to feel about their motherland:

In our opinion, however well read, well travelled or worldly we our, if we have not seen and known Anatolia and the remains of Selçuk civilization in Konya we must be considered ignorant of Anatolia and our motherland. For this Anatolia would always look at us as a stranger.

It was thus a small step before such patriotic rhetoric slipped into the imperative and began addressing readers with direct exhortations about where to travel and what to experience:

“Take in the view from Tophane when you go to this city. When Bursa is viewed from here it is under our feet and above our heads. Ulucami, Yeşil, Muradiyesi, Emir Sultani Yıldırımla, Yet you cannot tire of looking. In your free days go and

---

317 Ibid, 112.
319
view these all one by one. Visit the madrasas, the artful mosques, the graves and the tombs where a 600 year old state’s first six sultans, countless princes, viziers and commanders and the composer of the mevlut repose in peace.\textsuperscript{320}

As can be seen, the patriotic exhortation to travel the country was also linked to the need to understand the nation’s history on a visceral level. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, for example, was also moved by Bursa to write:

Of all the cities I’ve seen up until now, none is so completely the product of another given age as Bursa… I have gone to Bursa a few times and each time at the first step I have found myself inside this myth-like history and lost myself in the conception of time. I have always been fascinated purity of the lifestyle of our ancestors who entered this city for the first time and refounded it as a Turkish city. They loved this city, where they experienced the first smile of victory, so much that its every stone and its very ground are still full of the ennobling and shape-giving passion’s glowing traces.\textsuperscript{321}

Ibrahim Kafesoğlu, again, was not to be outdone, offering a comprehensive take on the relations between touristic charm, history, soil and patriotism:

I love Bursa both because it is a charming corner of a country and at the same time an exceptional city which cradled our glorious empire. The history I learned even as a schoolboy endowed Bursa with a special relevance to me. But truly it is necessary to give every corner of our country the same value. Every one of Anatolia’s towns and villages plays a part in the construction of our history and adds to our joy. Because all are our national soil. The Ottoman Empire we remember with pride was based in Anatolia. The grand empire that spanned three continents was founded with the devotion of Anatolia’s Turks.\textsuperscript{322}

Alongside the ideological reinvention of the Ottoman Empire, the visual and rhetorical strategies employed during the 1940s and 1950s helped consolidate the nationalist appropriation of the Ottoman past and complemented the “Turkish discovery Anatolia” that was already well underway. Many aspects of the Kemalist reform program reflected

\textsuperscript{320} Ulku: Milli Kultur Dergisi, “Bursada zaman ve Hulya Saatleri,” Issue 1, 1 Birincitesrin, 1941.
\textsuperscript{321} “Anadolunun Sesi,” July 1954, Istanbul.
a perceived need to change fundamental aspects of the nations’ appearance and behavior
in part to thwart Western perceptions of Turkey as an Oriental country. Yet the
magnitude, and success, of these more dramatic projects should not overshadow more
subtle and sophisticated efforts made in Turkey and elsewhere over the last century.
Chapter 5. Defiant Nations: Foreign Policy between the Arab East and the Imperialist West

In his memoires, Bekir Tünay recounted his experience as military attaché to Baghdad between 1953 and 1955, focusing especially on his friendship with Iraqi King Regent Abdulilah and its contribution to the formation of the Baghdad pact. Amid his descriptions of Iraq’s material backwardness, its people’s lingering respect for the Turks, and the admiration of even Kurdish nationalists that he meets for Atatürk, Tünay describes how his relationship with Abdulilah began and deepened.\(^{323}\) They met at a banquet following a military exercise Tünay had attended:

> The banquet was inside a large tent. There was every kind of liquor. I was by the buffet. Suddenly at my side I saw Emir Abdullah with two glasses in his hand. He offered one to me. “We don’t drink at the King’s banquets. But I heard how much you liked Iraqi raki and so I am breaking with tradition for the first time for you. I very much like Turkish raki, especially Club Raki.

“Shocked, touched, excited and overwhelmed” by the king’s behavior, Tünay offered him a cigarette: “At that time, on account of Fatih’s 500\(^{th}\) year, or rather the 500\(^{th}\) anniversary of Istanbul’s conquest, a FATIH cigarette had been put out. I praised them. The king responded “I like these cigarettes. They were well made.” Tünay then wrote home, urgently requested a kilo of Fatih cigarettes from Istanbul, along with two kilos of Haci Bekir lokum for Abdulilah’s Turkish mother. In Tünay’s telling, it was the start of a beautiful relationship.

Building on this friendship, Menderes subsequently requested that Tünay accompany Abdulilah during a diplomatic visit to Istanbul in 1954. Recounting a long string of events organized by the Prime Minister, Tunay boasts of everything from saving the emir from embarrassment with his savoir faire at a reception in the Beylerbeyi palace to joking about the singers and dancers at a late night dinner in an Izmir night club. Of their conversation in Izmir, Tünay recalls that upon returning after the evening’s entertainment Abdulilah remarked of Menderes:

-- He seems happy with his life. I looked, the singer’s eyes were on him all night. There must be something between them. What do you say?
-- I doubt it.
-- You didn’t look carefully. Menderes’s eyes never left her.
-- The Prime Minister appreciates Turkish music.
-- My God she could sing well. She truly was a Turkish music virtuoso. I suppose we were drunk. Honestly I was so busy looking at her I couldn’t follow any of the others.

The Emir then asked the singer’s name and the men moved on to talking about the dancers. Later, the Emir remarked: “I like Menderes for several reasons. He really knows how to work like a Western statesmen and how to enjoy himself like one too [Batılı devlet adımı gibi çalışmısını da, eğlenmesini de çok iyi biliyorlar]. We Easterners don’t know how. We know only excess and excessive restraint.” Recording this observation, Tünay reflected that it was completely true.

Another night of excess awaited them on their return to Istanbul, however, which, in Tunay’s telling was the high point of the visit. Asked if there was anything else he

---

324 Tünay, for his part, proudly cited his casual, personalized approach to diplomacy as a more modern, American inspired alternative to the stiff, Oriental formality of his superiors.
325 Ibid, 205.
326 Ibid, 207.
wanted before leaving Istanbul, the Emir, who often spoke of his childhood years spent on the Bosporus, admitted: “I want to listen to a handful of the best Turkish musicians on our terrace. We should start after midnight and continue till morning.” Having been given an unlimited budget by Menderes to entertain his guest, Tunay quickly arranged it; they ate and drank to the “enchanting sounds of the instruments” until “the half-bronzed red of dawn played over the quivering waves.”

The irony, which Tünay himself remarks on, is that the Iraqis with whom he felt such personal rapport where members of the Hashemite elite whose family had betrayed their Ottoman rulers in the Arab revolt. But these were also the Arabs who, on account of their own backgrounds in the high-society of late-Ottoman Istanbul, shared a cultural connection with Republican diplomats like Tünay. Kemalist ideology had not fully severed Turkey from its Ottoman past and its Arab neighbors, nor did Islamic piety serve as the primary force bringing fusing them together. Thus Tünay and Abdulilah’s shared nostalgia for living the good life in late Ottoman Istanbul provides a telling entre into the role of culture, history and geography in Turkey’s early cold war diplomacy.

This chapter investigates how beliefs and about geography and history influenced Turkey’s accession to NATO and its diplomatic relations with the Middle East in the Cold War period. In doing so, it builds on the considerable work already done by diplomatic historians on Turkey’s NATO membership, as well as the origins and eventual collapse of Baghdad Pact. The diplomatic history of Turkey’s involvement in these two

---

328 Tünay himself was from Adana, but like Menderes had experienced a version of Istanbul life while a student at the military academy.
alliances - one short-lived, the other long-lasting – has been well and thoroughly written. Unless there are unexpected revelations in the still-classified Turkish national archives it seems unlikely that any new information will overturn the broad contours of this account.

Absent from the prevailing narrative, however, is the impact of factors such as Italy’s NATO accession or the ambiguous concept of neutrality that can help shed light on the role of ideas in diplomatic decision-making. On the question of Middle East defense, more must also be said about the intensity of Turkish anti-imperialism at this time, specifically as directed toward the British. Many accounts portray Turkish policy during the early Cold War, particularly under the Democratic Party, as motivated by an almost sycophantic pro-Western attitude. In fact, Turkish leaders regularly appealed to a historically-rooted anti-imperialism in rejecting British defense proposals, and US policymakers regularly worried this attitude would be an impediment to US-Turkish cooperation. This leads in turn to one of the most intriguing instances of an idea that shaped diplomatic relations in the early cold war period: that of Turkey as a bridge between East and West. This metaphor was invoked by American and Turkish diplomats alike. To each group it had a clear meaning, though unfortunately not quite the same one. Ankara often saw its role as warning the US about policies that would alienate Arabs, while Washington expected Turkish diplomats to use their influence in convincing Arabs to accept these same policies.

During this period Turkish statesmen routinely invoked the rhetoric of East and West in a possibly paradoxical but surprisingly consistent way. Turkish leaders cited shared
religion, culture and history in seeking closer ties to Middle Eastern states, but referred more explicitly to their experience ruling over Arabs in explaining to often receptive Americans their unique insight into the Arab mind. At the same time, Ankara insisted that in dealing with Arab states Turkey appear as an equal partner of the Americans, French and British, while orchestrating official visits with Middle Eastern leaders so as to showcase their own power and modernity.

Finally, these diplomatic interactions force us to rethink the political importance of Turkish attitudes toward Arabs. While Turkish anti-Arab prejudice has often been cited as a motivating factor in Turkey’s policy toward Arab states, a closer examination suggests that this prejudice, though very real, was largely invoked in keeping with more influential and consistent beliefs: the anti-Imperialism discussed above and of course the Turkish leadership’s abiding hostility to the Soviet Union.

**Geography, Identity and NATO**

Following decades of desultory historiography, Ekavi Athanassopoulou’s *Turkey, Anglo-American Security Interests 1945-1952* finally provided a compelling narrative of the decisions leading to Turkey’s inclusion first in the Truman Doctrine and then in NATO. As Athanassopoulou explains, the Truman doctrine stemmed from genuine fears that Soviet political and military pressure would lead to Turkey’s incorporation into the Soviet sphere of influence, subsequently facilitating Soviet expansion into the Middle

---

Thus in providing diplomatic and military support, Washington would not only save Turkey but also create a necessary “barrier against Soviet penetration into the Middle East.” Yet even by the time NATO membership became the subject of trans-Atlantic discussions, these short-term fears about Russian expansion were no longer a driving force in US decision-making. At this point, Washington agreed to extend NATO membership to Turkey in order to secure its “wholehearted co-operation” in the event war occurred elsewhere in Europe. Melvyn Leffler has also detailed the many ways that US officials in the State and Defense Departments believed they could secure long-term strategic benefits from Turkey’s membership. Yet if this explains America’s desire for Turkish membership, this chapter will also attempt to address the question from Turkey’s perspective. This means considering the factors that led membership in the alliance to take on an existential importance in Ankara, and the way Turkish statesmen conveyed this sense of importance to Washington.

There has been a tendency to cast Turkey’s desire for NATO membership in the narrative of Kemalist westernization, suggesting that in joining the pact Turkey sought to solidify its European status. But whatever widely divergent opinions may have existed in the 1940s on the vexed question of whether Turkey’s culture or geography qualified it as “European,” no one up to that point had ever suggested that Turkey was located on the North Atlantic. In fact, from diplomatic discussions that occurred at the time, the process

---

330 Ibid, 238.  
331 Ibid.  
through which Turkey became a part of NATO had more to do with NATO transcending its geographic identity than with Turkey adopting a European one.

Turkey’s desire for a formal American defense commitment preceded, in both chronology and importance, considerations of the geographic context in which this commitment would be offered. Indeed, the Turkish government was quick to emphasize this fact as soon as it learned that US politicians were considering the possibility of offering such formal defense commitments to any of their European partners. As discussions leading up to the passage of the Vandenburg resolution progressed during the initial months of 1948, US diplomats responded to clear expressions of interest from the Turkish embassy by emphasizing that the new commitments under consideration represented a radical departure from their country’s longstanding desire to avoid entangling alliances, and, moreover, that their government was hesitant to weaken its position by overcommitting itself. In short, before the nature and scope of America’s commitment was given a concrete geographic scope or form, American statesmen were nonetheless hesitant about the possibility of including Turkey.

Only as Western Europe and the North Atlantic became the focus of Washington’s new alliance did geography became the most obvious explanation for denying Turkey membership. Responding to an enquiry from the Turkish government, Ambassador Wadsworth informed President İnönü on December 23, 1948 “It is very doubtful… that Turkey, which is neither in Western Europe nor on the Atlantic, could be considered to
form geographically a part of this regional group.”

US statesmen argued that rather than representing the sum total of their defense commitments, this regional grouping that could be augmented by other regional alliances centered in the Mediterranean or the Middle East. This formulation, however, quickly raised concerns in both Washington and Ankara, not to mention Athens and other capitals. Americans worried that making a formal commitment to defend Western European states from Soviet aggression without making a similar commitment to Greece and Turkey could encourage Soviet ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean by calling American concern for the region into question. In July of 1948 Foreign Minister Sadak told the US Ambassador that:

His preoccupation remained the same, namely, if and when assurances are given by US of military support for [the] security [of a] Western Europe[an] group of powers and no similar assurance [is] extended Turkey, this will be regarded as [an] invitation by Soviets to step up pressure on Turkey. He said he did not intend to convey that he believed this would lead immediately to military action by Russia against Turkey, but it would be [an] indication to Soviets that [the] US [was] less interested in [the] Security of Turkey and [the] Middle East than in [the] Security of West Europe and might well lead [the] Soviets to embark on rash movements or proposals re Turkey.

US officials, though sharing the concern, initially remained optimistic that something less than full alliance membership could assuage this concern:

[The] Dept further stated its realization… that [the] conclusion [of the] Atlantic Pact of which Greece obviously could not be member because [of its] geographic location might discourage [the] Greek people and encourage [the Soviets] to undertake more aggressive action against Greece. [The] Dept [is] in [the] process [of] developing [a] formula to avoid this danger by making clear to Greece [the]

---

333 Enclosure to dispatch no 483, December 23, 1948 From Embassy Ankara. Department of State. Top Secret Records, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives. In keeping with instructions received from Washington on Dec 17, Telegram no 588, Ibid.

334 Despatch from Ankara Embassy to Secretary of State, July 6, 1948, Department of State. Ibid.

Yet Turkish statesmen remained concern that any alliance consisting of Western European states would inevitably come to be seen as America’s strategic priority, and thus that inclusion in other potential regional alliances would be inadequate. Foreign Minister Sadak offered the State Department a systemic explanation of Turkey’s concerns. An arrangement between Turkey, Greece and the Arab powers, he argued was “ruled out for present because of Palestine dispute.” An arrangement between Turkey, Greece and Iran would be problematic because “neither Iran nor Greece could at present add anything in military sense to Turkey’s security and on contrary regional association with those two states might prove liability…” Finally, an arrangement with Italy, Greece and Turkey would be “impracticable at present” as “Italy is seeking to play “great power” role again…[and] would also assume patronizing role if associated in regional grouping with Turkey and Greece.” Thus, Sadak concluded, “the problem therefore can be stated in these terms: how can US under Vandenberg resolution associate itself for security purposes with Turkey in same manner as US evidently intends to associate itself for security purposes with the countries of Western Europe.”\textsuperscript{336}

The decision to include Italy in the nascent alliance, however, further undermined the viability of complementing a North Atlantic or Western European alliance with other regional arrangements. Both Turkish and American policymakers realized that once the alliance was no longer limited the North Atlantic, the question of Turkish and Greek

\textsuperscript{335} Despatch from Secretary of State to Ankara Embassy, February 4, 1949, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{336} Despatch from Ankara Embassy to Secretary of State, July 6, 1948, Department of State. Ibid.
membership became even more urgent. With Italy in, leaving Greece and Turkey out would appear to more blatantly signal a lack of US interest in their security. In November of 1949, five months after Italy had become a founding member of the alliance, the Turkish Ambassador explained succinctly, if not entirely accurately, that “Turkey would not have come into the picture if we [the Americans] had kept the North Atlantic group confined to the North Atlantic; it was when Italy was included that Turkey felt obliged to put forward her interest.”  

Among US officials, in fact, this argument received considerable sympathy. The US ambassador in Moscow, for example, weighed in noting:

As we understand it, the admission of Turkey would be a departure from the original concept of a unified grouping of countries belonging to the North Atlantic community. On the other hand, the admission of Italy at the outset was a broadening of that concept…”

After Turkey had been accepted into NATO, it became a staple of US and Turkish discourse that NATO membership in some way ratified Turkey’s claim to a Western or European identity on Turkey. But when membership was still up for debate, there was little suggestion on either side that NATO’s geography carried this sort of cultural connotation. While Italian membership may to some extent have intensified the link between NATO membership and European identity, the language used by both Turkish and American statesmen emphasizes the second Turkish motivation instead by making it appear that the borders of NATO was coterminous with area that Washington was most committed to defending. Indeed, the very possibility that NATO might be perceived this way, in Washington, Ankara or Moscow, led the Turkish government to redouble its

337 Memorandum of Conversation, “Renewed Inquiry by the Turkish Ambassador Regarding Possible Closer Treaty Relationship between Turkey and the United States,” Nov 15, 1949. State Department. Top Secret Records, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives.
338 Despatch no. 8 from Moscow Embassy to Secretary of State, August 31, 1950. State Department. Top Secret Records, Box 4, RG 84, National Archives.
campaign for membership and ultimately led Washington to grant it. In short, by admitting a country that was clearly not, geographically speaking, part of the North Atlantic region, Washington stripped the alliance of its geographic specificity. This, in turn, made Turkish membership appear necessary to many in Ankara, and subsequently in Washington as well.

As discussed, Washington ultimately accepted Turkey’s NATO membership not because, as had been partially the case with the Truman Doctrine, it believed doing so would forestall a Russian take-over, but because it feared that failing to do so would risk Turkish cooperation in the broader Cold War struggle. In short, the American debate over Turkish membership was not about the possible effect of rejection on Russian policy but rather on Turkish psychology. As revealed by Athanassopoulou and Leffler, American planners were eager to secure access to bases on Turkish territory and secure Turkish participation in case of a full-scale war in Western Europe. But this, in turn, presupposed that these strategic benefits could only be secured through granting Turkey NATO membership. Some argued Turkey would cooperate as necessary even without a formal defense commitment, while others worried that even with such a commitment Turks might still find a way to repeat the carefully managed neutrality of the previous war. The debate over whether Turkish cooperation was really contingent on NATO membership then involved questions of history, democracy, and Turkish psychology. And Turkish diplomats, for their part, did their best to exploit the ambiguities inherent in all these questions in order to achieve their goals.
George Wadsworth, the US ambassador between 1948 and 1952, most clearly stated the case for Turkish membership, arguing that “unless we are really prepared to come through with a commitment of real value to the Turks they would repeat last war’s “Friendly neutrality” policy, block the straights, trade with both sides and hope we would defeat the moscovs. Or as a subordinate commenting on Wadsworth’s draft, put it: “I also believe that, given certain conditions, the Turks might “weasel” on us.” That this the negative characterization of Inonu’s behavior during World War Two actually served as an argument in favor of accepting Turkey into NATO hints at the contradictions and ambiguity that would come into play when the question turned from Turkish history to the Turkish character.

As ensuing discussions made clear, for many US diplomats the would-they-weasel question was, at its “core,” “essentially psychological.” Thus General Henry Arnold, the commander of the United States Joint Military Mission for Aid to Turkey (JAMMAT) at the time, argued that NATO membership was “desirable and essential if we are to have the guaranteed right to utilize Turk facilitates and bases for action against the USSR,” because “doubts of our determination to continue assistance” might “weaken Turkey’s intention to resist.” The perceived cultural characteristics underlying Turkish psychology naturally came to the fore in these discussions. Admitting Turkey into

Note stapled to draft material for Chiefs of Missions’s Conference, Feb 1951, General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59. National Archives.

Ibid, written on draft material for Chiefs of Missions’s Conference, Feb 1951, Ibid.

Comments of Charles Lewis on draft of material for Chiefs of Missions's Conference, Feb 1951, Ibid.

Despatch no 582 from Secretary of State to Ankara Embassy, October 10, 1947. State Department. Top Secret Records, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives.

For your background info Army considers that planned Turk reduction in force prior to time Aid Program becomes effective would definitely weaken Turk capacity to resist attack but concurs our feeling that attack unlikely and acknowledges that advantages of reducing military burden may outweigh purely military considerations.
NATO, for example “would make them feel proud and would encourage their traditional martial spirit,” while refusing them would “in all probability… have a deleterious effect on Turkish amour proper and public morale.”343 “[T]he Turks are proud and suspicious and they have already suffered one psychological blow through their exclusion,” one diplomat explained in support of Turkish membership. But in another case orientalist stereotypes served to explain why Turks would fight even without an American guarantee:

That a simple peasant folk like the Turks need to be fortified morally by being allied to the ‘giaour’, I would doubt. I believe that the basic reactions of the Turkish peasants who constitute 80% of the population will be, in time of war, the “Kismet” which comes both from the historical process as well as his faith, and the satanic pleasure which comes to any Turk when he sets about killing Moscows.344

With Turkish psychology at the center of the debate, it is not surprising that American statesmen would assess the impact of Turkey’s emerging democracy in determining how this mass psychology would translate into policy:

There is no question but what the nation as a whole will fight if attacked but as in any other democratic country its leaders are sensitive to public opinion and public opinion is wavering because of a feeling that their contributions and sacrifices to the United Nations have reaped no tangible reward in the form of political commitment. There is a growing feeling throughout the country that neutrality maybe preferable to an aggressive attitude which might bring on an attack without any assurance of allied assistance in that event. The desire of all Turks to stand with the western world is as unquestionable as their courage and determination but they also have the universal desire for survival.345

The ambiguity inherent in such an assessment was something Turkish diplomats were quick to emphasize, as it proved incredibly useful in enabling them to play on American

---

343 Ibid. Charles Lewis
344 Ibid
345 Despatch from CINCNELM TO CNO, State Department. Top Secret Records, Box 3, RG 84, National Archives.
fears while still reiterating their commitment to Western defense. It let them threaten, in essence, that American refusal might come at the cost of Turkish cooperation while simultaneously defusing responsibility for what might otherwise appear their own government’s uncooperative attitude. In May of 1948, for example, the Turkish Ambassador told Secretary Marshall:

Any action on the part of the United States displaying greater interest in the security of Western Europe than in that of Turkey would undermine the morale of the Turkish people and strengthen the minority group which insists upon the hopelessness of Turkish resistance. The hand of the Soviet Ambassador would also be strengthened… The Turkish government would continue, of course, to resist Soviet pressure. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this resistance would be weakened.\(^\text{346}\)

Indeed, even before becoming fully democratic, the Turkish government was quick to pick up on the diplomatic benefits of invoking public opinion to negotiate. At least in the reports of several US officials back to Washington, this approach seems to have resonated:

While we do not believe that unfavorable decision would weaken determination of Turks to resist any soviet encroachment on Turk sovereignty we think there would be increased tendency of Turkish public opinion to insist that Turk Govt follow policy of less cooperation with US and Western democracies, policy tending toward neutralism. We think present Turk Govt is full convinced of necessity continuing its present policy of active cooperation with West but its own position would be considerably weakened by apparent failure its much publicized efforts to enter into closer security arrangements with Western democracies.\(^\text{347}\)

Another factor that came into play while discussing the trade-offs involved in Turkish membership was the role of Turkish anti-imperialism in limiting the degree of cooperation Turkey would be prepared to offer the US. Both before and after 1952, US

\(^{346}\) Memorandum of Conversation, “Turkish desire for American “Guarantee to Turkey against Aggression,” May 11, 1948. State Department. Top Secret Records, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives.  
\(^{347}\) From SECSTATE June 23, 1951, No INTEL Top Secret Records, Box 4, RG 84, National Archives.
discussions about Turkey’s role in NATO and Middle East defense inevitably made reference to the country’s sensitivity to matters of national sovereignty and deeply-felt anti-imperialism. Indeed, after Turkey joined NATO, US forces ultimately engaged in close cooperation with their Turkish counterparts, and made considerable use of military facilitates on Turkish soil. This, of course, had been a dominant consideration in accepting Turkey in the first place. Yet in many cases US diplomats appeared surprised at the degree of cooperation they received. Immediately following Turkey’s entrance into NATO, Americans were not even certain that the US military would be given rights to use Turkish airfields, even those constructed with US aid money and technical supervision, in anything less than an all-out war. A lower level embassy employee assigned to investigate the topic concluded:

In the absence of any information to the contrary, I do not know of any reason to believe that the Turks would be prepared to turn over bases within their territory to us or any other power, short of hostilities. I’ve always assumed that we were proceeding on the theory that it was desirable to help the Turks build up bases for their own use, which would be available to us in an emergency. I have checked over the verbatim record of the military talks here in October (Bradley Mission), and other pertinent papers, and find no reference whatever to the establishment of utilization of bases in Turkey. 348

Among other evidence that led US diplomats to this conclusion was a 1952 Speech in the Grand National Assembly in which Foreign Minister Köprülü declared:

“I do not conceive it possible that any observer with good intentions could fail to admit that we do not by any means contemplate giving bases to others in our territory and that only in the event of aggression shall we use our won bases within the framework of the necessary cooperation with our allies”

Assessing the speech, the embassy noted that his speech was met with applause and “greeted with cries of ‘Bravo.’” The conclusion based on the speech, was again that:

In the light of the Turk’s historical experience with foreign imperialism and the characteristic ingrained distrust of the Turkish people for anything suggesting possible foreign intervention, it seems evident that the Turkish Government would be extremely reluctant to consider outright granting of bases in its territory, unless and until it were confronted at least with the imminent threat of soviet aggression. 349

The correlation between Turkey’s NATO membership and America’s access to Turkish military facilities was always filtered through sometimes-conflicting assessments of Turkish psychology and domestic politics. If Turkish anti-imperialism raised the possibility that even in NATO Turkey would not provide US planners with the strategic assets they desired, even greater fears raised by the - carefully cultivated – prospect of Turkish neutrality still made accepting Turkey appear to be the wiser decision.

Moreover, by 1952, the changing nature of the Cold War and America’s already-manifest commitment to Turkey’s defense seems to have created a situation where American officials could not longer imagine a scenario in which a Soviet attack on Turkey would not lead to or be part of a larger European war. This reality mitigated the additional risks that Washington would take offering Turkey a formal defense commitment, making the ability to acquire specific strategic benefits all the more enticing.

349 Memorandum from Mr Wendel[in]. Top Secret Records US Embassy Ankara, Box 4, RG 84, National Archives.
Ultimately, the impact of Turkish anti-Imperialist nationalism was most fully felt after Turkey had joined NATO, in the subsequent debates over how the alliance should counter Soviet threats in the Middle East. During these debates, Turkish statesmen and the popular press showed how their anti-Arab prejudice and anti-imperialist sentiment could be interpreted in keeping with Turkey’s strategic interests. While Arabs were often viewed sympathetically in the immediate aftermath of World War Two, when they were viewed as victims of British imperialism, by the mid-1950s they were often presented as willing accomplices of Soviet imperialism. In early negotiations over Middle East policy, Washington and Ankara both embraced the cliché of Turkey as a bridge between East and West. But there was a subtle difference in the way both sides used the term. Turkish diplomats, seemingly motivated by their own feelings on the subject, regularly sought to convince America to be more sympathetic to Arab concerns over British imperialism. Yet Washington’s response often suggested they thought Turkey was building a bridge from the wrong side. Instead, they hoped Turkey would use its cultural and religious affinity with the Arabs to convince them of the regrettable necessity of cooperating with Britain. In time, as Arab nationalism took a more pro-Soviet direction, Turkey closed ranks behind its new American and British allies. Only at this point did Turkish diplomats, writers and cartoonists deploy the full force of their anti-Arab prejudice in condemning Arab governments for their relationships with Russia.\(^{350}\)

\(^{350}\) To give credit where it is due, the contours of this dynamic seem to be largely prefigured in a 1946 report from the US embassy: “Generally speaking, there appears to be a strong undercurrent of sympathy for the national aspirations of the Arab states, despite the commonly felt Turkish attitude of superiority towards Arabs. Coupled with this sympathetic feeling, however, there is the realization that Arab nationalism is mainly directed against Turkey’s ally, the United Kingdom, and is susceptible of exploitation by the Soviet Union.” Depstach no 639, March 1, 1946. State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 19, RG 84, National Archives.
“You do not find here today a marked warmth of feeling for Great Britain,” Ambassador Wadsworth wrote in 1951. As Washington sought to bring Britain, Turkey and the states of the Middle East together in a joint anti-Soviet alliance, this sentiment became a regular cause of concern for US diplomats in Turkey. Wadsworth subsequently drew up a hand-written memo titled “reasons for Turk[ish] dislike and distrust of Brit[ain]:” British behavior in World War One was “not forgotten,” he wrote, while Turks believed the British “still have imperialist ambitions in the Middle East” and think of Turkey and others as “colonials.” And on top of this there was Britain’s increasingly apparent weakness; Turkish concern, Wadsworth wrote, also stemmed from the fact that “[the British] are not able to make substantial contribution to military defense in ME.”

But if there was no warmth of feeling towards the British, attitudes toward the Arab world not always warm either. “Turkey’s relations with the Arab States and with Persia are on a friendly basis,” but “in their hearts and minds [Turks] regard them as of inferior character,” the Ambassador wrote in 1951. Indeed, Turkey’s Democratic Party Foreign Minister at the time, Fuat Köprülü, was widely seen as the most outspoken advocate for improved Turkish-Arab relations, but had no end of disparaging remarks to make about Arabs. Meeting with Dean Acheson in 1951, for example he “readily agreed”

---

351 Chiefs of Missions’s Conference, Feb 1951, General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1. RG 59, National Archives.
352 France often suffered the indignity of being more frequently ignored than condemned in discussions of European imperialism. When it was mentioned, though, the sentiments were generally similar Kop. Or Bayar: “French attempt to maintain dominant position in Syria and Leb had merely succeed in making them appear ridiculous. Prestige is not something that can be developed artificially. QUOTE it is like a shadow, when you turn to it, it disappears UNQUOTE. Despatch No 1326, May 26, 1952 State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 5, RG 84, National Archives.
353 Chiefs of Missions’s Conference, Feb 1951, General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1. RG 59, National Archives.
that Arab states were “weak and suffer from jealousy among themselves.”\footnote{354} Lest this be
taken as a purely political assessment, Ambassador Warren wrote up another
conversation with Köprülü concluding “[e]xcept for incidental comment touching chiefly
on emotional susceptibilities of other Arab Govts and peoples… our conversation ended
on this note.”\footnote{355} Köprülü, who at one point described the Egyptians as ‘twisty and
suspicious by nature’\footnote{356} concluded in his most charitable moments that:

He was certain that the contempt in which the Arab States and Arabs in general
are held by the present generation in Turkey would gradually disappear…
although he admitted that the time required for such a development might be long
indeed.\footnote{357}

Yet despite this prejudice, Turkish diplomats and writers often showed considerable
sympathy for the Arabs as well. Tellingly, it was when Arabs appeared as victims of
imperialism that Turks were at their most sympathetic. Perhaps never more so than on the
issue of Palestine. In October 1947, the US embassy reported that “it continues to be
clear that Turkey is sympathetic to the Arab viewpoint” on the subject and then in
December, “Outcry in the Turk press over Palestine partition becoming more violent and
more directly critical [of the] US role.”\footnote{358} In 1951 Wadsworth again explained for a
meeting of regional US ambassadors:

\footnote{354} Memorandum of conversation between Fuat Köprüli and Dean Acheson, November 12, 1951, Top
\footnote{355} Despatch No 310 from Ankara Embassy to Secretary of State, Ibid.
\footnote{356} Telegram No 244, Sept 29, Ibid. Interestingly, his full claim was that Egyptians were “twisty and
suspicious by nature” a striking example of the contradictory deployment
of prejudices discussed in the preceding chapter, Köprüli pairs a generalized trait attributed to a group’s
“nature” with a reference to specific historical circumstances, in this case the experience of British
colonialism, which explains that “nature.”
\footnote{357} Memo – to GTI Roundtree from Mr. Moore, “Turkey and its Near Eastern Neighbors – the Problem of
Leadership.” General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Lot File no 58 D 61, Subject
Files relating to Turkey, Box 2. RG 59, National Archives.
\footnote{358} Despatch No 1893, Oct 22 1947; Despatch 932, Dec 5, Unclassified General Records, US Embassy,
Ankara, Box 100, National Archives.
On the explosive Palestine issue, Turkey expressed sympathy with its Moslem brothers of the Arab League to the extent of voting against partition in the General Assembly but has made it plain that it will not allow that issue to jeopardize its close collaboration with the US... Turkey’s sympathies have been with the Arab states on the Palestine question. Turkey voted against the Partition Plan and is uneasy over the implications of a Jewish state... Turkey, nevertheless, maintained a strictly hands-off attitude and forbade its citizens under penalty of loss of nationality to participate in the struggle on either side. 360

Among other things it should be noted that feeling on this subject was bipartisan in Turkey. Before the Democratic Party came to power, for example, CHP Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak told Ambassador Wadsworth:

> Israel was a fabrication of the United Nations (particularly a fabrication of the United States). The creation of this state was a mistake as he, the Foreign Minister had informed Mr. Wadsworth’s predecessor. 361

His language was almost the same as that used by a friend of Köprülü’s, speaking before an American audience several years later with the Minister’s endorsement:

> When Palestine was occupied by the British during the first World War, the Balfour Declaration promised a home for the Jews in Palestine. In my opinion it was a mistake. It was a mistake to try to put a foreign element in the middle of Arab-dominated area [sic]. The mistake continued until we had the Israel Government and the Israel State. 362

If the prevalence of such sentiments is not surprising, they are important to understanding how the geostrategic circumstances of the immediate post-war period shaped Turkish

---

359 Chiefs of Missions’s Conference, Feb 1951, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1.
360 Indeed correspondence from 1948 shows that US diplomats were not only trying to find out if Turkish officers were indeed going to fight with the Palestinians, but also seeking reassurance from Turkey after reports that the Arab states had sought to purchase weapons from Ankara. citation
361 Memorandum of Conversation, April 21, 1950. State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 3, RG 84, National Archives.
362 Lecture by Hazim Atif Kuyucak Jan 24, 1955 Air University Air War College Maxwell Alabama. General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Box 1, RG 59, National Archives. Kuyucak had showed text to his “good friend” Prof Köprülü who was “said to have expressed general agreement.”
policy toward the Arab world, and Turkish attitudes toward Arabs as well.

In the early 1950s, several diplomatic crises pitted Western States against colonized or semi-colonized Middle Eastern States. The following section examines an initial stage, in 1952, of what would become the Suez Crisis, followed by the crisis over Iranian oil nationalization and finally the tense, if not crisis level, negotiations over the fee for US basing rights in Libya. In every case, Turkish diplomats pushed the United States, and in turn Britain, to be more accommodating of regional anti-imperial concerns. Yet in every case Turkish diplomats ultimately proved willing to close ranks behind America and Britain in the face of a perceived Soviet threat.

When a standoff first developed between Britain and the new Egyptian regime of Gemal Nasser, the US State Department sought a solution in having Britain and Egypt join together as partners in a joint Middle East Command. The optimistic and always pro-Turkish George McGhee promoted the idea that Turkey was uniquely positioned to overcome Egyptian skepticism and sell this idea to Nasser. “I welcome Department’s recognition of Turkey as important element in “new deal” approach to ME states,” he wrote “[the] association of Turkey, as a neighbor with strong ME ties and no justified suspicion of colonial intent, should greatly assist in proving bona fides of other powers in [Middle East Command] approach.”\(^{363}\) As McGhee explained in another telegram, it was

\(^{363}\) Despatch No 994, March 31, 1952, State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 5, RG 84, National Archives.
“the multilateral nature of the Middle East Command, and [in] particular participation of Turkey as a founding member,” that would have the “greatest appeal” for Egypt. 364

Ankara, for its part, was eager to promote its unique ability to play just this role. But Turkish statesmen repeatedly made it clear that success depended on the plan really being a multi-lateral one with no latent colonial intent. One of the first times McGhee raised the question of participation in the command, Prime Minister Menderes emphasized that “he envisaged not simply allied command to mask existing situation but true inter-allied organization and command.” 365 Köprülü, likewise, stressed that:

> If object is simply to strengthen Brit position in ME (eg to maintain brit troops in Egypt to reestablish historic British position of “occupation”), we shall get nowhere with Egypt of other Arab States. Otherwise put, if MEC is designed to mask political objectives, we shall be wasting our time. For Arab countries, question is primarily political and psychological. 366

And in regard to the question whether the command would be lead by a British general, President Bayar explained:

> Egypt, like other newly independent countries this area, is highly sensitive to presence of foreign troops. Egypt is particularly sensitive because British troops there seem continuance of historic occupation…. Today we have only good intentions, but it is difficult make Egypt understand. Our ForMin has long sought similar formula which, while not offending national feelings, will assure strategic position. We recognize fully need for maintaining allied troops there. We sense that your new formula offers an answer. 367

364 Untitled Memorandum, Ankara Sept 27, 1951, State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 4, RG 84, National Archives.
366 Telegram No 244, Sept 12, Ibid.
367 Despatch no 283 from Ankaray Embassy to Secretary of State Sept 24, Ibid.
Turkey’s chief of staff put the Turkish case even more emphatically in discussing the MEC with US Navy Colonel Royson.

Not only Egypt but entire ME was definitely anti-British. He singled out Egypt and Iraq as well as Iran as being particularly opposed to further “British exploitation and domination” At one point near end conversation he stated Royson, I tell you frankly again, Turkey will not accept a British General as commander of the Middle East Command – an American Lieutenant yes, but British General, No! Maybe if the British supply 40 divisions we may agree; otherwise, No.” I then inquired if this was his (Egeli’s) own personal opinion or was it also shared by Turk Govt. His reply was: “It is the decision of the Turkish people”

Americans, of course, were not unreceptive to Turkey’s concerns about British imperialist motives. But on the specific issue of the MEC leadership, American diplomats were far more willing to overlook these concerns and accommodate London’s demands. The result was a series of exchanges that elucidate the respective Turkish and American approaches to balancing British and Egyptian sensibilities. Washington continued to not only push for a British commander, but also urge Ankara to try to sell Egypt on the idea. When told, for example, by the Turkish ambassador in Washington that “a British Supreme Commander would be unacceptable to the Egyptians…” McGhee responded “that he recognized the difficulties involved in obtaining Egyptian acceptance of the MEC idea and a British Supreme Commander. We were, however, counting on the Turks to help us to convince them of the desirability of this proposed solution.”

368 Despatch no 299, Sept 27, 1951. Ibid. Commenting on this, Ambassador Wadsworth wrote: Gen. Egeli has made similar statements upon several occasions during the last six months, but he has never been quite as emphatic. I do not give full credence to all his statements, but discounting his last even evening statements 50%, there still exists evidence of very strong anti-British feeling in Turkey which cannot be brushed off lightly – Wadsworth from memo by Col Royson chief of JAMMAT plans group
Tellingly, the Turkish Foreign Ministry also presented its critiques of British colonialism in the context of the Cold War struggle against communism. Köprülü told McGhee, for example:

Rising nationalism in ME exploited by Commies utilizing also reactionary and chauvinistic elements. Situation greatly worsened, however, by pursuit Western Powers their own special interests which result in lack of common policy. Western Powers much abandon “old methods” in dealing with States of area. Essential to harmonize policies on basis friendship with ME States, which offers only chance obtaining their cooperation. \(^{370}\)

Ambassador McGhee, by contrast, tried to justify Britain’s approach with reference to the same Cold War goals:

Brit position more complicated. I did not feel it involved merely questions of prestige. Brit Govt and people had accepted passing of colonialism as demonstrated in India and Africa. However, Brit had specific economic interests, such as oil interests in Iran, Iraq and Kuwait, which were of desperate importance to them at this time. Brit treaty systems with Jordan, Iraq and Egypt considered by ME Stats, rightly or wrongly, as relic of colonial era. In my judgment Brit would have been prepared to abandon these treaty rights in normal times. Now, however, in midst of Cold War, to do so would invite instability in whole area and open invitation to Sov aggression or subversion. Nevertheless treaties had served to produce national irritations, especially in Egypt, which had been aggravated by Commies to point of cancelling out their stabilizing effect. In light this situation we had developed concept of multilateral approach, leading to MEC, as offering more acceptable basis for relationship of west with ME. \(^{371}\)

Köprülü’s response, again, captured the nature of Turkey’s disagreement with the US. He quickly agreed that it was “important that Brit prestige be built up and Suez defended,” before seeking the final word, that the “Middle East command had a chance of

\(^{370}\) Despatch No 673 from Ankara Embassy Secretary of State, Jan 26, 1952. Top Secret Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 3, RG 84, National Archives.

\(^{371}\) Ibid
acceptance only if it was, in fact, what it purported to be, and not subterfuge for covering up a defense of British interests.”

The Turkish government was less actively involved in the confrontation between Britain and Mosaddegh over Iranian oil nationalization, but the same dynamic quickly showed itself nonetheless. What stands out, throughout 1952, is the degree of sympathy the Iranian cause garnered in the press and the extent to which Turkish diplomats, in discussing the issue with Americans, argued that greater Western sympathy for Mosaddegh’s position was in fact crucial to forestalling the rise of Communist influence in Iran. Yet throughout the crisis, Turkish sympathy was quick to evaporate, when Mosaddegh went too far in seeking support from communists either in Iran or Moscow. Indeed, as the situation became more polarized, and Mosaddegh appeared increasingly forced to seek such support, Ankara fell into line with the Anglo-American position. Crucially, though, that this was a position only reached after considerable public and private advocacy for a more accommodating course of action.

In 1951, Köprülü, in conversation with Acheson, said that “the US should do all it can to prevail on Britain to be reasonable because Russia must be prevented from entering the area through the Tudeh party.” He would voice similar sentiments a year later, telling Ambassador McGhee that the Americans “must do something to help bolster Mosaddegh’s position Iran.” When McGhee then cited the “shortcomings of Mosaddegh on [the] oil question and his leanings toward neutralism,” Köprülü “agreed,” but

---

372 Ibid.
373 Memorandum of Conversation, Fuat Köprülü, Dean Acheson. General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59, National Archives.
explained that he “felt Mosaddegh was now [the] only element of strength in Iran which can successfully oppose a seizure of power by communists.” Even in conversations with the British, Ankara urged greater accommodation with Mosaddegh, telling the British Ambassador, for example to “pursue a moderate course.” The British, in turn, responded by “suggesting that the Turkish Government might find it appropriate to make similar suggestion to Iranians.”

Noting that the Turkish press almost unanimously rejected the Iranian accusation that by voting “to permit [the] Security Council to discuss dispute” Turkey showed “support” for the British, the US embassy wrote:

Most of press, while sympathizing with Iran’s desire to nationalize [its] oil industry, expresses [the] view that [the] Iran govt has submitted too often to [the] pressure of extremist elements and has not been willing to make reasonable compromise. Press unanimously deplors recent reported Iranian approach’s to USSR.

Yet the press reaction quoted in this same embassy report shows how outspoken such sympathy could be. Zafer, the Democratic Party paper, declared proudly, if slightly defensively that “Turkey has shown road of freedom to many eastern nations enslaved by foreign influences,” in this case influence of the British economic variety. More striking, though, is that while Köprülü was privately appealing to the US and Britain to be more accommodating, the Foreign Ministry came under attack in the press for publicly standing in line with its Western allies. An editorial in Yeni Sabah, for example, declared

374 Ibid.
376 Despatch no 338, Oct 10, 1951 , Ibid.
377 October 5, Zafer.
We regret to observe that in [the] UN as elsewhere Turk Fonoff continues under influence of Britain and France. We enjoy a brilliant and prominent position in East but when we use our influence against eastern nations we run risk of falling into position only of guardian Anglo-French colonialism in this part of world…

Then offering a more pointed critique:

What Iran is doing is just what Ataturk did 20 years ago in Turkey. By voting against Iran we are voting against Ataturk. When will our Fonoff wake up from its lethargy and try to be worthy of leadership of the East.  

Ironically, the lack of access to Turkish diplomatic archives on this subject has made it easier for modern-day observers to critique the Turkish government’s approach to the conflict on the same grounds as contemporary newspapers. The policies of the Menderes government are regularly presented as being embarrassingly pro-Western. Undeniably, the government ultimately sided with Britain. But as State Department records should make clear, for the Turkish Foreign Ministry this was very much perceived as political realities – British power and the Soviet threat – taking precedence over long-standing anti-imperial inclinations. Perhaps this dynamic was best captured by a single edit made by the Ambassador to the draft text of a 1951 telegram: “If it came to losing Iranian oil to Russians than “British intervention would be accepted palatable” to Turkey. 

A year after covert British and American intervention removed Mosaddegh from power, the United States and Libya became embroiled in a much less dramatic conflict over the appropriate rent for the Wheels Airbase, located near Tripoli. Turkey’s relationship with the regime of King Idris Senussi had been considerably better than with other Arab states.

---

378 Ibid
379 Circular Telegram No 178 from Ankara Embassy, August 23, 1951. State Department, Classified General Records 1936-1950, Box 5, RG 84, National Archives.
Libya was more closely aligned with the United States, and did not perceive Turkey as constituting any kind of threat to its territorial integrity or aspirations for regional leadership. Additionally, the fact that many of Republican Turkey’s founders had fought with King Senussi against the Italians in 1912 provided a more positive recent history on which build ties than the experience of World War One in the Middle East. Indeed Libya’s first Defense Minister at the time was a Turkish citizen by birth and the country’s first Foreign Minister had lived in Turkey and worked at the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

As tension between Washington and Tripoli intensified, the relative closeness of Turkish-Libyan relations seems to have intensified both Turkey’s sympathy toward Libya’s position and Washington’s expectation that the Ankara could use its influence in convincing the Libyans to back down. Turkey, the Americans were happy to note, appeared eager to demonstrate its importance by helping to resolve the conflict. The Turkish foreign Ministry, the embassy concluded, “will savor with pleasure both the feeling of paternalism for weak Libya and the choice of Turkey to reconcile American limitations of patience with the bazaar-type bargaining of the Libyans.”

Ankara was certainly eager to play this role, though a split quickly became apparent in what US and Turkish diplomats thought that entailed. Americans very much hoped that Turkey could reconcile King Senussi to their demands, while Ankara sought to achieve reconciliation by lobbying both the Americans and Libyans to make concessions. Shortly

after tensions began, the US ambassador, acting on instructions from Dulles explained to his Turkish counterpart that he would be most grateful to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his efforts with the Libyan delegation… to make clear the value of American friendship… [and] for the thoughtfulness which prompted the Turkish government to observe to the Libyan visitors that American Friendship in Turkey (as elsewhere) is not measured in dollars.

Dulles original instructions, in fact, make the nature of the US request more clear.

Would be grateful if the Turkish Government were inclined to pass to His Excellency… [that] it is contrary to American policy and is distasteful to the American temperament to have the American contribution to the military security of the free world hinge on the size of a financial grant.\(^{381}\)

Yet the Turkish Foreign Ministry seemed inclined to accept the assessment of their ambassador in Libya, who felt that the US government might do well to be more flexible:

Turkish minister to Libya is currently in Ankara. He had passed on to the Foreign Office a request that the Turks, as good mutual friends of both the Americans and the Libyans, intervene to secure a more favorable deal for the Libyans. Mr. Birgi said obviously the Turkish Government could not intervene in such a matter or presume to tell us how we should spend our money. On the other hand, they were sure that we recognize as they do that Libya is one of the few Middle Eastern States which has shied away from neutralism and shown itself prepared to cooperate with the West. … relatively minor increases in aid to states willing to cooperate might have very beneficial psychological effects on those tending toward neutralism.\(^{382}\)

The US ambassador to Libya in fact worried Turkey was acting as an advocate for the wrong country. Citing a memo expressing Turkish hope that the “US assume sympathetic attitude toward compensation…” he wrote, “Turkish good offices… might help forestall

\(^{381}\) Aid memoire, Dulles, Ibid.
\(^{382}\) Despatch No 358, May 11, 1954; Despatch No 520, Feb 1, 1954. Ibid.
present trend wherein they appear to be assuming role Libya’s sponsor vis-a-vis United States.”

Yet in response to repeated suggestions that the crisis might prove an “excellent opportunity for Turks if they are willing to act as moderating influence,”

Turkish diplomats continued to push the US to change its behavior. The US embassy in Ankara reported that in response to this suggestion:

Birgi indicated understanding our exasperation [over] continued Libyan bargaining on [the] subject. At same time, he… indicated Turks continue [to] believe it would have good effect on Arab neutralist tendencies if they see tangible benefits accrue to those who grant bases and otherwise cooperate with us…

Or as Köprülü elegantly explained to the US embassy “if Libyans can be prevailed upon to move away from spirit of bargaining… a slight increase in [America’s] current offer might well provide a solution.”

In the end, despite continuing to push both sides toward concessions, Turkish diplomacy played almost no role in the resolution of this dispute, just as it was of little consequence to the outcome of the Suez Crisis or the Anglo-Iranian dispute. Yet an important conclusion nonetheless emerges from the US-Turkish diplomatic exchanges they produced. In all three cases, both American and Turkish diplomats whole-heartedly embraced the idea that Turkey could serve as a bridge between east and west, but they consistently interpreted the metaphor in different ways. Essentially, American statesmen

383 June 16, Tripoli No 2, Ibid.
384 June 17, 1954, No 1392, Ibid.
385 June 22, No 1365, Ibid.
386 June 24 No 1380, Ibid.
expected Ankara to use its knowledge of and influence with the Arab world, and historically based insights into their culture to sell Arab leaders on the desirability of American policies by overcoming Arab concerns about Western imperialism. Turkish statesmen, however, believed that their “bridging” role involved telling Washington what US polices would, if not modified, meet with Arab hostility or rejection and convincing Washington to modify these policies to win Arab support. Repeatedly during the 1950s, Turkish diplomats proved more adept at warning Washington about policies that would evoke anti-imperialist sentiment among Arabs than they were at convincing Arabs to accept these policies.

As the Democratic Party government increasingly closed ranks behind the United States and Britain during the course of the early 1950s, the opposition began to criticize its policy using many of the same anti-imperialist arguments DP diplomats had privately made to Americans. Writing for a leading CHP paper in 1956, Bülent Ecevit penned a series of columns articulating a foreign policy vision that was highly critical of Arab support for the Soviet Union, but also critical of the government’s deference to Western interests. In fact, Ecevit suggested that it in uncritically supporting Britain and America, the government was undermining Turkey’s security by pushing the Arabs states into Moscow’s arms. Instead, he suggested, Turkey could provide the Arab world a model of non-communist resistance to colonialism, adding that if the Arabs could learn from Atatürk’s example they could free themselves from Europe’s grasp without falling into Soviet hands.
Ecevit’s analysis, like that of Washington and Ankara’s, took for granted that the Soviet Russia was trying to penetrate the Middle East by exploiting Arab opposition to Western imperialism and Israel. Noting that in recent years the fear of Western imperialism and Israel had been “revived in the Arab mind,” Ecevit claims the primary reason is surely Communist propaganda, but that Turkish policy has helped lay the foundation for their success. To “erase” this “suspicion” Ecevit concludes, Republican Turkey should stay out of Arab affairs and “behave more independently [müstakil hareket etme] from our Western friends.” He argued consistently that while Turkey could have engaged with the Middle East as a “regional power” or “not engaged at all” the DP government had instead chosen the worst option, of “engaging as a representative of western powers.”

As soon as Turkey became a NATO member, without thinking of the future Turkey became interested in the internal affairs of the Arab world in the manner assumed to be of greatest benefit to its Western allies, especially England. In time it began to gain a reputation in the region as the representative of its Western allies who were regarded as “imperialists.”

Yet this approach had already begun to backfire:

Turkey became the nearest target of the negative feelings that the Arabs, rightly or wrongly, felt towards our Western allies. Above all, even when the Arabs struggled to secure their legitimate rights inspired by our own War of Independence, Turkey, for fear of offending our ally France, remained indifferent, and even openly opposed them. In doing so Turkey once again fanned the fears and suspicions directed against us. And all of this eased the Soviets task in provoking the Arab world against us.

It was a theme Ecevit returned to in successive articles, emphasizing that the DP’s approach was harming not just Turkey but the Western alliance more broadly.

Whether aggression [tecavuz] or supporting aggression against any Arab state…

---

387 “Türkiye'nin hataşı,” December 1, 1956, Ulus.
388 Ibid.
389 Ibid.
might be justified, Turkey’s seemingly self-interested current policy in the region will only increase tension and instability… If Middle East’s most powerful state, Turkey, in an alliance with Western powers known as “imperialists” [sömürgeciler] is seen to be on the side of one of the Arab world’s internal factions [hizip], the other factions, rightly or wrongly, will become worried… and driven to take precautions. In doing so, as they cannot turn to the Western allies, they will instead turn to Soviet Russia, unaware that it is the real threat.390

In line with this analysis, Ecevit went further in suggestion that by not siding with imperialist powers America too could gradually begin a profitable long term strategy of winning Arab confidence and even friendship. But this critique did not necessarily imply any sympathy with Arab behavior. During the Suez crisis, he spelled out this view most explicitly:

We cannot praise Israel for aggression [tecavüz] against Egypt. But this does not mean we must be sorry for Egypt that it suffered aggression. We cannot excuse England and France for dismissing the United Nations and using force against Egypt. But this does not require us to see Egypt as a victim. England and France and Israel might be unjustified [haksız]. But this does not make Egypt justified.391

The problem, he explained in another article, was that every Arab leader wanted to be an Ataturk but they failed to truly understand his example.392 Men like Nasser, for example, only “saw what Ataturk had accomplished” but not the “behavior through which he achieved them.” In the case of Suez, for example Ecevit explains that Nasser’s aims were eminently justified but his methods were problematic. He did not follow Ataturk’s “realist” [realist] and honest [durust] behavior. Ataturk, for example, sought full Turkish sovereignty over the Bosporus, but he “waited patiently for many long years… and after that not with a unilateral and dramatic decision but by persuading all the interested states

390 “Tutulacak yol” December 4, 1956, Ulus.
at an international conference claimed sovereignty over the straights.” In this manner, Ecevit concluded, he secured “a legitimacy for Turkish sovereignty about which no friend or enemy could have the least doubt.”

In essence, Ecevit’s critique of DP foreign policy was that in allying to closely with the West, they undermined Turkey’s ability to serve as a spiritual inspiration and made it harder for the Arabs to find their inner Ataturk. And of course, in doing so the DP betrayed the spirit of the Turkish nation as embodied by Fatih Sultan Mehmet and Suleiman the Magnificent as well:

In the era lasting from Fatih Sultan Mehmet’s coronation to Suleiman the Lawgiver’s death… the Turkish nation struggled to unite East and West and bring all nations into a state of being able to live together…In that era if you had asked the Turkish nation “why are we here” it would have been in a better position to answer than any other nation… Today, the elements giving meaning and value to our existence as a nation are opening the road to uniting the two separate realms [alem] of East and West by removing the East-West divide in our own national life, being an example for the whole Middle East by strengthening the concept of individual freedom on our own territory, and defending the rights of nations who are fighting for independence.393

If the Democratic Party’s efforts to serve as an arbitrator between the US and the Middle East often fell short or exposed the party to criticism, Turkish statesmen nonetheless worked hard to craft historical and geographic discourses that would facilitate this role. In order to prove Turkey’s potential value as an American ally in the region, Turkish leaders regularly promoted both their cultural and historic ties to the Middle East. At their most ambitious, Turkish statesmen sought to simultaneously claim insight into the region based on their experience as the Arab’s imperial rulers and anti-imperial allies. As elsewhere, the Ottoman legacy proved remarkably multi-faceted.

The claim, in 1950, that Turkey was a Middle Eastern power would, strangely, have had a rather different meaning than the syntactically identical claim that Great Britain was a Middle Eastern power. The first would be taken to mean Turkey was, in some fundamental sense, Middle Eastern, while the second implied that Great Britain exercised power over the Middle East. Though often unsuccessful, Turkish diplomats did their best to treat this ambiguity as an asset rather than an obstacle in dealing with their partners in the West and their neighbors to the South and East. In discussions with Middle Eastern states, Turkish rhetoric emphasized their shared values and culture, at times more cautiously their shared religion and frequently their shared history without, of course, mentioning who exactly had been ruling over who while this history was being shared. At the same time, Turkish diplomats articulated their country’s potential usefulness in advancing western interests in the region by stressing their understanding of and experience with its people. This understanding and experience, they suggested, came both from the aspects of their identity shared with these people, but also several centuries experience ruling over them. Americans diplomats, more than their Turkish colleagues, even at times drew parallels between the deeper understanding of the region both the Turks and the British had developed through their time as imperial powers there. While Turkish diplomats sought to benefit from the ambiguity of their position, they also worked hard to ensure that in diplomatic dealings involving Western powers and Middle Eastern states, Turkey appeared to be a partner of the former rather than one of the later. This worked in concert with the Democratic Party government’s efforts to use state visits
with Middle Eastern leaders in order to proclaim the party and the nation’s status as both modern and powerful.

One of the arguments that proved most useful in trying to obtain maximum benefits from Turkey’s Ottoman-era role in the Middle East was the claim that Turkey had voluntarily given Arab states their independence. In 1945, for example, CHP stalwart H.C. Yalçın wrote of Syria and Lebanon that “Turkey gave up these parts of the motherland in order that they might live in freedom and under the regime and government of their own choice.” In *Yeni Sabah*, meanwhile, Ömer Riza Doğrul explained:

> [T]hese countries succeeded from Turkey with our full consent. Consequently we feel certain responsibilities with regard to these brother states. In fact, we relinquished these territories in order that they should become independent and free, and not in order that they might be turned into colonies…. It is not the principle of Kemalist and Republican Turkey to watch with folded arms events in adjacent countries. Consequently, it is our right to demand from our Government a more active policy on this matter.\(^{395}\)

Finally, in his treatment of “foreign relations in the Republican Period” professor and diplomat Nihat Erim explained that Turkey and Iraq had “no unsettled problems left between them” and “were closely attached to each other by a 400-year long life together.” As for Syria, he wrote “as it has with every country which detached itself from the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish government has always nourished well-purposed intentions toward Syria and has sincerely wished that she win her independence.”\(^{396}\)

At the same time appeals to Turkey’s own history as an imperial power also resonated with US diplomats who were also keen to learn from Britain’s colonial experience.


\(^{395}\) *Yeni Sabah*, June 4, Ibid.

\(^{396}\) *Ulku*, Ankara, November 1, 194, Ibid.
Ambassador McGhee told members of the Near East Department, for example, that “the Turks, with their many years of Ottoman rule over the Arabs, had a vast fund of experience in dealing with these people.” The legacy of this imperial relationship was also highlighted when Turkish diplomats referred to their country’s “responsibilities” in the region, using the term most frequently associated at that time with the British colonial rhetoric.

Turkish public opinion also appeared to be quite receptive visiting Arab statesmen invoke, whether sincerely or not, the Ottoman past as an example of Turkish-Arab brotherhood or Turkish leadership in the Islamic world. Indeed, official visitors from the Arab world often referenced their personal experience of the Ottoman era as a source of solidarity with Turkey. In addition to his love of Turkish cigarettes and raki, Emir Abdullah of Transjordan told the Turkish press that while he regretted being unable to read Turkish he felt an emotional bond with Turkey and listened to Turkish news on the radio. Likewise, Sheikh Senusi of Libya told Turkish journalists about the “happy times” when Libya was part of the Ottoman Empire:

Before the Italian war we were not ruled by foreigners. The Turks ruling our country did not represent a foreign country. The Turks ruled Tripoli in keeping with the wishes of the people. In those times, it was not the Turkish government

397 Memcon Feb 21, 1956, General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59, National Archives.
398 Speech by Azzam Pasha. Classified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 3, National Archives. The main object of my visit to turkey is to consolidate an old friendship between two people who have a shared a common inheritance of more than a thousand years… This nation, which has always been the advance post of the Moslem world, and which as always fulfilled its civilizing and organizing mission for centuries with great courage, and which has attracted my admiration since my earliest youth is still occupying that admiration now forty years later.
which forced its will upon the people. The government only carried out the people’s will.\textsuperscript{400}

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, meanwhile, told Vatan that “when Palestine constitute a part of the Ottoman Empire, she was one of the most loyal members of that empire. It is very natural that our relations with Turkey in the future will, as previously, be established on the principals of loyalty and friendship.”\textsuperscript{401}

Yet Turkish and American statesmen were also well aware of the limitations of this rhetoric. They sometimes acknowledged the marginal relevance of the cultural ties they shared with the Middle East, while also rejecting any overt appeals to religious solidarity. Following a tour of the Arab world, for example, Köprülü offered an assessment of the strength and limitations of Turkish-Arab cultural ties. He said that he had:

found a warm and sincere response from Arab leaders. Many were old friends and pupils in his university days. He had spoken to almost all of them directly in Turkish... He did not pretend, however, that this had any conclusive significance.\textsuperscript{402}

American diplomats, in turn, were eager to enhance Turkey’s influence in the Middle East. In 1951 McGhee wrote to US ambassadors in Arab capitals asking what steps Turkey might take toward this end. In response to this query, the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia explained that the Turkish Government “should not endeavor to approach the

\textsuperscript{400} Quoted from Cumhuriyet April 12, in Desparch No 1565, April 15, Unclassified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 106, RG 84, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{401} Quoted from Vatan, May 4, 1947 in Despatch 1622, 8 May. Unclassified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 100, National Archives. Meanwhile, Dr. Halidi, Secretary General of the Palestine Arab Committee told Vatan that Ataturk “is indeed like a torch burning in the hearts of all Arabs,” and “until a few years ago, Ataturk’s picture was to be found in every street in Palestine” Ibid, May 3.

\textsuperscript{402} General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59, National Archives.
Arabs as agents of the West, they must identify themselves with the interests of the area."\(^{403}\) The ambassador from Syria, meanwhile, suggested that the US:

> encourage the Turks to greater latitude than previously in [regard to issues such as] Palestine, Tunisia, Suez, etc. If occasionally they do not vote with us at UN, and vote with the Arabs, it could do much to improve their prestige and counteract the charge, no commonly believed, that they are America’s “stooge”. I remember the Suez issue for example, The Turks firmly believed the UN resolution was against their and our interests in the Middle East, but because their vote was needed to carry the day and because they wanted to defer to our wishes, they voted against the Arabs., That one vote caused their prestige heavy damage in Arab circles.\(^{404}\)

Paradoxically, while the Americans were at times eager to have Turkey act so as to appear more “eastern,” Turkish leaders were cautious lest their efforts to do so prove too successful. At the same time that Turkish diplomats stressed their cultural ties to the Middle East in conversations with Americans and Middle Easterners alike, they also worked hard to ensure that in their diplomatic relations with the countries of the region they would appear as equal partners of the Western powers approaching the region from a position of superiority. Not only did they simply seek to ensure that their relations with Middle Eastern states would not make them appear more Middle Eastern themselves, they also saw that these dealings could represent an opportunity to present themselves as Western.

Perhaps the most concise statement of this dynamic came in a state department memorandum prepared before the visit of the Libyan Prime Minister in 1954:

> Turkey [has] hosted leaders of a number of European countries…. This aspect of Turkey’s aggressive and alert foreign policy has enabled her to make progress


\(^{404}\) American Embassy Damascus, October 7, 1952, Ibid.
toward goal of identifying herself as the ally, and not subordinate, of the leading powers. Recently then, Turkey has felt herself to be in a position of demonstrating readiness to lend a hand to the smaller and less powerful countries. [The PM’s visit] is an example of the latter attitude.\footnote{Despatch No 11, July 8, 1954. Visit of Libyan Prime Minister to Turkey, Classified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 63, RG 84, National Archives.  
\footnote{Sept 18, No 261 to Secstate, Washington, Ibid.  
\footnote{Aug 20, 1954, Ibid.  
\footnote{Aug 16, 54, No 202 from Ankara, Ibid.}}

On the MEC, US officials took it as given from the very outset that this attitude would govern Turkey’s approach to the command. An early memo on the subject, for example, stated “Turk Govt will be prepared to cooperate in any MEC organization jointly agreed between US, UK and French Govts provided Turk Govt participates in that command on equal footing with those three powers.”\footnote{Sept 18, No 261 to Secstate, Washington, Ibid.}

Likewise on the issue of the tripartite declaration, despite US insistence that Turkish participation would provoke a hostile response in the Arab world, Turkey felt this was necessary to maintain their status as equal partner with the Western powers. Birgi, for example, declared “Turks not rpt not in position effectively support role we have asked them to play in Mideast defense unless they are taken into partnership on other Mideast questions.”\footnote{Aug 20, 1954, Ibid.}

Based on further conversations, Ambassador concluded that Turks wanted to join because they believed “their Middle East position, developed with [America’s] active encouragement and support, would otherwise be seriously weakened.”\footnote{Aug 16, 54, No 202 from Ankara, Ibid.}

Newspaper articles from across the political spectrum echoed the idea that Turkey could become more Western by becoming more involved in the Middle East. Writing for Ulus,
for example, Huseyin Yalçın called for a more “active” and “dynamic” policy in the region, saying: 409

Turkey cannot completely achieve its task as the champion of western civilization in the Near East only by endeavoring to grow stronger at home… passive defense does not bring victory. A strong Turkey can be of service… not only to herself, but also in the strengthening and rehabilitation of the Near East… Turkish diplomacy will have done a great service to the cause of civilization by establishing a stable, freedom-loving, democratic network of friendship in the near east. As a matter of fact, the Saadabad pact was a step forward toward that establishment of stability and peace in the Near and Middle East. New steps must be taken to reinforce and develop this to meet the present conditions of the world.

Ahmet Emin Yalman was even more explicit in summarizing the Government’s approach:

It does not, in the first place, want Turkey to play the part of an Oriental State. On the contrary, it wants Turkey to interest itself in eastern affairs from the standpoint of a Western country, as one on the outside looking in. Consequently, it shares the Government’s disinterest in any regional grouping or pact which does not have Western, and especially American support.410

On a more symbolic level, it should also be noted the extent to which the DP government used frequent visits with Middle Eastern heads of state to emphasize both its status and importance in a particularly Western light. While visits of Western leaders might feature display’s of “traditional,” or at least historically rooted Turkish culture such as performances by a costumed Ottoman-style military band, visits of Middle Eastern leaders to Turkey did not. Press photographs of these visits, as well as Turkish coverage of Bayar or Menderes’s visits to Arab states, almost always featured one or both of these

409 July 13, 1950, Ulus. Huseyin Yalcin on Turkey in the Near East. Intriguingly, among positive steps he cited as having been taken to improve Turkey’s relations with the region were “the Foreign Minister’s demarches with the Arab states” and “the progress recently made in establishing closer relations with Israel…”

410 General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59, National Archives.
men dressed in suits reviewing rows of soldiers. When the visitors were themselves eager Westernizers, such as the Shah of Iran or the President of Pakistan, these visits seemed to provide an opportunity for a mutual celebration of modernization. [Figure 39]

In describing the Shah’s 1956 visit to Ankara, for example, the most non-Western the always critical Ecevit found to seize on was the inconvenience caused by his motorcade:

This is the capital of a country that is trying to keep up with the lifestyle and work temp of Western civilizations. In 20th century Western civilization every minute of a city’s life counts. It’s minutes and hours cannot be sacrificed, spilled out onto the roads that visitors will travel on. However much we like our guests, however much we welcome them, we must be able continue our daily work without interruption and live our normal lives. Without detracting from our hospitality, it is within our reach to be a little more Western in our style of hosting. 411

Things only got worse for the Shah in Istanbul, but it was the Menderes’s eagerness to show off that caused the problems. The US consul reported widespread amusement the Istanbul public following the parade held in honor of the Iranian royal couple. Menderes arrived in Istanbul at the last minute eager to “achieve a public assertion of his person” and, to the embarrassment of his protocol officers, inserted himself in the parade. As a result of the awkward logistics, he ended up travelling in a parade of open vehicles through “Istanbul’s decorated main streets… tightly squeezed in in the same car between the visibly uncomfortable Queen Sureyya and the in no way less at ease Mme Gokay [wife of Istanbul’s mayor]. The consul concluded that “the spectacle was, indeed, quite out of the ordinary, and naturally this, what seemed to the people quite obvious effort at

411 “Şahin geçtiği yollar,” May 20, 1956, Ulus
recognition on the part of the Premiere, promptly set minds and tongues into motion.\(^{412}\) In short, the whole thing proved to be a far bigger scandal than simply taking the Regent of Iraq to a nightclub to flirt with the singers.

Finally, a brief review of Turkish cartoons from this era provides an overview of the way Turkish prejudices adapted to help reconcile the country’s Turkey’s oft-manifest anti-imperial sympathies with its newfound need to cooperate with European imperial powers against the Soviet Union. Indeed, Political cartoons offer a remarkable illustration of the way Turkish perceptions of the Arab world changed in response to geopolitical circumstances. In a cruel and colorful way, cartoons are ideally suited to illustrating the ugliness of prejudice, as well as its nuanced, often multi-determined character. The following images are taken from Akbaba, Turkey’s most popular and widely read satirical magazine from the 1930s through they 1950s. They offer a visual record of Kemalist anti-imperialism, as well as the sympathy Arabs received when they appeared victims of imperial powers. Yet they also show how, in the 1950s, this sympathy turned into hostility, and how effectively the reserve of anti-Arab prejudice could then be mobilized, when the Arab governments grew increasingly pro-Soviet. When viewed as Russia’s accomplices rather Britain’s victims, down-trodden Arabs quickly became animals or drunken topless women. The visual crudeness with which Arabs are depicted in the context of being Russian puppets stands in stark contrast to more charitable representations in anti-imperial contexts.

\(^{412}\) May 28, 1956 Istanbul Reaction to Events (May 21-27, 1956). General Records of the Department of State. Misc Lot Files, Lot File no 58 D 61, Subject Files relating to Turkey, Box 1, RG 59. National Archives.
Cartoons such as [Figure 30, 31] stand out as testaments to Kemalist anti-imperialism. In the first, an outsized Italian soldier in a gas mask and a host of modern weaponry bears down on a crudely caricatured Ethiopian with a spear declaring “We are bringing civilization to Africa.” In the second, Britain, poised uncomfortably on the peak of a pyramid, reacts to news of the British revolt by declaring “[the sun] is beginning to set here too?” It is telling that as in many similar cartoons from the period, the target is clearly European imperialism, while the victims are either elided, as in the second cartoon, or treated dismissively, as in the first. A similar trend is clear in cartoons from the 1940s and 1950s dealing with the French in North Africa. Though some (Figure 32 for example) depicts a generic Arab – shown chained reading a “Declaration of Human Rights,” more common are those like Figure 33 in which a gun-toting French soldier poses for a “souvenir” photograph over the body of a dead Moroccan. Arabs are absent altogether from Figure 34, a pun on the word “cabinet” in which France relieves itself on a poster reading “human rights.” This same sympathy appears in coverage of the early phases of Palestinian-Zionist violence under the British mandate, with cartoons targeting British hypocrisy [Figure 35], as well as many that dealt with the conflict purely in terms of the cruel anti-Semitism that marked much of the Turkish press in this period [Figures 36, 37].

In dramatic contrast to the sympathy Arabs received when pitted against European powers or Zionists was the contempt directed against Arab states and leaders who appeared to be cooperating with Russia. Subsequent cartoons [Figure 38] show Arabs as tethered camels, caged birds, or the veiled wives of the Soviet Union. In others the Arab
states appear chained together, or encircled by a large sickle, while Syria and Egypt come in for particularly harsh criticism, shown as a wind up dancing doll, drunken woman or simply drawn with crude African features. Indeed a number of these cartoons make specific reference the idea of the Egyptian-Syrian union, or Arab Union more generally when condemning Arab leaders as Russia’s dupes.

Taken together with diplomatic records, these cartoons help make the case that popular anti-Arab sentiments were as much a product of Turkey's foreign policy as they were a driver of it. A historical and geographical realities pushed Turkey and its Arab neighbors into different geopolitical camps, Turks' invoked well-established but previously dormant prejudices accordingly. Cartoons from the 1930s make it clear that Turkish sentiments at the time were strongly anti-Imperialist, anti-Communist and anti-Jewish. Subsequently Anti-Arab feeling, however strongly felt, was voiced most clearly when it accorded with these pre-existing sentiments.

The strength of Turkish anti-imperialism during the 1950s, as manifested in ambassadorial meetings and popular cartoons, deserves attention in part because of the impression given by some scholars that Turkish policy during this decade reflected an almost sycophantic pro-Western instinct that constantly prioritized the interest of European colonial powers over those of colonized Middle Easterners. Turkey’s alliance with Israel or its support of France in the UN vote over Algeria frequently serve as dramatic evidence for this argument. In the context of both popular anti-imperial sentiment and privately expressed views however, I suggest that these policies, like many
others, must be understood as the result of conscious decisions to prioritize interests over instinct. In this there was a clear parallel to US statesmen from the same period who, as has been amply documents, often found their own anti-imperial inclinations in conflict with the policies seemingly forced on them by their Cold War alignment of interests with Britain and France.

The anti-imperialism of Turkish policymakers, though sincerely felt, was often compromised in the name of political necessity and strategic interest in the early Cold War period. Turkish diplomats, like to a lesser extent their American colleagues, found themselves forced to choose between their strong anti-colonial, if not quite pro-Arab, sentiments and the perceived need to cooperate with imperial powers whose military strength they felt was crucial to protecting their own sovereignty from Soviet “imperialism.” Ironically, while Turkish diplomats at times sought to stress their experience ruling over Arabs as grounds for being able to understand them, it seems to have been a shared experience with Western colonialism that gave Turkish diplomats their most relevant, if seldom heeded, insights into Arab political sensibilities. Meanwhile, when the legacy of Turkey’s Ottoman-era relationship with the Arab world manifested itself in the most concrete forms, the consequences could be both positive and negative for Turkish-Arab relations. Family relationships, such as those between the Egyptian royal family and the wife of the Turkish Ambassador in Cairo could create warmth, but also new sources of tension, as when these ties were accompanied by property disputes. And as Köprülü himself saw, being able to speak Turkish with Arab leaders who were once his students hardly guaranteed any diplomatic breakthroughs.
The paradoxes that emerge in Turkey’s relations with Middle Eastern states in turn help shed light on the nature of ideas that, while less nebulous than the discourse of “modernity,” nonetheless contain crucial ambiguities crucial to their diplomatic relevance. Thus in the case of NATO, it was the element of geographic ambiguity introduced by Italian membership that transformed the alliance into one that Turkey felt compelled to join. But there was no malleability to this ambiguity. A geographically non-specific NATO became a non-geographic NATO, and this, to American and Turkish, statesmen, meant a NATO whose membership was tantamount to those countries that the United States was genuinely committed to defend. Which in turn made non-Atlantic Turkey’s membership in a no-longer Atlantic treaty organization suddenly imperative.

Likewise, Turkish and American diplomats jointly promoted this membership with reference to the ambiguous but still serious consequences of Turkey’s non-membership. Presented in such terms, these consequences could both alarm strategically conscious planners and also escape from more concrete counter-arguments. Compelling arguments that Turkey would be strategically compelled with cooperate with the US in case of a World War regardless of its NATO status, for example, could never address the “psychological” risks of non-membership. Yet here too it would be wrong to conclude that these fears, however vague, were malleable - or indeed groundless - ones. Even those diplomats who believed Turkish membership was ultimately unnecessary did not challenge the assumption that this decision would, in some unspecified or even unspecifiable way, reduce Turkey’s willingness to cooperate with the United States.
Finally, on the subject of Turkey’s geographic and historic identity, Turkish and American statesmen derived maximum benefit from exploiting the possibilities inherent in Turkey’s ambiguity. Turkey was a bridge between East and West in multiple different ways, one that could use its Ottoman history as proof of its intimate relations with the Middle East and its right to stand alongside the Western powers in approaching the region. Even the US pushed Turkey to be more Middle Eastern in order to better serve Western interests, while Turkey struggled to publicly appear modern and Western at the same time it promoted an anti-imperial agenda in private meetings with Americans. And as the political logic of the Cold War eventually forced Turkey to pick sides, the malleable nature of prejudice helped in justifying Turkey’s new political commitments.
Chapter 6. Malleable Modernity: Rethinking American Policy, Aid Programs and Propaganda in 1950s Turkey

“Turks, being semi-Oriental, have certain similarities and dissimilarities to Americans.”


Before the articulation of an academic modernization theory in the late 1950s, American diplomats, soldiers and economists working in Turkey had a very clear idea of what it meant to be modern, and more specifically, what it meant to be modern in an American way. They appealed to this idea of modernity - which required societies to be democratic, participatory, literate and mobile - in all of the political, military and economic aid programs they designed for the benefit of Turkey, and America. They also crafted propaganda to advertise the extent of America's modernity, and emphasize Americans' eagerness to share this modernity with Turks. When weighing Turkey's readiness for democracy, these same men carefully evaluated the extent of Turkey's modernity, and repeatedly referenced these evaluations in crafting US government policy. Yet a closer examination reveals this rhetorical coherence belied a profound but necessary incoherence in the way these ideas were applied. That is, while the qualities identified as "modern" were quite consistent, the diverse, even contradictory ways intelligent people could apply these values to any concrete situation were highly variable. During the early Cold war period, "modernization" was used, in turn, to justify American support for Ismet Inönü's one-party regime; to celebrate the democratic election of Adnan Menderes; to defend Menderes from charges of
authoritarianism; and, finally, to accept the coup that removed him from power. And at every stage along the way, the rhetoric of modernization was also used to challenge each of these positions and the policies associated with it. At the same time, America’s modernization discourse resonated with Turkish politicians because its flexibility also gave them the tools with which to challenge American policies, and compete with their domestic political rivals. American diplomats recognized the centrality of modernization to Turkish political discourse, and as they relied on modernization theory to make their own policy decisions, they quite consciously crafted “propaganda” designed to showcase American modernity in order to secure Turkish support in the cold war.

Building on Salim Yaqub’s argument that US policy was pragmatic in spite of American prejudices, I argue that these prejudices, often couched in the language of modernization, proved durable precisely because of how readily they served to justify pragmatic decisions. In short, the Turkish and American experience of the early cold war period reveals that both the power and omnipresence of modernization discourse depended upon its incredible malleability. A greater awareness of this fact will serve to help redirect the cultural turn in diplomatic history toward the foundational insight Michael Hunt’s Ideology and US Foreign Policy: that in order to become a dominant factor in American foreign policy, an ideology must be sufficiently elastic to articulate any course of action required of it. Furthermore, a thorough study of Turkey-related correspondence from the State Department, Joint US

---

Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, US Information Agency (USIA), and Central Intelligence Agency reveals that those formulating policy, executing US government modernization programs, and selling these policies and programs to the Turkish people all shared a remarkably coherent understanding of what it meant to be modern but used this understanding for remarkably diverse ends.

To date, the growing literature about modernization theory and the cold war has consistently suggested that ideologies are “strong” or “important” to the degree have clear causal links to specific policy outcomes. Thus authors such as Michael Adas, Nicholas Cullather, Michael Latham, Nils Gilman, David Engerman and Bradley Simpson have all examined the relationships between academia and the foreign policy establishment, showing how the academic discourse of modernization encouraged and justified US support for authoritarian regimes in the third world. These authors have examined how, beginning in the late 1950s, social scientists worked to better understand the process through which modernization occurred in order to develop policy recommendations the US government could use to accelerate the process. As Latham and Gilman both show, these social scientists appear to be trying to ‘weaponize’ their understanding of modernization, like nuclear scientists who applied their knowledge of the atom to the task of making bombs. The result of this process was quite often a form of modernization discourse that justified authoritarian rule and violence in countries like Indonesia and Vietnam on the grounds that only strong states could implement the social and economic programs necessary to change traditional societies. Gilman articulates the charge that is latent in Latham and Simpson’s work most provocatively, saying of the modernization theorists: “It is difficult to escape the
conclusion that American postwar apologists for military dictatorship occupy a moral position akin to Martin Heidegger’s in his celebration of early Nazism.”

Examining the incredible malleability of American ideas about modernization during the 1950s, particularly in a country where democratization seemed to align neatly with US strategic interests, reveals that different political circumstances could have easily led to the creation of a different, more democratic, version of modernization theory. Indeed, it suggests that by the outset of the cold war, modernization was already so deeply ingrained – as “an ideology, a political instrument, an analytical model, a rhetorical tool, a cognitive framework, and a system of beliefs;” in short, ‘an element of American culture’ - that any policies the US government adopted would almost inevitably have been framed and justified by some form of modernization theory. If anything it exacerbates the responsibility of US modernization theorists to observe that it was not the widely-shared, deep-rooted idea of modernization that led them to rationalize authoritarianism. Rather, they interpreted, then codified their understanding of modernization in keeping with the needs of the foreign policy establishment with which they had become enmeshed.

Modernization, in short, was an ideology before it became a theory. And like all ideologies, its intellectual dominance and centrality to policymaking depended on the fact that it had no inherent policy implications. This paradox is central to Michael

---

Hunt’s belief in the importance of such broad ‘ideologies’ as racism and American exceptionalism in shaping the course of US foreign policy over the last two centuries. Hunt takes his definition of ideology from Clifford Geertz, saying that, “ideologies are integrated and coherent systems of symbols, values and beliefs.” For Hunt, such ideologies, which taken together approximate what could more colloquially be called a worldview, are too general to explain individual policy decisions. “An understanding of a nation’s ideology provides no certain insights into its behavior,” Hunt cautions, and “the relationship between ideas and action is not rigid.” He argues, for example, that in the early 20th century some Americans embraced a vision of American exceptionalism that precluded imperialism, while others embraced a version that required it. Similarly, some Americans argued that the racial inferiority of non-whites justified colonizing the Philippines while others used the same racist ideology to oppose annexing Cuba.

Hunt draws on Geertz’s “Ideology as a Cultural System” in formulating his definition of ideology. In that essay, however, Geertz is explicitly taking up Mannheim’s quest to create a “non-evaluative conception of ideology.” Geertz challenges the “pejorative” view of ideology, articulated both in the “familiar parodic paradigm… ‘I have a social philosophy; you have political opinions; he has an ideology,’” and in Werner Stark’s claim that “Ideological thought is… something shady, something that ought to be overcome and banished from our mind.” Hunt, by contrast, is eager for

---

420 Ibid, 49.
Americans to banish, or at least overcome, the ideologies he describes. It is hard to fault him for treating racial hierarchy and American exceptionalism as a ‘deviations’ from ‘scientific objectivity.’\footnote{Hunt, \textit{Ideology}, 16.} Still, if Hunt simply wanted to explain US foreign policy and not criticize it, the accuracy of American views about race or American intentions would in fact be irrelevant. In short, while mistaken ideas or outdated prejudices can certainly be dangerous in any number of realms, policymaking is seldom one of them. These ideas cannot be blamed for failed policies, nor, unfortunately, can their eradication be expected to produce better policymaking.

When America’s political relationship with Turkey began in earnest toward the end of the Second World War, Ismet İnönü and his Republican People’s Party held a firm monopoly on power in the country. They had inherited this monopoly from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself, who had created the party to help in institute his revolutionary modernizing agenda in the early years of the Republic and appointed İnönü as successor before his death. Turkey’s democratic transition began after World War Two when a group of prominent politicians from within İnönü’s party split off, founding their own party and demanding free elections. While making it clear their party would take a more permissive approach to the role of religion in public life, these men remained staunch defenders of Atatürk’s secular modernization program, as well as his emphasis on national sovereignty in the face of potential foreign threats. They differed, however, in their commitment to free market ideas - Democratic Party cofounder Celal Bayar had championed such an approach when he served as Prime Minister under Atatürk. This went hand in hand with a desire to prioritize rural
development over industrialization, an approach in keeping with the personal background of men like Adnan Menderes who came from wealthy provincial landowning family.

Whereas Ataturk had at one point allowed the formation of an opposition party that he quickly closed, İnönü allowed the DP to form. In 1946 İnönü oversaw a heavily manipulated election that returned his party to power, but also allowed some DP members to enter parliament. This was the situation when US officials first began their intensive appraisals of Turkish domestic politics, a status quo that many assumed would continue indefinitely. American statesmen, for their part, were fine with all of this. Over the past half century scholars have occasionally asserted, with little hard evidence, that US pressure prompted İnönü’s decision to hold multi-party elections in 1946 and 1950.

Only recently Barın Kayaoğlu highlighted the crucial flaw in this argument: even assuming İnönü would have been susceptible to such pressure, Washington never gave him a chance to feel it. In a December 1948 conversation touching on rumors that the United States had abandoned Chiang Kai-shek because of his undemocratic behavior, a member of the U.S. military mission drew the attention of Naci Akalın, head of the Turkish National Security Service, to “remarks by some of the Turkish opposition

---

422 Despatch number 992, Embassy to SecState, “Turkish Election Day, July 21 46,” July 25, 1946, Classified General Records, Box 18, RG 84, National Archives.

423 The most compelling evidence for this assertion, in fact, appears to be a conversation between Dankwart Rustow and İsmet İnönü in which after repeatedly denying that the US played any role in his decision to hold multi-party elections İnönü smiled and said something to the effect of “but even they did, it wasn’t such a bad idea was it?” Rustow subsequently related this conversation to William Hale, who repeated it to the author.

424 Barın Kayaoğlu “Strategic imperatives, Democratic rhetoric: The United States and Turkey, 1945–52,” in Cold war History, Volume 9, Issue 3, 2009. Kayaoğlu does not, however, address the question of whether, as some US embassy officials suggested, the founders of the Democratic Party were encouraged by the genuine belief that greater democratization would bring Western support against Russia. Memorandum to John Evarts Horne from G. H. Damon, November 14, Unclassified General Records, US Embassy, Ankara, Box 91, National Archives.
members that the United States would realize that Turkey is also not democratic and would take similar action here to withdraw US Aid.” “Naci’s response,” he reported, “was to laugh and say that since aid is still coming in, the U.S. evidently is convinced that Turkey is democratic.”

The reigning US attitude toward İnönü was perhaps best characterized by a description of Atatürk given in a US army manual used by embassy officials at the time: “Many accused him of being a dictator. If so, he was a strong man of the right sort.” This was not a case of İnönü being “our son of a bitch” – indeed, US diplomats were infuriated by his insistence on maintaining neutrality during the war. Rather, it was a grudging acknowledgement of the fact that unlike other one-party regimes the Republican People’s Party had focused on domestic reform and economic development instead of external aggression.

When Turkey’s next parliamentary elections were scheduled for 1950, State Department officials and CIA analysts largely expected İnönü to once again use heavy handed methods to achieve victory. Tellingly, in private conversations with İnönü about US-Turkish cooperation in the months before Turkey went to the polls in May,

---

425 Naci, his interlocutor wrote, went on to explain that “Turkey could not be democratic until the level of education is much higher, and such a condition is many, many years away,” adding parenthetically, “Naci does not even bother to give lip service to democracy which he considers, I believe, unsuitable for Turkey. As a loyal, patriotic Turk, he does his best for his country by the means he knows best – a good police system which helps the Turks vote the straight PRP [RPP] ticket.” Memorandum to the Ambassador, from Colonel GSC J. S. Robinson. Ankara, December 16, 1948. Top Secret General Records, Box 1, RG84, National Archives.

426 Guide to Turkey, Research and Analysis Branch Detachment “C” 2799 Prov OPR & TNG Unit APO 787, U.S. Army.

427 Ibid.
US participants made it clear they expected relations to continue apace. Publicly, US descriptions of İnönü’s rule were sufficiently ambiguous that pro-government papers could interpret them praise for İnönü’s fundamentally democratic character while opposition papers could read them as a critique of his authoritarianism. When a congressional delegation visited Turkey in April, 1947, for example, coverage in the RPP party paper Ulus reported Congressman Carl Hatch as saying “All my life I have been a supporter of democracy and government by the people. I must express my admiration for the speedy development which democratic life has shown in Turkey.” Kuvvet, by contrast, quoted Congressman Brewster as saying, of the same democratic progress, “I hope that this development will expand.” Such ambiguity was not just a product of US officials trying to be polite. Rather, it reflected a profound ambiguity in private assessments of Turkey’s political maturity. This ambiguity, in turn, stemmed from the fact that while everyone agreed being a modern country ultimately required being democratic, people could disagree on what it meant for a country whose level of modernity was up for debate in the first place. According to a typical April CIA assessment:

Although the Turk has been accustomed to being pushed around (provided it is done by duly constituted authorities in what he accepts as a proper and customary manner) he has now been told by both government and opposition that mishandling of his electoral privileges this time would be most improper. If it happens, he will object most strenuously.

Here, as in other similar statements, the peasants’ traditional mentality appears as the backdrop for a conclusion that is predicated on the assumption that this mentality has

428 Despatch No 38, American Embassy Ankara to SecState, February 3, 1950. Top Secret Records, Box 1, RG 84, National Archives.
429 Ulus, April 14, 1947; Kuvvet, April 14, 1947.
430 CIA Near/East Africa Intelligence Summary, April 12 1950. NARA, Electronic Reading Room.
fundamentally changed. More striking, though, is the parenthetical caveat that renders the initial statement about the Turk’s passivity almost meaningless. Caveats like this in fact played an important role in giving modernization its flexibility as an ideology. Government officials whose opinions did not fit neatly within the prevailing rhetoric could easily find exceptions or qualifications that would enable seemingly irreconcilable ideas to coexist.

When Turks went to the polls in 1950 and democratically elected a party that enthusiastically supported an American alliance and free-market capitalism, State Department observers were excited to have an example of modernity working the way they always thought it should. US officials were quick to praise Turkey for having taken a vital step on the road toward modernity, and also to strive to understand what had made this step possible. Thus subsequent years brought a newfound American interest in the factors enabled Turkey’s peasantry (the country was still largely rural at this point), often seen as too “traditional” to even have opinions on matters of high politics, to reach such an enlightened decision. The most common answer was that the newly elected Democratic Party’s commitment to rural development and agricultural modernization improved the peasant’s life, making him both grateful and more modern in the process. Turkish peasants, who held “no conviction that the passage of time connotes progress, and had been “born and raised in an environment where the material things of life are sparse at best,” the very act of improving the peasant’s lot challenged his fatalism and made him demand even more improvements.431 The very

431 “Evaluation of the 1954 Turkish general election,” May 6, 1954, Department of State. Classified General Records, 1938-1958, Box 72, RG 84, National Archives.
desire for material betterment, which was at the heart of the modern personality, led the peasant to be grateful not only to the DP, but also to the country with supplied the tractors, built the roads, and engineered the irrigation projects that facilitated these improvements.

During the 1950s, one of the principle debates between the DP and its CHP opponents was over the relative merits of agricultural development, favored by the DP, or industrial development, the longstanding focus of the CHP since the beginning of the republic. America’s strong preference for the DP’s program was grounded not only in their belief in its capacity to modernize the peasantry, but also on an historical reading of America’s own modernization process. In McGhee’s words:

[A]gricultural development was the basic requirement of a country; that the United States had started off as an agricultural country and as the farmers began to accumulate money they started investing in various industries, leading to the development of industry.\(^\text{432}\)

Yet here too, the logic of modernization could justify the opposite conclusion. McGhee again:

I, myself, had not been as critical of the policy of etatism in Turkey during the 1930’s as some observers, because it appeared evident that if the State had not taken the initiative at that time nothing would have happened. It was better that something happen… than that nothing happen.\(^\text{433}\)

When lower ranking members of the embassy staff actually went out into rural Turkey during this period to evaluate the success of the DP’s efforts, their reports were almost

\(^{432}\) “Memorandum of Conversation between the Ambassador and Ismet Inönü, Former President of the Republic of Turkey and Current President of the Republican People’s Party, the Principle Party in Opposition,” undated. George C. McGhee Papers, Georgetown University Library Special Collections. Series XXIV, Box 1.

\(^{433}\) “Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador McGhee and Foreign Minister Koprulu on February 1, 1952.” George C. McGhee Papers, Georgetown University Library Special Collections. Series XXIV, Box 1.
universally ambiguous. Returning from a partridge hunting expedition in 1951, Izmir Consul Edward Rivinus declared: “I have seen nothing during my journey to cause me to dissent from the generally accepted thesis that the old Turkish cultural pattern is still dominant in Anatolia,” before going on to note that ‘the Anatolian peasant adapts himself to the tractor with remarkable facility.” A year later, his successor, drew a similar conclusion in Thrace, but with the emphasis completely reversed. “Mechanization of agricultural has clearly taken hold” he reported “and has had a leavening effect on the spirit and outlook of the whole countryside.” Yet the population nonetheless lacked initiative, “presumably…a Turkish trait.” Crucially, all of these assessments reveal just enough cause for optimism to justify further American support, but never so much optimism as to obviate the need for this support. Their variability, however, challenges the idea that prejudice would inevitably lead American observers to conclude that ‘traditional’ people were too backward for democracy. In some cases observers declared themselves quite pleased with how modern such people appeared. In other cases, observers found diverse ways to reconcile pessimistic assessments of the citizens themselves with the belief they were still best suited to democratic government. As will be seen below, an abiding belief in democracy could even alleviate US concern over aspects of peasant behavior such as excessive religiosity that could potentially be seen as dangerously backward.

After 1955, the virtuous cycle Americans had identified between the DP’s support for the peasants and the peasants’ freely-given support for the DP had broken down on two fronts. The high-profile arrest of several journalists coupled with violent anti-Greek riots inspired public criticism of Menderes’s democratic credentials in the US press. Meanwhile, the failure of Turkey’s wheat crop after three profitable seasons led to a budget crisis that made Menderes’s high profile rural development projects seem more like wasteful pandering than inspired modernizing. Yet here the evolutionary aspects of the modernization model came to Menderes’s defense, as US officials sought to explain why supporting a democratically-elected leader who was behaving undemocratically was in the long term interests of Turkish democracy. In this typical assessment, an ultimately positive evaluation of the Turkish people’s democratic development is used to explain why a recently manifest lack of political maturity in other realms should be overlooked.

Turkey is far from being an operating democracy in our sense of the word. It never has been and is not likely to be for many years to come, for it takes time to develop the psychological attitudes among both leaders and people and the institutions and traditions which are essential to the democratic system. It is true that the really revolutionary step was taken in 1950 when the Turkish people discovered that they could be the masters, via the ballot box, and throw out a repressive government. They are not likely to forget this basic lesson… On the whole, Emb[assy] is satisfied Turkey is headed and will continue in right direction despite our feeling there has been some retrogression or at least slackening of evolutionary pace in past year.436

On the economic front, embassy officials argued that Menderes’s enthusiasm for projects like big-budget dams revealed that he was simply “over-eager” for modernization – “all steamed up” in the words of one memo.437 Such over-eagerness,
in turn, was often seen as a common symptom of incompletely modernized elites within traditional societies, and could be grounds for criticism or praise as circumstances necessitated. When US officials supported Menderes, over-eagerness was seen as preferable to reticence. After the negative effects of DP economic policies had become more clear, some Americans would argue that perhaps leaders from the even more modernized military would be more mature, and thus more measured, in their pursuit of modernization.

Among Menderes’s political opponents in Turkey, however, it was the DP’s willingness to relax some of the CHP’s more stridently secular reforms by allowing a greater public role for Islam that most frequently called the party’s modernist credentials into question. However, the State Department’s faith in the party’s vision for Turkey was such that US officials routinely justified the revival of public religious practice that occurred after 1950. Though embassy reports frequently contained a section for “Religious Reaction,” quite often the ensuing analysis merely explained why a recent incident was not as bad as it initially appeared or why RPP charges against the government were exaggerated. At first, alarming developments were written off as manifestations of the country’s new democratic spirit. After visiting a town near Izmir, for example. Rivinus quoted approvingly the reassurances of the city’s Vali [mayor]:

438 Introducing the translation of a Turkish teacher’s description of traditional village life, anthropologist Paul Stirling excused the author’s excessive desire to “fill the vacuum of ignorance with the blessing of modern knowledge” by saying he was one of those men “deliberately indoctrinated with modern ideas and ideals,” who have not had “the opportunity to witness the kind of society which had invented [them], and to which they were adapted.” Thus with “these notions,” the author, “a lad of seventeen, was sent back to a totally different type of society with the naïve goal of altering it to suit his inevitably half-understood ideas of progress.” Mahmut Makal (Wyndham Deedes Trans.) A Village in Anatolia. Valentine, Mitchell & Co. (London, 1954).
He insisted that there is no difference in the number or extent of reactionaries in the Turkish social picture since the coming to power of the new regime, and that the only difference lies in the healthy fact that these and all elements feel free to speak their desires openly…. The Turkish nation today is in the hands of such men as the Vali and his generation to whom a return to religious law or similarly reactionary tendency is so repugnant as to be inconceivable.\footnote{“Observations made on an inspection trip in the Izmir Consular District,” from Izmir Consulate to Ankara Embassy, May 16, 1951, Records of the Izmir Consular Post, Box 69, RG 84, National Archives.}

Even when, at a later stop, he learned that citizens had been petitioning the government to be allowed multiple wives, Rivinus remained nonplussed. “Naturally the social habits of a people cannot be completely eradicated in 25 years,” he stated, before again repeating that the all the rural leaders he met where “children of the Republic.”\footnote{Ibid.} In addition, he noted that there had, after all, been a large number of unmarried women in the village relative to the number of eligible men. Indeed, even the traditional Turk’s lack of initiative would help keep him on the path to modernity:

[T]he Turkish people are by nature and background disciplined and will follow their appointed or elected leaders unless the latter are grossly unsatisfactory. Certainly at the present time, there are no reactionary leaders… who have even passing appeal to the people.\footnote{Ibid.}

Memos from higher up within the embassy reflect a similar logic. A report from the State Department’s respected Turkish advisor, for example, acknowledged that “religion continues to exert a hold on the thinking of the majority of the rural population” but then states that “counteracting such menace is the dominant political influence of the educated class and the majority of the urban population.” The role of the DP is made explicit when he concludes, “If no serious mistake is committed by those holding the reins of government, the safeguards in question, without undue
coercion, serve to preserve the essentials of the reforms.” Throughout the 1950s, the embassy remained convinced that on the religious question at least, the DP was not committing any serious mistakes.

This faith persisted until the very end of the Menderes’s time in power. As opposition criticism of the regime’s ‘exploitation of religion’ grew, State Department officials dismissed these concerns as “name calling.” Prominent displays of religious sentiment were “isolated incidents,” “in line with worldwide trends,” and “hardly a threat to the secular foundation of the regime.” In 1958, Menderes, having survived a plane-crash that killed several of his companions, returned to Istanbul where “literally thousands of animals were sacrificed” as his motorcade passed through the city.” “So much sacrificial blood was thrown up on the car that the driver had difficulty seeing the road,” wrote the US Consul, before again concluding that there was nothing to worry about. [Figure 40] The State Department’s calm acceptance of such displays reveals the extent to which the political implications of modernization as an ideology lay in its application. In the face of evidence that could easily have been used to brand Menderes a reactionary, the embassy, under pressure from serving ambassador, continued to confidently assert that evidence of such widespread

442 Letter from Nur Ali Bozcali to Bartel E. Kuniholm, April 16, 1951, Department of State. Classified General Records, 1938-1958, Box 72, RG 84, National Archives.
443 “Religion in Turkey – Spring 1959,” April 24, 1959, Central Decimal File, Box 3734, RG 59, National Archives
445 “Recent Developments in Turkish Islam” Despatch No. 325. Ankara to Department of State, Jan 30, 1959. Ibid. The photograph of camel sacrifices at a pro-Menderes rally appeared in a State Department dispatch from April 1959 which concluded that fears of religious reaction were exaggerated. Despatch No. 664, Ankara to Department of State, April 24, 1959. 1955-1959 Central Decimal File, Box 3730, RG 59, National Archives.
Religiosity made it more important than ever to have a thoroughly modern man like Menderes at the nation’s helm. This was not a case of ideology shaping politics or politics shaping ideology. It was a case of officials maintaining both their policies and principles by dismissing any evidence that they might be in conflict with one another.

As domestic opposition to the DP grew, US officials grew increasingly concerned with the possibility of a coup, particularly after a group of radical officers in the Iraqi army ousted pro-Western Prime Minister Nuri al-Said in a bloody coup in 1958. The rhetoric of modernity, in turn, served to both calm and exacerbate these fears. Turkish soldiers were by nature obedient, meaning they were less likely to initiate a coup, but also less likely to resist one once initiated. The country’s Byzantine-Ottoman inheritance was an obstacle to a functioning democracy, but after making the “hard break” with Ottoman authoritarianism, the people were now even more committed not to return to it. One State Department memo written in 1958 takes the contradictory possibilities of this style of reasoning to an extreme:

“There is general agreement [among foreign observers] that the stolid Turk very seldom blows up but when he does there is a major explosion. Certainly no other Mediterranean would have so long endured without vociferous protest the inconveniences, discomfort, privations and outright hardship that have been the lot of Istanbul citizens for nearly two years…. The fact remains that a Turkish society so long static and dormant is now in movement and it would be unwise to take for granted that the superficial political stability rests on any rock-like base of economic and social stability…. On the whole I believe that the Turkish Army is in most ways typical of the faults and virtues of the Turkish people… The

Daniel Newberry echoed the complaints of other junior embassy staff (for example, George Harris, interview with the author, November 17, 2010) in saying “[Fletcher Warren]’s idea of being an effective ambassador was to give Prime Minister Menderes whatever he wanted… Ambassador Fletcher Warren did not want his ‘constituent posts’ reporting things that reflected against Prime Minister Adnan Menderes.” Frontline Diplomacy interview with Daniel Newberry. December 1, 1997.
tradition of respect for and obedience to elders and superiors, characteristic in all Turkish life, seems to retain a firm hold among the military.”

To summarize, the Turks, as Orientals, were stolid, which made a coup less likely, but, were it to occur, more dramatic. This stolidity also trumped the passionate Mediterranean aspect of their character, which might have made them more likely to rise up in revolt. At the same time, their recent experience with modernity made instability more likely, though the military was still too traditional to move against authority. On top of all this, the memo ends with a quote from a Turkish officer who explains that there will not be a coup in Turkey because “this is not Syria.” In his eyes, the military’s respect for authority marked Turkey not as traditional but as more modern than its backwards neighbor.

When a coup ultimately toppled the Menderes regime in 1960, the meaning of modernization had to be once again recalibrated. The new attitude was perhaps best encapsulated by a 1962 USIA exhibition that began with its title, “The Birth Of American Democracy,” facing a large drawing of a musket-bearing minuteman as if to reassure viewers that armed forces were sometimes needed to play the role of midwife. The academic literature evaluating the coup from this period was hardly enthusiastic in praising the military, but seemed instead committed to finding a silver lining. Richard Robinson, for example, who had worked for American Universities Field Staff before becoming professor of history at Harvard, did not hide his sympathy for the Democrat

---

447 Embassy Despatch 89, Ankara to Department of State, August 5, 1958. Department of State, Classified General Records, 1938-1958, Box 77, RG 84, National Archives.

448 One of the most remarkable inversions of typical Western prejudices came from the British Ambassador at the time, who argued that attempting to use economic pressure to prevent Menderes’s execution would be counter-productive because “The Turks are oriental enough to enjoy standing on their honour against sordid economic considerations.” Fo-371/153037, RK 1018/1, Burrows to FO (Ross), Ankara, 21 October, 1960, as quoted by Cihat Göktepe’s “1960 ‘Revolution’ in Turkey and the British Policy Towards Turkey,” The Turkish Yearbook, Volume XXX, pp 139-189, p 183.
Party in describing the coup. Nonetheless, he concluded that “the lesson to be derived from the failure of civilian leadership in Turkey is that such leadership can survive only as long as it continues to lead.” While faulting Menderes for corrupt mismanagement and admitting there was an “appeal and validity to the idea of temporarily setting aside popular government” Robinson argued that the solution was not military rule but better civilian government. Writing about the coup for the Brookings Institution in 1963, fellow historian Walter Weiker concluded by saying that though the United States “cannot look with benign approval on military usurpation of power,” “[t]he questions whether and to what extent the United States might encourage continuation of military or one party governments… are extremely difficult ones.”

The most striking counterpoint to the evaluations of Turkey’s democratic potential after the coup come from Daniel Learner’s seminal 1958 work, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernization in the Middle East*. Based on research first conducted in Turkey in the early 1950s Lerner used elaborate social science metrics to evaluate the social progress of different Middle East populations on the path from “tradition” to “modernity.” What stands out, beneath the sophisticated numerical analysis of survey questions is Lerner’s ultimate conclusion: Turkey, under Menderes, was an example of successful modernization, Iran, under Mossadegh, an example of failed modernization.

---

450 Ibid, 273.
Meanwhile, in Egypt, where Nasser was still seen as a potential US ally, Lerner concluded it was too soon to tell.

Perversely, it was the complexity of the very questions Lerner, Robinson and Weiker set out to wrestle with that that made it so easy for social scientists to answer them according to US interests when articulating academic modernization theory in the early 1960s.

The diverse ways US policymakers applied the tenets of modernization theory, inevitably raises the question of whether they were sincere in doing so or whether they deliberately applied this discourse in order to advance their interests. The best evidence for their sincerity comes from a comparison of the modernization discourse found in development programs that policymakers felt were crucial for US national security and its use in what were explicitly referred to as “propaganda” programs. [Figure 41] Even as Americans adjusted their ideas about what modernization meant, they remained genuinely convinced that it could and should be applied in Turkey. But versatility of modernization discourse enabled it to serve not only as the ideology that unconsciously turned to when their interests were at stake, but also as a discourse that could be deliberately mobilized for public diplomacy.

Modernization has been heavily criticized by authors such as Timothy Mitchell, who have suggested, that it was purely a discourse used by Western powers to justify exploitative imperial or neo-imperial relationships with third world peoples. In this view modernization discourse only existed as rhetoric for ‘the natives,’ while in
private canny ‘experts” knew better than to fully believe their own schemes. This assertion is unsustainable, however, in light of the striking similarity between the modernization discourse Americans used in what was candidly described as propaganda and the discourse present in classified correspondence among themselves about vital military and economic projects. Only when these two aspects of modernization discourse are viewed side by side does it become clear the distinction between belief and rhetoric is often an unnecessary one.

The Turkish military was the target of the United States’ most extensive modernization effort in Turkey in the 1950s. At a moment when many American military planners believed that a war with the Soviet Union was a real possibility, they set about trying to modernize Turkey's military because they were convinced that, were such a war to erupt, Western access to Middle Eastern oil would hinge on Turkey's ability to successfully hold out against Soviet forces. For US officials, “modernizing the Turkish military” meant making it as strong as possible so it could hold its own against Soviet forces for as long as possible. It meant providing Turkey with modern equipment, training soldiers to use this equipment and instilling the modern psychological attitudes that, Americans believed, were necessary for winning modern wars. The language with which the United States Information Service (after 1953 the United States Information Agency) advertised the US mission was little different from that of US officials discussing their efforts in classified correspondence.

The courage of the Turkish soldier is well-known. But there is more than courage needed in modern warfare... because the nature of war has changed. Weapons of

---

the past are obsolete. The soldier of today must be well-equipped, well-trained and well-organized to survive and be an effective fighting unit.  

Complicated as it proved to be, delivering vehicles and weaponry was nonetheless the most straightforward aspect of this program. JAMMAT (Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, subsequently JUSMMAT, the Joint United States Military Mission for Aid to Turkey) monthly reports from the early 1950s provided regular, detailed breakdowns of equipment delivered and discussed whether it was effectively utilized. These reports devoted considerably greater space, though, to detailing the number of Turkish soldiers and officers entering, enrolled in and graduating from various training programs. The United States Army established a series of specialized training centers, including an engineering school in Istanbul, a commando training school in Izmir, an armored school in Ankara and artillery, anti-aircraft and ordnance schools in smaller cities. While ordinary recruits were sent to these schools to learn specific skills, a smaller number of English-speaking officers were sent for more advanced study at US or NATO bases in America or Germany. The US military worked to ensure that Turkish soldiers who graduated from these courses were given positions in which they could teach the skills they had learned to other soldiers. JAMMAT also tried to ensure that the classes Turkish soldiers took deviated as little as possible from those of their American counterparts. The training manuals provided for Turkish courses were translations of those used in the equivalent US schools, and JAMMAT officials sometimes became worried when they feared a “Turkish twist” had been introduced into the translations.

455 “Report of Ad Hoc Committee on Turkish Infantry,” 2 January 1951, Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, Adjutant General Section Decimal File, Classified, Box 7, RG 334, National Archives.
In addition to teaching a wide range of technical skills, US military advisors also sought to impart a new ethos, at once more American and more modern, to the Turkish military. “The traditions of a Turkish enlisted boy” they feared “is not that of the Janissaries but of the patient mute immemorial Oriental infantry, the uncomprehending serf of an inflexible fate.” The US military wanted to replace what they saw as a culture of blind obedience and slavish devotion to authority with a new spirit of initiative in which responsibility would be delegated to younger officers who would in turn be more assertive in exercising it. The JAMMAT leadership also worked to encourage greater meritocracy, with promotions based on ability rather than seniority. Not only did JAMMAT officials believe that greater initiative and meritocratic promotions had strategic benefits in their own right, but they were also aware that the methods advanced by younger, lower-ranking officers were more likely to be those taught by JAMMAT.

In 1952, JAMMAT identified several methods for the “indoctrination of the Turkish Forces in the principles of leadership and the exercise of initiative.” At the most basic level, these included holding special classes for Turkish units, emphasizing leadership and initiative at military schools, using “on-the-spot correction” during officers’ field visits and providing a “good example” through the conduct of American advisors. The

456 Memorandum from Betty Carp to Ambassador, “Morale of the Turkish Armed Forces,” June 18, 1946. Classified General Records, Box 17, RG 84, National Archives. This quote too, included a pragmatic acknowledgement that alongside cultural factors “poverty” remained one of the major reasons for Turkey’s failure to adopt to modern warfare.

457 In the words of a JAMMAT evaluation: “In many unites where senior officers are non-graduates of American supervised schools or of Stateside schools, there is a marked tendency to side track or disregard any advice which might be forthcoming from junior officers who have had such schooling. The tendency on the part of such senior commanders is to adhere to the old methods with which they are familiar.” “Reassessment of results of training efforts of TUSAG in advice of Turkish Ground Forces, Appendix X,” 24 November, 1952, JAMMAT Army Group Adjutant General’s section, Box 116, RG 334, National Archives.

458 Ibid. US military documents regularly used “indoctrinate” as a synonym for teach when referring to both Turkish and American soldiers.
memo also suggests giving “public credit and recognition to outstanding officers who exhibit qualities of initiative and leadership,” along with eliminating “those officers, young or old, who prove themselves to be obstructionists or reactionaries.” On several occasions during the 1950s JAMMAT leaders, in coordination with the State Department, worked to secure the replacement of members of the Turkish General Staff who fit this description. Meeting with Prime Minister Menderes shortly before leaving Turkey, General Arnold praised him for deciding to retire all but one of Turkey’s four-star generals, saying that this would “bring into leadership of the Turkish army a new and more flexible mentality.” Arnold went on to say that “one of the principle deterrents to the development of initiative on the part of the younger officers in the Turkish army was the fact that at the present time no man could be promoted without the unanimous concurrence of the heads of the army, navy and air force.” This, Arnold felt, led junior officers to “keep their mouths shut” instead of making suggestions or questioning their superiors. The Prime Minister agreed and “indicated he would do something about this situation.” Later in the decade, the one general Menderes retained in 1953 was also retired with the support of the US when he too began to appear as an obstacle to reform.

The extent to which US understanding of “modernization” in military context was intellectually in keeping with precepts of democracy offers perhaps the best evidence that the ideology of modernization was never inherently predisposed toward an authoritarian reading. Rather policymakers’ ambiguity about democratic values on governmental level

\footnote{\textit{Memorandum of Conversation of the Ambassador and General Arnold with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on March 19, 1953.” McGhee Papers, Series XXIV, Box 1. See also “On the military resignations. Members of Cabinet, the Ministry of Defense and Military Establishment in Turkey,” Feb. 6, 1953. Department of State, Classified General Records, 1938-1958, Box 77, RG 84, National Archives.}
seems to have been a product of fact that this was the realm in which US political interests came into play. In a military context, where the only US interest was winning wars, the ‘democratic’ aspect of modernization was never challenged. In fact, see Robinson, when they appeared to come into conflict, interests again dictated “psychic mobility” within the military at possible expense of democracy.

The same rhetoric of participation, mobility and initiative was central to a US initiatives in a widely divergent array of activities. In designing their massive road-building program, for example, US planners prefigured Daniel Lerner’s idea that “physical mobility” would lead to “psychic mobility,” by stressing the psychological benefits of travel.\(^\text{460}\) When it came to sketching out maps and allocating funds, however, the actual debates were over the relative importance of military versus economic goals. When a Soviet attack seemed potentially imminent after World War II, the Turkish General Staff had anticipated a rapid effort to link Istanbul, Ankara, Erzerum and Iskenderun through three major highways that could transport men and material from the country’s capital and major port directly to the front.\(^\text{461}\) In the early 1950s, though, US military planners felt the short-term threat of war had sufficiently receded to prioritize long-term economic growth. Thus the JAMMAT development program built a road network that slowly expanded out from Turkey’s major cities with the result that it was over a decade before an unbroken paved road linked even

\(^{460}\) Upon his return from a partridge hunting trip, for example, E. H. Rivinus credited roads with being the source of all the positive change he had observed in the region. “Partridges and Politics in Muğla and Aydın Vilayets,” Izmir Consulate to Ankara Embassy, September 7, 1951. NARA, RG 84. Records of the Izmir Consular Post, Box 69.

\(^{461}\) Confidential Memorandum Conference on Roads, Ministry of National Defense April 14, 1946. Classified General Records, Box 17, RG 84, National Archives
such major cities as Istanbul and Ankara.\textsuperscript{462} These were two fundamentally different approaches to road-building, and yet there was nothing in the rhetoric of “psychic mobility” that could make one preferable to the other. The important thing from a purely modernization perspective was that both approaches involved building roads.

Alongside trying to modernize Turkey’s military and its transportation network, State Department officials also felt that purging the Turkish bureaucracy of its overly-centralized, authoritarian character would facilitate modernization in other fields. While they fervently encouraged free-market reforms, they also reasoned that as long as Turkey’s economy remained largely state-run, the bureaucracy running the economy should at least be as modern as possible. George McGhee believed that America must “encourage Turks to revise the present rigid civil service system to provide greater incentive to civil servants to take initiative and responsibility, particularly in state economic enterprises.”\textsuperscript{463} Americans also felt increasing initiative was necessary to improve Turkish education. The Turkish government seemed so intent on maintaining tight control over Turkish schools – the US military even had to obtain special authorization to run a private school for the children of enlisted men – that American officials concluded the field of education was too sensitive for major reforms efforts. However the first time that the Turkish Ministry of Education allowed the Ford Foundation to implement an experimental curriculum in a girls elementary school, the result was a program emphasizing individual initiative, parental participation and

\textsuperscript{462} For the clearest example of this approach, compare the maps issued by the Turkish Highway Directorate [Türkiye Karayolları Müdürlüğü] from 1950, 1953, 1954, 1956 and 1960.  
\textsuperscript{463} Untitled speech of George McGhee. \textit{George C. McGhee Papers}, Georgetown University Library Special Collections, Series XVII, Box 2.
practical training. Students were allowed to choose their own electives, and courses were “remodeled to suit the needs of young women going out into the world of Turkey today.” Parents, too, were invited to the schools” and “asked to comment on the school program which is offered their children” for “perhaps the first time.”

Indeed, in even more varied areas of Turkey's cultural life, US rhetoric was the same. After arranging for an American to serve as temporary coach of the Turkish national basketball team, the state Department concluded that in addition to teaching the fast-break game, Fox “has done a great deal toward instilling American concepts fair play and sportsmanship and idea that selection of any national team should be based solely on ability and performance [instead of seniority, as had reportedly been the practice before].” After visiting the Greek Orthodox monastic community on Mount Athos, George McGhee declared:

The Mount does not appear to have, however, any positive mission…. The Mount, by its very nature cannot be related to the modern world at large, except as a curiosity for tourists… If it is to survive it will require strengthening internally – and increased outside support…. Additional education facilities for the monks on Athos are believed to be required if there is to be developed an intellectual approach to the mission of the Mount. Also it is believed that the caliber of the monks must be improved. Vigorous young men with qualities of leadership must be attracted to the mount.

---

464 “Ambassador Warren’s speech to the Propeller Club,” an attachment to Department Circular Telegram 153, August 28, 1954, General Records of the State Department 1955-1959, Central Decimal File, Box 2213, RG 59, National Archives.


An official who accompanied him added “I too was depressed by what might best be described as the futility of purpose and selfishness of the monks’ life… [and] the apparent mechanical method in which the liturgies are practiced,” before adding that if anything made such a traditional lifestyle seem understandable “atom bomb quote”

Finally, another official concluded, more optimistically, that Mount Athos “could become a center of valuable research and creative thinking – if the proper stimulus were present.”

Alongside American efforts to supply Turks with the “proper stimulus” in diverse fields was an equally important effort, largely orchestrated by the USIA, to advertise the extent of America’s modernity and highlight American generosity in sharing this modernity with Turkey. [Figure 42] The State Department consciously distinguished between its modernization programs and its “propaganda” campaigns, though they saw both as complementing each other. US officials believed that wanting to be modern was the first step toward being modern, and that being modern meant appreciating modernity. That is, showing off how modern America was would encourage Turks to be more modern themselves, and as they became more modern, they would develop an even greater appreciation for America, the most modern country of all.

Though authors such as whoever have already identified the importance of modernization discourse in US public diplomacy from this period, a closer examination of several of these programs in the Turkish context serves two important
purposes. First, as stated above, it demonstrates while US policymakers used modernization ideology for diverse ends, their abstract articulations of that ideology were remarkably consistent whether they were speaking about it privately amongst themselves or presenting it for public consumption. Secondly, the USIS/USIA remarkably thorough documentation of Turkish reactions to their public diplomacy projects offers a unique opportunity to see how Turkish and American elites were equally committed to modernization, and routinely spoke of it in the same language, but once again could use it for very different political ends.

Among many programs that aired on VOA, *Here are the Answers* was among the most paradigmatic in showing just how much modern knowledge America had to share. Called “Hazircevap Adam,” or literally, ‘the ready-answer man’ in Turkish, the show featured a pair of Turkish hosts answering questions submitted by Turkish listeners. The questions selected sometimes touched on social or political topics, but the general focus was American science and industry. Fairly typical were questions like: “When was Nylon invented and who invented it?” “Where are the longest bridge and tunnels in America?” “How many tons of tobacco are grown in American annually?” “How old is the invention of bells” and “which cars were invented in America and at what dates?” For every two or three of these, though, the hosts would bring their earnest attention to more general questions: “Among the weapons invented until now are there any that are useful to human beings or nations?” “How long will the Cold war last?” “Will it be possible to form a world nation?” “Where in America are the redskins located?” “Is there a remedy against snoring?” “Do they make Turkish movies in Hollywood?” “Are there men or
women who have more than one spouse in America?” “What kind of flowers are exhibited at American flower shows?” and “How can a 17 year old man become a woman?" 

The answers to all of these questions varied between the overtly politicized and the relatively objective. Bells, listeners learned, were actually first made in Moscow. Nylons were discovered by accident, but the process still involved “a deep farsightedness” and “thousands of experiments.” Of course military weapons could have useful benefits – throughout history they “helped people to progress in the field of learning.” Redskins lived mainly in the Southwest and enjoyed many rights. In fact, in 1952 “all the Redskins in America” would vote for the first time in the country’s history. And “no, no cure has been found for the disease of snoring, which has given rise to a number of psychological crises, complaints and even divorces in America.” Likewise, Hollywood made no Turkish movies, but did you know Turkish was spoken in such films as Terrible Journey and Background to Danger? Polygamy was not only illegal in America but “people who do not obey this law are punished.” Finally, “a male can to a certain extent become a female and a female can become a male. Our listener can obtain more detailed information on this subject through physicians, medical journals and books.” Even when the questions themselves were not about America, VOA implied that there was an answer to every question and that more often than not America had it.

467 “Here are the answers,” November 11, 1951, Voice of America Daily Broadcast Content Reports and Script Translations, 1950 – 1955, Box 29, RG 306, National Archives; January 10, 1952, Box 34; March 22, 1953, Box 67; March 6, 1955, Box 78; Ibid; November 11, 1952, Box 29; January 10, 1952, Box 34; Ibid; January 10, 1952, Box 34; September 4, 1952, Box 51; October 19, 1952, Box 51; Ibid; March 22, 1953, Box 67; Ibid; Ibid.
Whenever Turks came to America on education exchange programs, the USIS/USIA took it as an opportunity to show off just how generous America was in sharing this vast store of knowledge with Turks. Press releases written for VOA interviews with dozens of Turkish visitors followed a similar pattern: First, the visitor was introduced, along with the subject they came to study. Then there was a quote reflecting the visitor’s impressions of America or their excitement over their visit. Finally, the press releases would often end with either a quote from the visitor about how they hoped to share what they learned when they returned to Turkey or a third-person statement to that effect. All of these interviews reflected the idea that in almost every conceivable field America possessed modern knowledge and techniques which it was giving to Turks for their benefit. Indeed, VOA closed with almost identical sentences when promoting interviews with a boxer, a playwright and a delegation of engineers:

“The young boxer intends to demonstrate American techniques to Turkish fighters upon his return to Turkey.”

“After Ozdogru finishes his remaining three study semesters, he plans to return to Turkey, where he hopes to add modern American theatre techniques to his country's expanding dramatic outlets.”

“On their return, the men plan to put the technical knowledge gained in the United States to practical use in the construction of public power projects throughout Turkey.”

468 Records of the USIA VOA radio news press releases, Boxes 4 and 5, RG 306, National Archives. Marked up drafts of these announcements reveal that these quotes were occasionally altered for effect. Thus a visiting Turkish radio journalist went from saying “we're busy learning... all we can about how America lives,” to “we’re busy... absorbing as much as we can of the fascinating kaleidoscope that is known as 'The American way of life.'” A Turkish woman who said “I was amazed to see how many women work here.... It's wonderful to see how many important positions women hold in the United States, but sometimes I wonder if it gives them enough time to dream,” had the final part of her thought removed by an editor. Likewise, when a visiting Turkish journalist wrote that the Turkish immigrants he met in Detroit “cling tenaciously to their Turkish traditions and speech,” this observation disappeared in the final draft. “Bingul Gulsever,” “Interview with Nazli Tlabar,” “Naci Serez.” Records of the USIA VOA radio news press releases, Boxes 4 and 5, Ibid.

469 “Turkish Fighter Necmi Karahan.” Ibid.

470 “Nuvit Ozodgru: [sic] Student,” Ibid.

471 “Public Power Discussion,” Ibid.
If this message was not explicit enough, VOA made it more clear in the title of a later program, “Turkey attends the American Classroom.” This show, which featured profiles of Turkish exchange students funded by the Fulbright Commission, emphasized both American hospitality and American learning while showing the flow of knowledge from America to grateful Turkish recipients.472

Just as Americans sought to use the rhetoric of modernity for their own political ends, Turkish officials quickly showed it was malleable enough to advance their goals, and reach strikingly different conclusions from US officials as well as one another.

Articles in the Turkish General Staff’s military journal, for example, frequently invoked the need for “initiative” during the course of the 1950s. Quite often, though, these invocations were articulated in such a way that they became over the course of a single article, or even a single paragraph, calls for greater discipline and obedience:

Compared with before, in atomic and thermo-nuclear wars of the future, a more individual-centered [ademi-merkeziyetçi] style of command will be dominant in the management and direction of forces... This situation requires that lower ranking commanders have initiative, understanding and an internal discipline [inisyativ, anlayış ve içten bir itaat]. For this reason in each formation everyone’s internalization of full individual discipline [teker taker tam bir disiplin anlayışı içerisinde bulunması] gains even more importance than the concept of group discipline.473

472 When Turks came to America to teach Americans, however, they were generally described as ‘helping Americans understand Turkish culture’ or ‘explaining Turkish problems to America.' On occasion, VOA quoted Turkish visitors speaking about Americans and Turks jointly addressing shared problems, but they seldom used this language themselves. “Mayor of Istanbul Fahrettin Kerim Gokay.” Ibid.
Here, the very idea of individualized discipline serves to reconcile the “modern” fixation with individual initiative with the “traditional” concept of discipline that remained central to Turkish (and of course American) military thinking.

Turkish citizens did not merely consume and then re-appropriate US modernization rhetoric, however. They also helped produce it. Much more so than other parts of the US mission in Turkey, the USIS/USIA relied on the Turkish elite to help in crafting its propaganda. Unlike the US military and its fears about the “Turkish twist,” VOA asked that translators “chosen on the basis, and constantly reminded of the fact, that their jobs are as much creative writing as translating.”474 In addition to seeking advice from the staff of Turkey’s state radio, VOA hired Turkish journalists to listen to broadcasts and give feedback on their quality and content. VOA staff told these ‘monitors’ to be “critical” but not “hyper-critical,” and asked them a series of questions such as “Was there ever a program that infuriated you as a Turk or had the potential for doing that to other Turks.”475 Most of the feedback VOA received concerned the accent and word choice of their Turkish broadcasters. Comments on the programming itself, though, often veered into the hyper-critical, with entire shows frequently written off as “useless” or “a waste of time.”476 Turkish monitors helped push the VOA toward creating separate programming tracks for listeners of different social classes. Faced with complaints that “broadcasts were not directed at either the

474 Embassy Despatch No. 696, June 27, 1951, General Records of the State Department 1955-1959, Central Decimal File, Box 2213, RG 59, National Archives. The USIS welcomed the work of Turkish censors who screened all USIS films before they could be shown in Turkey. Censorship was “considered helpful in eliminating films which might be offensive to the local population on the basis of custom or religious faith.” “filmstrips – Cooperation with Turkish Ministry,” Jan. 8, 1953. Ibid.
475 Radio Broadcast Records. Ibid.
476 Ibid.
well-educated… or to the peasant class,” VOA decided early on to “eliminate the fruitless quest for a non-existent common denominator.” As time went on, VOA staff continued to find “it was an agreeable surprise to note that monitors broke down their suggestions for programs into categories designed for the well-educated and the peasant.”

Furthermore, Turkish broadcasters and monitors suggested a number of the ideas that eventually found their way into VOA programming, including almost all of those discussed in this paper. According to VOA staff, Turks wanted more anti-communist material and more classical music. Turkish broadcasters also proposed a program featuring interviews with Turkish visitors to America and a question-and-answer show. A publisher and farmer from Adana encouraged VOA to broadcast “talks to farmers on how to improve their crops by modern American methods.” The Director the Radio Section of the Press Bureau, meanwhile, suggested “more news on UNESCO, the World Bank, and ‘culture news’ such as items on new American inventions, science, education, research, medicine and industry.” When US officials assumed that Turks shared their vision of modernity, they found ample reinforcement from their Turkish partners.

There were other issues, however, on which Turkish feedback was much more divided. Monitors criticized some VOA broadcasts as too condescending toward listeners, others

_________

477 Embassy Despatch No 696, June 27, 1951. Ibid.
478 The recommendations themselves were not surprising. “For the well-educated, better designed music programs were suggested, as well as more thorough investigations into political and economic questions. For the peasant, more Turkish music was prescribed augmented by simple agricultural talks, lengthier news bulletins and informal chats about American community life.” Ibid.
479 Ibid.
as not condescending enough. One anonymous monitor gave Radio Moscow grudging praise for the fact that it presented material “in language the peasant can understand.” Another added “Sure Radio Moscow pounds in its propaganda, but the VOA is too subtle.”

Haughtiness, however, was worse. The Turkish host of a show called “A Widely Traveled Turk” earned almost universal criticism from VOA’s paid monitors, as well as from the Turkish friends and colleagues of the VOA staff. Regretting that the widely travelled Turk had given the impression that “he and the people of the country about which he reports are snobs,” the VOA Ankara staff recommended that the show be ‘revamped’ with a new announcer and material that presented “a reasonable rather than an eulogistic picture of America.”

When the US sponsored an underwhelming pavilion at the 1956 Izmir Fair, the city’s political and intellectual elite were quick to criticize what they saw as a missed opportunity to propagandize rural fair-goers. Throughout the decade, US participation in the fair had been a source of conflict between the USIS/USIA officers on the ground in Turkey and higher-ranking State Department officials in Washington. Washington insisted that, as the fair was nominally a commercial one, it should be up to US companies to participate or not as they saw fit. USIS officials, by contrast, argued that this was an important opportunity to demonstrate the depth of America’s commitment to Turkey and show off American industry. They wanted Washington to provide the money and leadership in organizing a US pavilion, saying that US companies could not be

---

480 Ibid.
481 Deptel 48, July 24, 1951, General Records of the State Department 1955-1959 Central Decimal File, Box 2213, RG 59, National Archives.
482 Ibid.
483 Department of State. Classified General Records, 1938-1958, Box 77, RG 84, National Archives.
trusted to adequately demonstrate the superiority of private enterprise in the face of slick, government-organized exhibits put on by Eastern Bloc countries. Fearing that a sub-par exhibit would be worse than no exhibit at all, USIS officials sat out the 1953, 1954 and 1955 fairs when Washington did not provide the resources they requested. In 1956, however, strained US-Turkish relations combined with increasing fears over Soviet propaganda victories to convince USIS staff that they had no choice but to enter the fair with whatever resources they could muster. These proved to be meager. Washington said no to the double-decker Greyhound bus and emphatically rejected their suggestion to build a brand-new six-story hotel as part of their exhibit. Instead of a model cigarette machine whose output could be given away to visitors, they got a nail machine. In other rooms of the pavilion they were forced to make do with pictures instead of models.

After the conclusion of the fair, the USIS/USIA commissioned a survey to gauge the Turkish response. It was harsh. Of the 25 members of Izmir’s economic, political and intellectual elite who were interviewed, most were critical, and many were downright rude. One mechanical engineer went as far as to compare the US pavilion to “the studying of a lazy student for an examination a few days prior to it.” Another businessmen said the exhibits “meant nothing” to him.”484 A more moderate critic claimed it was “not smart enough for intellectuals and not practical enough for ordinary people.”485 “Turks do not understand statistics” opined one government official, while another explained “the logic of our people lies in their eyes”486 Tellingly, many comments displayed a sense of betrayal. Turkey, specifically the Turkish elite, had

---

485 Ibid, 131.  
486 Ibid, 104, 135.
thrown in its lot with the Americans and now they expected the Americans to do their part in showing Turkish voters this had been a wise choice. As one critic said, “Because our fates are linked we want a better pavilion. [This one] did not show the strength of the American Nation.” Ultimately, the one aspect of the fair participants praised was the one they had not seen. Asked about the USIS/USIA film series at the American Pavilion, a large number of participants responded that while they themselves did not go to watch any of the films, such things were undoubtedly ‘useful’ for less educated fair-goers.

Democratic Party members were deeply invested in the success of America’s military and economic modernization programs, both because they thought these programs were good for Turkey, and because they thought these programs were good for their party. Menderes spoke to his constituents in the language of modernization and, for most of the 1950s, his constituents responded enthusiastically. The DP couched its support of free enterprise and agricultural reform as modernizing programs, while the RPP, in opposition, criticized the DP for encouraging religious reaction and retrogressing on democratic principles.

Both parties’ approaches, as well as the fierce criticism directed at “inadequate” US propaganda efforts, offer additional evidence for Odd Arne Westad’s argument that “modernization” was not a discourse imposed on the third world countries by their superpower patrons. Rather, it was one that third world leaders expected any power

---

488 DP rhetoric frequently downplayed the role of religion and culture in explaining Turkey’s economic underdevelopment and instead emphasized the crippling effect of the military expenses Turkey had incurred as a result of World War II and the Cold war. The RPP, by contrast, was usually quicker to join American observers in identifying ideological factors.
seeking their support to engage in, and engage in convincingly.\(^{489}\) What would become clear in the following decades, however, is that modernization discourse was no less flexible when used by third world leaders than it was when used by US diplomats. As the Americans responsible for planning the Izmir fair realized, modernization rhetoric could easily serve as a tool for de-legitimizing Turkey’s pro-American position. What they did not necessarily realize, however, as they set up their pavilion displays, is that Turks would evaluate US modernity in line with Turkish political interesting rather than an objective assessment of US economic or social development.

When Bülent Ecevit – journalist, art-critic, poet and future prime minister – returned to Ankara from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, he embodied all the hopes and expectations of the US State Department officials who had arranged for his four month stay there. As part of an International Educational Exchange Service program Ecevit had worked for Winston-Salem’s newspaper, the Journal-Sentinel, and both Ecevit and paper’s staff were effusive in praising one another. “The Journal has been most lavish in its praise of Mr. Ecevit, who appears to have made a very excellent impression both as an individual and as a newspaperman,” a State Department report concluded, adding in letter in a letter to the Journal-Sentinel’s editor that Ecevit had “described in glowing terms his most enjoyable and informative time in Winston-Salem.” Explaining the benefits that would accrue to the United States, the letter went on:

His accounts made it quite obvious that his stay in this country, and especially with your newspaper, has been a wonderful and valuable experience which he

will always remember with great pleasure... By providing Mr. Ecevit with an insight into two leading American newspapers, and by allowing him to witness at firsthand the functions of the American press in our democratic society, you have contributed greatly toward the accomplishment of our aims. Your help in making the United States better known to this foreign journalist, and through him to his reading public in Turkey, has been a real service to the cause of international understanding.

Subsequently, a report on the effectiveness of government run educational programs noted that after returning to Turkey Ecevit “has written forty articles about his experiences in the United States.” Read alongside his many other articles from the 1950s Ecevit’s writing in the US, from the US and about the US, offers a uniquely articulate take on the role of history, modernity and much else in a particular moment of Turkish-American cultural encounter.

Writing in the Turkish press on his return from the US, Ecevit was eager to extol America’s virtues, and suggest to his Turkish readers how their country might benefit from America’s example. The content of these pieces would undoubtedly have warmed the hearts of the officials who sponsored his exchange. And even when Ecevit offered his forceful and unsparing criticism of America, he did so in exactly the way the State Department wanted: politely, respectfully, even admiringly. Ecevit’s final guest column in the Journal-Sentinel, in which wrote at length about the injustice of segregation and the cruelty of racism, was titled “Visiting Turk Says of Americans: Even Angels Can Go Wrong.”

Ecevit, of course, went on to join a long list of foreign leaders whose positive experiences in America hardly led him to adopt pro-American policies when in office. His terms as
Prime Minister was marked by conflicts with Washington over Cyprus, opium production and other issues. Yet Ecevit’s response to his time in America is much more than just another example of the problematic self-confidence driving educational exchange programs. To the contrary, many of the ways in which Ecevit went on to cite his experience of American democracy reflect the profound change he oversaw in Turkey’s Republican People Party. Read in this light, Ecevit’s early writing – in, from and about America – provides a particularly fascinating example of how Turkish responses to American modernization rhetoric could be as complex and malleable as the rhetoric itself.

Throughout its time in power, Democratic Party rhetoric sought to position the party as paradigmatic of a new spirit of liberal modernity. Finding common ground with many American diplomats, they differentiated their vision of Turkey’s democratic future both from the outdated fascist modernity that they attributed to the CHP (along with the stale positivism of Europe more broadly) and the Communist modernity of the Soviet Union. As İnönü remained the Democrats chief political opponent throughout the decade, the party’s rhetoric sought to associate him with the most oppressive aspects of Kemalist rule. Doing a rhetorical end-run around İnönü, the Democratic Party sought to portray itself as an heir to Mustafa Kemal’s legacy. Thus comparing İnönü to Hitler, or, in lighter moments, an undemocratic mermaid, went hand in hand with passing a new law making it illegal to insult Ataturk.
Ecevit’s writing from the early 1950s can be read as a response to the democratic discourse of the era. Ecevit consistently invoked American and British examples to criticize the Democratic Party for its undemocratic behavior. He complemented this critique by also criticizing the Democratic Party on nationalist grounds, echoing many religious conservatives by suggesting the DP government had been almost treasonously enthusiastic in its embrace of American culture. Yet, beyond American democracy, he also sought to identify other supposedly “modern” aspects of American culture that Turkey would do well to imitate. In the face of successive electoral defeats, Ecevit wrestled with the question of how to make the basic tenets of Kemalism popular to a skeptical electorate. In many of his columns, he seeks to reclaim Ataturk’s liberalism for the CHP, trying to show Ataturk’s commitment to democracy and portray his secularism as a form of religious tolerance. Then, while insisting the party must remain true to its secular principles, Ecevit increasingly sought to appeal to the voters by emphasizing left-wing critiques of the Democrats economic policies. At the same time, with the CHP out of power, Ecevit was increasingly attuned to the need for private initiative in realms such as art, suggesting that an entrepreneurial spirit was needed to free artists from their dependence on state patronage. More broadly, Ecevit addressed the question of who besides the government could promote a more liberal mindset in the population at large by calling on Turkey’s intellectuals, or “aydınlar” to play a leading role in enlightening the masses. Their leadership, he hoped, could bypass the state and thus overcome the paradoxical challenge of instilling an independent spirit in people whose flaw was an over-reliance on traditional state authority. For better or worse, Ecevit’s response to the
challenge of crafting a popular, democratic Kemalism became the centerpiece of CHP ideology during the decades that Ecevit led the party.

In his columns from the 1950s, Ecevit used his first-hand observations of democracy in America and the United Kingdom, where he served as press attaché and studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies, as a benchmark for criticizing specific government actions and policies. As Menderes and the Democratic Party became increasingly heavy handed in stifling dissent after 1954, Ecevit’s criticism increased accordingly, particularly on the subject of press freedom. While he would sometimes cite foreign criticism of Turkish democracy directly – a US bank manager, for example, saying efforts to invest private capital in Turkey where hampered by the lack of democracy and free press – he was more inclined to elaborate on the US example. When, for example, a pro-government paper asked rhetorically if even in the US reporters had the right to violate the privacy [mahremiyet] of the White House, Ecevit responded emphatically. After criticizing the paper for translating “white house [beyaz ev]” as “white palace [beyaz saray],” he continued:

In America the president has no privacy, so there can be no talk of violating his privacy [mahremiyetin ihlali de söz konusu olamaz]… American newspapers have special correspondents whose assignment is to monitor the White House. If President Eisenhower gets tired of work and goes to play golf for two days, the papers argue about whether the President has time to play that much golf. No one considers this argument an affront to his dignity. No one accuses the papers of violating the President’s privacy because they are against him playing golf.\(^{490}\)

\(^{490}\) “Hususi hayatlar ve isbat hakkı,” July 25, 1955, Ulus.
In another article⁴⁹¹ Ecevit approvingly quotes a local cop he befriended in North Carolina explaining that while their town would drop everything to honor a foreign dignitary, if Mamie Eisenhower came they would throw eggs at her. Not because they disliked her, of course. Quite the contrary she was well-liked. “Her only fault was that she was the President’s wife.” Americans, Ecevit’s friend explained, “seized every opportunity to be able to display hostility [istiskal] toward their leaders. So that they know their place. So that they don’t become full of themselves and cause trouble for us.”

Ecevit was also particularly impressed with the behavior of the police that he witnessed in America and the UK, citing this repeatedly as further evidence of the appropriate relationship between a government and its people. In an article entitled “Citizens and the Police” he explained that “England is a country where mothers don’t frighten their children by saying “I’ll give you to the police.” Because English children only know the police as smiling, polite individuals who will stop traffic, hold their hand and guide them across a busy street.”

In addition to citing the behavior of Western democracies as examples for Turkey to follow, Ecevit also called on these governments to do more to promote democracy in Turkey. Specifically, he repeatedly expressed his belief,⁴⁹² that NATO should show its commitment to the ideals of liberty and freedom by holding its members to a higher standard of democratic behavior.

⁴⁹¹ “Makyavelli ve Demokrasi,” June 8, 1955, Ulus.
⁴⁹² For example “Üç akıllı adam ne yapacak?” October 25, 1956, and “NATO'nun düştüğü çıkmaz”, November 8, 1956, Ulus.
Yet Ecevit’s admiration for American democracy did not lead him to overlook its flaws. In fact, he often used the flaws themselves to further advance his efforts to apply the American model to his calls for greater democracy in Turkey. Criticizing the DP for restricting workers’ right to strike, for example, he dismissed the argument that Turkish workers were too ignorant to use their right to strike responsibly by asking “when Western workers received the right to strike were they educated? Are they even educated now?” Indeed the idea that American democracy succeeded in spite of the shortcomings of the American people served repeatedly to promote the idea that Turkey was ready for democracy despite its uneducated population. In 1948, for example, when the subject of Russian veto rights in the newly-founded UN was the subject of international debate, a Gallup poll revealed that forty two percent of Americans did not understand the term “veto right.” “These are the very people who founded and preserve American democracy” a Turkish author declared. If democratic government required a thoroughly educated population “it would be natural to think that America must wait years longer before it could achieve democracy.” Thus it would be equally absurd to suggest

Furthermore, Turkey’s relationship with America and the Cold War context more broadly also offered Ecevit grounds for criticizing America for failing to live up to its own ideals. In prefacing his polite criticism of American race relations in his final column for the Winston-Salem paper, Ecevit not only included a Peanuts cartoon on the dangers of conformity but also a clear statement on why this was “his business:”

493 Hifzi Oguz Bekata, “Demokrasiye “veto” denilemez.” Iste Turkiye, Cild 1, Sayi 1, January 1948, p 63.
This so-called “segregation” or “color-bar” business is not merely America’s own business. It is my business, too, and the business of hundreds of millions of other people like me all over the world who are looking up to America today as their only hope. But an American with the “color bar” cannot fulfill their hopes. That is why I regard myself entitled to poke my nose into an affair which many a racist would regard as solely his own.494

Ecevit’s nuanced evaluations of the good and bad elements he observed in Western culture led him to devote a considerable degree of thinking to the question of how Turkish society could best adopt not only the political attitudes that he admired in the West but the broader liberal social attitudes as well. In doing so, he wrestled with the same question as US advisors eager to transform the mindset of the Turkish military or the Turkish villager, but of course he came to a different set of conclusions. Like everyone from Bernard Lewis and Peyami Safa to religious conservatives like Serden Geçti’s Osman Yüksel, Ecevit made it clear that he was promoting an enlightened adoption of the best aspects of the West rather than thoughtless, wholesale or superficial embrace. Yet in what he identified as a true understanding of the West, Ecevit found a form of modernity that justified his continued commitment to democracy, and his abiding belief that Turkey’s intellectual elite had a duty to guide the country’s masses towards enlightenment even in the face the illiberal attitudes displayed by the people themselves of the leaders they elected.

Ecevit could be quick to criticize the DP on the grounds that in their relations with the United States they had gone too far in the direction of cultural or economic subservience. An column entitled “How an ‘Economic Colony’ Happens,” for example, began with a friend’s observation that at the newly opened Hilton Hotel the staff would not take your

order in Turkish. In fact, they treated Turkish speakers like “colonial natives [bir sümergenin yerlileri].” Adding that there were store-keepers and drivers who would not take Turkish money, Ecevit recalled the city’s Allied occupation after World War One, and demanded to know what steps the government was taking to prevent Turkey from becoming an economic colony: “Precautions must be taken against those who want to replace the Turkish language and the Turkish currency in Istanbul, a city that has been ours for 502 years.”

Yet there was also a great deal in American and British culture that Ecevit firmly believed Turkey should adopt. While sometimes praising Western citizens for displaying diverse forms of civic virtue – unlike Turks, he claimed, Englishmen refused on principle to patronize the black market\(^495\) – he often focused on the importance of traits related to industriousness, and private entrepreneurialism, and personal initiative. Even on vacation in the small seaside town of Akçakoca, Ecevit could not resist chastising his fellow citizens for their lack of initiative. Though he admitted he could understand the appeal of doing nothing in life but sitting by the window, watching the sea and getting a shave, he felt that the villagers had the time and money to make better roads and house, to “develop” their lives and their village.\(^496\)

In contrast to the villagers’ placid lives, Ecevit presented America as a place where even young children worked hard, playing with machines and studying physics. In America and Canada, countries which Ecevit described as “developing with head-turning speed,”

\(^{495}\) “Paylasmayan Sikintilar,” June 28, 1955, Ulus.
\(^{496}\) “Deniz,” August 8, 1955.
kids don’t play koşmaca or sakiamba or kayra or taşvankaçı, instead they grow up knowing how “the airplanes in the sky and battleships on the sea and cars and the types of locomotives in the station” work. “For them, chemistry and physics aren’t boring classes, they are even more fun than games…” Old trains and boats are left in parks and on lake shores for kids to enter and play inside. Ford factories have magazines for amateur technicians. In short, Western children grew up with machines the way Turkish children in Central Asia grew up around horses. And only by adopting this lifestyle could Turkey make development not just a “social and economic need” but a “psychological need” as well. In a subsequent column, Ecevit lamented the fact that while fifteen to twenty five year old Turkish youth waste their time singing and riding bicycles over the summer, American children earned their pocket money, working as waiters or doormen or clerks or farmers at the instructions of their parents to prepare themselves for future careers.

From roads to art to industry, the question of individual initiative in Turkey’s modernization took on particular importance for Ecevit when his party was out of power. It was not just that villagers were too lazy to improve their own villages, he argued, but that they “waited for the state to open parks, schools and libraries. Even most of our charitable foundations [yardım dernekler] depend on the government.” While this might not be dangerous, Ecevit claimed, in countries with established democracies, Turkey’s developing democratic culture made this form of dependence on the state uniquely

497 “Endüstrinin ham maddesi: çocuk,” July 8, 1955, Ulus
Particularly as the Democratic Party could not be trusted to patronize the right sort of art, Ecevit felt Ecevit was emphatic on the importance of freeing Turkish artists from their dependence on the state patronage. In describing why he and his wife opened one of Turkey’s first art galleries, for example, Ecevit repeatedly emphasized that enabling artists to support themselves through the private sale of their paintings was crucial. Ecevit admired the British Arts Council, for example, which relied on experts to ensure that state funding, free from political influence, could even go to unpopular modern art but ultimately he felt that only the establishment of an independent art market could truly free Turkish artists.

In trying to promote the participatory, entrepreneurial aspects of American culture, the United States government relied on its relationship with the Democratic Party government, as well as propaganda programs like Voice of America and educational exchanges like the one that brought Ecevit to North Carolina. Ecevit, though, in part because of his partisan position, felt that Turkey’s cultural and intellectual elite had a unique capability and responsibility to transform their society. Moreover, he believed that if Turkey’s elite truly understood the essence of Western modernity, they would persevere in this effort despite the manifest shortcomings of the Turkish people.

Importing European civilization, Ecevit explained, was not like importing a refrigerator or a car, it was like planting a tree. The responsibility of Turkish intellectuals was to help this tree take root. Ecevit repeatedly returned to the idea that intellectuals who think

---

the Turkish people are too uneducated for democracy were only western in their clothing and appearance: “Intellectuals who give into the impulse to say our society isn’t ready for democracy aren’t doing their job as aydınls which is to lead society to a better place.”

Ecevit insisted that a successful democracy needed intellectuals who were focused on the problems of the people. Just as, in the realm of economics, wealthy individuals had to develop a “social conscience [toplum şuuru]” and “spirit of service [hizmet duyguşusu]” to help fight the societies dependence on state patronage… intellectuals must interest themselves in the nations political affairs: “intellectual who reads English papers and French magazines must endure the sacrifice of buying a Turkish newspaper for his home every day and, whether with wonder or hate, reading it…” Before the Turkish people could be expected to change, or to become more modern, Ecevit believed Turkish intellectuals had to change and become more modern in their own views in order to become instruments of broader social change.

In truth democracy is not, as we assume, a regime where the votes of the enlightened majority don’t count and their words are ignored. Democracy is a regime that teaches intellectuals the humility they need to pay attention to the problems of the majority and take an interest in them.

Ecevit’s abiding faith in the ability of Turkey’s intellectuals to embrace this responsibility and play a crucial in transforming Turkish society endured in the face of successive electoral defeats for his party, while also helping him to sustain his political faith in the face of these defeats. It was, in fact, Ecevit’s commitment to a remarkably teleological

vision of modernization that facilitated his continued commitment to democracy even as political developments shook other modernizers’ faith in the system.

While many American diplomats constructed a coherent vision of Turkish modernization in which the Democrat Party leaders served as Ataturk’s successors, perfecting, consolidating and sometimes moderating his revolution with the electoral support of the masses, Ecevit offered an equally coherent reconfiguration of the relationship between democracy and modernity:

In Turkey every person who learns to read and write, every person who becomes accustomed to understanding matters of state as something more than just personal or local profits, is a new hope for the Republican People’s Party and a new threat to the Democratic Party.... In Turkey time is on the side of the political parties who embrace revolution [devrimcilik]. Because time, even in the near future, will make a majority of the generation that grew up when Turkey had opened itself to the West. The CHP must wait for this preordained [mukadder] time’s arrival without changing course. In the one party era, the six arrows were imposed on the people. In the multi-party era the Six Arrows point or origin must be the people!505

What stands out about Ecevit’s response to his time in America is the extent to which he ultimately interpreted the question of modernization in much the manner his hosts would have liked. And yet, when faced with the same seeming paradox as American modernizers, drew a different conclusion that fit perfectly with his own personal and partisan interests.

“Turks, being semi-Oriental, have certain similarities and dissimilarities to Americans,” General Arnold told newly arriving US officers in 1954.\textsuperscript{506} In the nuanced meaninglessness of this statement lies the vitality of modernization as a dominant ideology in US foreign policymaking. Paradoxically, faith in the ideology of modernization and the stereotypes that informed it were so central to the worldview of US policymakers during the early cold war period that it has only limited use in explaining the most important aspects of US policy during this time. Modernization theory as a whole cannot be reduced to a byproduct of Cold war strategic interests, just as Cold war policies cannot be seen as little more than the application of modernization theory. As a result, scholars hoping to identify the sources of US policy during the Cold war will have to look at more concrete beliefs rather than broad ideologies. Though 1950s Turkey was exceptional in the degree to which democratization seemed to coincide with US interests, it is an exception that truly does prove a rule. That is, the ease and regularity with which US officials explained Turkey’s unique circumstances through their already established notions about modernization illustrates the extent to which examining modernization discourse only enables us to understand how national interests shaped the way policymakers applied and exploited the rhetoric they were already using and understood an ideology they already believed. In this light it is no surprise that when, in the early 1960s, American policy-makers increasingly found that their interests could be served by supporting dictatorial regimes, they articulated a version of modernization theory that prioritized autocratic modernization. By that time, however, the tenets of modernization theory

\footnote{General William Arnold, “Briefing for New Arrivals,” undated, 1952, Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, Adjutant General Section Decimal File, Classified, Box 2, RG 334, National Archives.}
were already so dominant that, had their interests led them elsewhere, they would have called on a different version of modernization to show them the way. Indeed, if the basic tenets of modernization theory were not also compatible with a policy of democracy promotion, they would not enjoy the continued prevalence they do today.
Conclusion: A Century of Statements

In an address after his party’s 2011 electoral triumph, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan declared the election was also a victory for the spirit of Adnan Menderes, a martyr to democracy. After his 2014 victory in Turkey’s first popular presidential election, Erdoğan declared that the parenthesis opened by Turkey’s 1960 coup had finally been closed. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who succeeded Erdoğan as Prime Minister, went further, claiming that Turkey is now closing a parenthesis that opened with the declaration of the Republic in 1923.

The Justice and Development Party’s rise to power over the past decade has facilitated a range of historical narratives. While some outspoken secularists insisted that the Islamist party was destroying Atatürk’s Western democratic vision for the country, many of the party’s supporters insisted that it was finally achieving Atatürk’s vision by bringing a democratic Turkey into the EU. Others argued that the AKP was ending a century of militarism, nationalism and authoritarianism that had begun with Atatürk. In time, as Erdoğan’s behavior became increasingly authoritarian, some continued to justify his behavior through criticism of Atatürk’s authoritarian modernism. Others instead began to argue that in his undemocratic behavior Erdoğan was continuing an illiberal tradition.

507 In a 2014 newspaper column, historian Sukru Hanioglu responded to a New York Times article claiming that, Erdogan had distanced his country from the West through his authoritarian behavior. The problem, Hanioglu argued, was not with Turkey’s “deviation” form the Western model but with the Western model itself. We should not, he argued, treat Turkey like a “disobedient child” and give into “grand East-West style polarizations ["Doğu-Batı" benzeri mega kutuplaşmalara]” but instead recognize that in refusing to pursue a flawed and impossible vision of Westernization Turkey was seeking a “new synthesis [yeni sentez]” that “could more harmoniously accommodate social values and realities.” Where an earlier generation of Ivy League professors justified authoritarianism in the name of imposing Western modernity, rejecting it apparently works just as well. “Bati ‘model’inden ‘sapmak’,” (“Deviation” from the Western “model”), Sabah, 30 November 2014.
of strong man politics inherited from Atatürk, İnönü, and the leaders of Turkey’s subsequent military coups.

Menderes, meanwhile, has been reduced in many contemporary political discussions to either the pious democratic martyr imagined by Erdoğan or a Islamic reactionary condemned by contemporary secularists. The more precise comparison between Menderes and Erdoğan remains elusive, but both certainly began as young politician, challenging an established autocracy in the name of his people’s material needs and democratic rights, then, either insecure in their power or simply hungry for more, became increasingly authoritarian.

Yet the differences are striking too. Erdoğan famously characterized Ismet İnönü as a drunk, just as after the 1960 coup Menderes’s detractors printed rumors that he had been intoxicated when the military came to arrest him. Subsequently, a collection of letters exchanged between Menderes and his mistress appeared to further discredit him. Yet his popularity endured. Menderes was not simply a leader whose own idea of modernity involved having camels sacrificed in his honor and an affair with an opera singer. He was a leader who won over the masses with this vision as well.

Critics of Atatürk have sometimes seen his popularity in the West as evidence that Westerners always preferred authoritarianism to democracy in countries like Turkey. In fact, if most Americans did not fully believe Ecevit the in 1950s when he said Atatürk’s
rule had been “a dictatorship to end dictatorship\(^{508}\),” they did not completely disbelieve him either. It was not necessarily because they had an overly romantic view of Atatürk, or were seduced by his enthusiasm for Westernization, but because the evidence was right there in front of them in the form of a democratic Turkey.

Scholarly and popular accounts of Turkey often veer between describing it at times as the only Muslim democracy, a shining model for the rest of the Middle East and at other times fundamentally genocidal state that has at best progressed from murdering Armenians to murdering Kurds. It is sometimes hard to tell if we should be asking what is wrong with Turkish democracy or inquiring, instead, about the secret to Turkey’s success? For certainly if the militant nationalism of the Kemalist era can be blamed for the persistence of authoritarianism in Turkey, we must also explain the unique degree of democracy Turkey achieved between 1950 and 1980, and then, fitfully, thereafter.

In the realm of foreign policy, critics argued for almost a decade over whether Erdoğan and Davutoğlu rejected Atatürk’s legacy by turning their back on the West in favor the Muslim East or whether they instead had finally realized Turkey’s role as a bridge between the two. The AKP’s much discussed neo-Ottomanism represented for some a long-belated recognition of the “strategic depth” that Turkey possessed on account of its unique geography and history, its centuries of harmonious and tolerant relations with its neighbors. Yet for others, Greeks, Armenians and Islamophobic American conservatives, used “neo-Ottoman” instead as an epithet, akin to neo-Nazi and shorthand for some form

\(^{508}\) “Ataturk: he defied an Empire in the Name of Freedom.” Nov 14, 1954. As Ecevit wrote, they were more likely to think of Atatürk’s rule as a “benevolent dictatorship” or, as cited above, a “dictator[ship] of the right sort.”
of Islamic irredentism. Yet even for critics the term proved ambiguous. Erdoğan’s efforts to cozy up to Syrian leader Bashar Assad before the Arab spring were regularly cited as proof of his neo-ottoman ambitions. Then, after 2010, Erdoğan’s support for anti-Assad rebels was as well.

Dramatic changes in Turkey’s strategic environment, as well as its relative economic and military power, have clearly changed Turkey’s foreign policy over the past century. In some ways, it is the rhetorical continuities that seem most remarkable. Atatürk famously explained his foreign policy as “Peace at home and peace in the world.” More recently, Ahmet Davutoğlu unveiled his less catchy “zero problems with neighbors” strategy. Both men revealed their genius in being able to make these utterly empty expressions appear as coherent visions for Turkey’s place in the world. The opening chapter contained a 1940 map showing Turkey standing alone between Europe, Africa and Asia and exhorting Turkish children to shoulder the burden that accompanied this unique geographic position. Compare this map to one published in the newspaper Milliyet in 2014 illustrating Ahmet Davutoğlu’s foreign policy vision.509 [Figure 44] The key divides the map into Turkey’s “close territorial basin” and a larger "close continental basin. Yet on closer inspection, an equally accurate key might read simply “Countries near Turkey.” Both maps try, in different ways, to attach some deeper significance to the fact that Turkey is, fundamentally, where it is.510

510 Another recent interpretation of Davutoğlu’s foreign policy, interestingly, presents it in terms of a rival Turkish political tradition, “Eurasianism.” See Özgür Türfekçi’s “Ahmet Davutoğlu’s Foreign Policy Understanding,” in The Arab World Geographer, Vol. 17, No. 3, Fall 2014, p 275.
Reading a century’s worth of rhetoric about the politics of geography, modernity and history, it is hard to escape the conclusion that much of what has been written about these subjects is little more than a clever attempt to dress up the obvious in pseudo-substantive terms. And that any satisfaction we now feel in recognizing this reality should be tempered by the fact those doing the writing seem to have, implicitly at least, already recognized and taken advantage of it.
Figure 1. Celal Bayar, president of Turkey from 1950-1960, reads the popular magazine *History World*. Undated photo, author’s collection.
Figure 2. Selection from an undated map published by George Philips and Sons, London for the Turkish market showing “defiant” governments of the world. Author’s Collection.
Figure 3. Selection from Genclerin Haritasi, or a Map for Youth, Printed by Cemal Azmi Matbaasi, Istanbul, 1935. Ataturk Library, Harita No 000150.
Figure 5. Akbaba, April 9, 1953

Figure 6. Akbaba, August 22, 1952. Turkish Woman: I am ashamed of both of you.
Figure 7. Front page of the third issue of Çapkin, or Rake Magazine, February 28 1947.
Figure 8. November 20, 1947, *Diken* Communism: I wonder if I can get in without revealing myself.
Figure 9. Front Cover of *Religious History World*.
Figure 10. Header from Serdengeçti Magazine.

Figure 11. “Hajj Memories,” header from Doğru Yol Magazine

Figure 12. Front Page of Nuri Osman’s Dinimizde Reform Kemalizm.
Figure 13. *Namaz Hocasi*, Bozkurt Press, 1944

Figure 14. Fetullah Gulen. From www.herkul.org
Figure 15. ‘The Fabric That is Conquering Istanbul,’ 1953 newspaper advertisement.
Figure 16. Hafta, No 92, 29 May 1953.
Figure 17. “Is there no good Muslim left to save me from the hands of these infidels?” from Tübentç'i’s *Hayrettin Barbarosa Geliyor*.

Figure 18. Illustration from an article on Istanbul’s only documented execution by stoning, *Tarih Dunyasi* [bound volume], Istanbul: Şaka Matbaası, 1950. P. 37.
Figure 19. Akbaba, Issue 57, 16 April 1953. Cover

Figure 20. Drawing of an American sailor in Istanbul owned by a collector of “naval folk art.” Undated, Author’s collection.
Left: A horse-tram passes in front of the English consulate. Right: Today’s tramway on the same street, though this too will become history.
Figure 22. General Tayfur Sokmen famous for his role in the Turkish annexation of Antakya, inspecting a Mehter band at the Turkish Military Museum. Ibrahim Hakki Konyali Collection,
Figure 23. Mehter Band in Beşiktaş. Ibid.

Figure 24. Asırlar Boyunca İstanbul.
-- The Beyoğlu side is being improved, why is the Istanbul side being ignored?
-- If it isn’t ignored and left in this shabby, ruined state how will it be obvious that it’s the historic district? Cumhuriyet.
Figure 27. A page from Reşat Ekrem Koçu’s *Turkish Istanbul, From Osman Gazi to Atatürk* reprinted in Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul*.

Figure 29, “A Woman from Yüksekova,” *Tarih ve Coğrafya Dunyasi*, Volume 1, issue 1, Nov 15,1950.
Figure 30, 31 Issue 62, Cover, 7 Mart, 1935; Issue 98, Cover, 23 "Tesrinievvel, 1935

Figure 32. Issue 294, Page 4, 31 Ekim, 1957; Figure 33. Issue 182, Page 4, 8 Eylül, 1955.
Figure 35. 13. Issue 244, Page 10, 8 Eylül, 1938
I’m so sorry for our Moishe, the Arabs shot him eight times. His poor family, they won’t be able to sell his suit if it’s full of holes! Figure 36. Issue 121, Page 2, 2 Mayis, 1936.

Haji sir, if you’re going to burn Jewish villages at least buy the matchs from us! Figure 37. Issue 121, Page 3, 2 Mayis, 1936.
Figure 38. Issue 160, Cover, 7 Nisan, 1955. Issue 159, Cover, 3 Mart, 1955.

Mürdüm, Eşber Camiinde: 
İnan ve cemaat!
Figure 39. “Welcome!” The Shah of Iran and his wife; Pakistan’s first couple. Zafer
Figure 40. Perceptions of modernization: As long as Adnan Menderes remained a trusted ally, the State Department treated camel sacrifices as isolated incidents rather than dangerous evidence of religious reaction. (Despatch No. 664, April 24, 1959, 1955-1959 Central Decimal File, Box 3730, RG 59, National Archives.)
Figure 41. Modernization as military policy: This photograph of an American officer supervising Turkish recruits at a course on military communication appeared in a confidential 1952 report on the progress of JAMMAT training efforts. (Monthly Progress Report, December 1952, JAMMAT, Box 1, RG 334, National Archives.)

Figure 42. Modernization as propaganda: These photographs accompanied the Voice of America press release for a program featuring a group of Turkish naval engineers who had come to America for instruction. (Records of the USIA VOA radio news press releases, Boxes 4 and 5, RG 306, National Archives.)
Figure 43. A cartoon by Cemal Nadir showing leading members of the Republican People’s Party watching a ship labeled Democracy sail away. İnönü is the mermaid and Recep Peker the puffer fish. Bulent Ecevit appears on the top right. Cumhuriyet.

Figure 44. “Osmanlı varisi Türkiye hâlâ siyasi bir merkez,” Milliyet, August 22, 2014.
Bibliography

Archival Sources

Cumhuriyet Arşivi, Ankara, Turkey.

Ibrahim Hakkı Konyalı Library, Üsküdar, Turkey.

The Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Electronic Reading Room, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland.

Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The George C. McGhee Papers (McGhee Papers), Georgetown University Special Collections Library, Washington, D.C.

United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

Personal Papers of Bülent Ecevit.

General


**American and Cold War Diplomatic History**


Gurbuz, Mehmet Vedat. *An overview of Turkish-American relations and impact on Turkish military, economy and democracy, 1945—1952*, The University of Wisconsin.


Little, Douglas. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since*


**Modern Turkey**


Deringil, Selim. “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate.” Comparative Studies in Society and History 45, no. 2 (April 2003): 311–342.


Eissenstat, Howard. The Limits of Imagination: Debating the Nation and Constructing the State in Early Turkish Nationalism. (PhD. Dissertation, UCLA, 2007).


Shaw, Wendy M.K. *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from The Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.


