

Gülenism as “Religionist” Kemalism

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ABSTRACT Utilizing Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemonic struggles through both coercive means of the state and also the production of consent in civil society, the article conducts a comparative textual analysis of the writings and speeches of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Fetullah Gülen. In so doing, the article focuses on four main themes: (1) sacralization of modern knowledge, science, and education; (2) militarism and centrism; (3) statism and corporatism; and, (4) ethnic nationalism and Turkism. It argues that the ideology of the Gülen’s “service movement” shares the principles of Kemalism in the above-mentioned domains, while couching them within a religious discursive framework. Since Gülenism uses Quranic terminology out of context and for secular ends, the term “religionist” is used instead of “religious” to describe this ideology.

Introduction

Since the 2000s social science literature on the group led by Fetullah Gülen, which was assumed to be a religious movement, has focused on two major themes. The first has been the ideals, values and ideology of its leader. In the post 9/11 atmosphere, most interpretations framed this community as an alternative to Islamist movements which advocate radical change to secular political systems and evincing a worldview that clashes with the Western interests and ideals, most often using violent means. Gülen’s worldview, in contrast, has been widely seen as an example of “moderate” (as opposed to “radical”) Islam. This perspective was reinforced by his advocacy of dialogue among religions, apparent acceptance of the Western ideals of multiculturalism and tolerance, and his emphasis on the compatibility of these ideals with Islam.¹ The second line of inquiry has focused on whether, as a religious movement, it could be considered as a part of civil society through the study of Gülen’s followers as a social movement.

The interpretations differed according to the definitions of civil society scholars have adopted. Whether it is conceptualized in neutral terms or as having

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liberal-democratic traits was consequential in the conclusions drawn about the role of the movement in democratization.² Thus, there are evaluations of the movement as contributing to democratization, pluralism and erosion of Kemalist statism both in terms of its discourse through studies of Gülen's writings and lectures³ as well as its practices through analysis of its public activities in the spheres of education, business, trade, the media and health.⁴ This article offers a different perspective to both these lines of inquiry by utilizing Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony and Ali Shariati's notion of "religion of legitimation" to compare the official ideology of the Turkish Republic (namely, Kemalism) and the ideology of Gülen movement (namely, Gülenism).

It is imperative to conduct a comparative analysis of these two seemingly incompatible ideologies to understand the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, which has been framed as heralding a new period in the history of the Turkish Republic. This article conducts a comparative textual analysis of the writings and speeches of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Fetullah Gülen focusing on four main themes: (1) sacralization of modern knowledge, science and education; (2) militarism and centrism; (3) statism and corporatism, and; (4) ethnic nationalism and Turkism. It argues that Gülenism and Kemalism share these principles, but that the former adopts a religious and spiritual language to mobilize the consent of the pious citizens that "secular" Kemalism had hitherto been unable to integrate into the polity as "acceptable citizens." Despite its use of religious language, Gülenism is not a religious movement, but a secular and worldly one that has been used to gain consent of the dominated classes. Thus, since Gülenism uses Quranic terminology out of context and for secular ends legitimized by a quasi-messianism of Gülen, the term "religionist (*dinci*)" is used in this article instead of "religious (*dini, dindar*)" to describe this ideology.⁵

In the first section, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and his understanding of civil society, as well as Ali Shariati's separation of "religion of legitimation" from "religion of revolution" will be discussed as the theoretical framework for the analysis of Gülenism and Kemalism. In the second section, Kemalism as the hegemonic ideology of the Turkish Republic will be analyzed briefly followed by comparisons of these two ideology's understandings of knowledge and approach to education, organization of authority, state-society relations and national identity.

Theoretical Framework

To describe the "intellectual and moral authority" of the dominant social and political institutions and how "capitalism" was able to thrive and marshal the support of the working classes in the early twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci

reframed the concept of "civil society" and identified how capitalist social relations became "hegemonic" not only through the use of "coercion," but also by the organization of spontaneous "consent." Hegemony is not just domination in economic and political relations. In addition to these, the people need to think that the existing order is the appropriate one which is accomplished through the activities within civil society. For Gramsci, "civil society" does not refer only to all economic relations, but instead occupies a space within the superstructure comprising all ideological relations. Thus, it includes all "private" institutions that work for the maintenance of hegemony by the dominant class. Gramsci considers civil society to be part of the state, together with political society. Defined more comprehensively, civil society has three complementary features: (1) As the ideology of the dominant classes, it encompasses the economy, law, arts and science; (2) as the worldview spread among all the social classes in order to produce consent to the direction set by the dominant class, it produces philosophy, religion, common values and folklore befitting all, and; (3) as the ideological governance of society, it can be observed within institutions that produce and spread ideology, such as the school system, mass media, libraries, etc.⁶

According to Gramsci, the bourgeois leadership of society in moral, material, ethnic, religious, cultural, ideological, political and economic spheres has been made possible by hegemony production within civil society; in other words, the organization of consent for discourse and values of the dominant group throughout the whole society. Thus, contrary to the common Marxist prediction of revolution in capitalist societies, Western working classes were integrated into the system through the transformation of their "common sense" values, which had become compatible with the capitalist state's values and norms.⁷

For Gramsci, then, capitalism had transformed society and become firmly entrenched within it through two methods. The first was the use of force and suppression of dissent to elicit obedience. The second was the construction of social consensus through ideological leadership. This was possible by developing and working through a certain form of collective creed (such as religion) prevalent within society.⁸

Based on the Gramscian understanding of civil society as a bridge between the state and society and its role in hegemony construction, this article argues that "secular" Kemalism represents the "coercive" dimension of capitalist hege-



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mony, and the “religionist” Kemalism of the Gülen movement its “consensual” dimension. Through comparative textual analysis of the speeches of Atatürk and Gülen, the analysis will argue that the “religionist” version overlaps with its “secular” counterpart both ontologically and epistemologically on issues of knowledge, the individual, society, the state, education and nationalism, which represents its ‘consensual’ dimension. While the former uses profane and secular language, the latter’s language is spiritual and religious. However, both are constructive discourses coming from the same paradigm and a blend of Turko-Islamic imperial tradition and Western positivist modernity.

In addition to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, the analysis here draws on the “religion vs. religion” perspective of Ali Shariati. Shariati makes a distinction between “religion of revolution” and “religion of legitimation.” While the former aims to transcend the existing differences in society and to work against the *status quo* of oppression, enslavement etc., the latter –which Shariati also calls “religion of multitheism or shirk”– works to perpetuate and legitimate social and economic differences and to maintain the *status quo* by using metaphysical beliefs.⁹ Thus, the article posits that both “secular” and “religionist” forms of Kemalist discourse aim at eliminating “religion of revolution”/“true religion” and legitimizing the *status quo*, while the former has used coercion and the latter has worked to produce consent. It aims to show that these two Kemalism’s are the twin children of Western modernity aiming to create a sanctified “secular theology.” They are the two faces of the “religion of legitimation” that suppress the “true religion” and legitimize the existing order.¹⁰

Kemalism: The Official Ideology of the Modern Turkish State

Turkish political thought has been shaped since the founding of the Republic by Kemalism. At first, associated with the accomplishments of its founder Atatürk, Kemalism was later institutionalized as the official ideology of the state. Its role in shaping the ideational movements of the Republic has been either viewed positively as the encourager of new ideas, or negatively through its hegemonic strategy of either absorbing, eliminating or marginalizing alternative ideas. However, as Belge argues, in the history of the Republic, no ideational movement could become legal or be taken seriously without establishing a *modus vivendi* with Kemalism in one way or another.¹¹



In the early 1930s, the CHP declared itself as the "state party" thus establishing a single-party regime and no opposition was allowed until 1946.

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Kemalism marks the transition from a multi-national imperial state to a nation-state. Although ideas such as the state and society as being part of an organism, the sustenance of social order, as well as world order and shaping society in a top-down fashion had been long standing elements of Turco-Islamic imperial tradition, which were also passed down to the Republic, Kemalism is

rather a product of Western modernity and its understanding of secular instrumental reasoning, humanism, positivism and modern science/education. As a product of these elements, Kemalism has devoted itself to raising a "modern/contemporary (*çağdaş*)" generation and any ideational movement wanting to have legitimacy has in some way or another had to articulate its principles.

Ottoman modernization, the Republican modernization project has created a centrist administrative and political philosophy anchored on the state and bureaucracy. Despite having emphasized political and legal citizenship during the founding of the Republic, it eventually adopted ethnic nationalism and refused to identify ethnic and religious diversity of the population living within its territory. Aiming to build a homogenous society, the Republic made official the sovereignty of a single nation over the new political structure. Thus, Kemalism has adopted a different basis for the legitimacy of the state, i.e. the nation, and identified the Ottoman State and Islam as its "other."¹²

As it is understood here, Kemalism is a hegemony-producing discourse. It is associated with a particular period in Turkish modernization project considering it together with "*Nutuk* (Speech)"¹³ and the "six arrows" of Republican People's Party that refer to the six guiding principles of Kemalism declared in the party's 1931 program, namely republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism and reformism. As it has developed during the last years of the Ottoman modernization period, its secularism is understood to be radical, its nationalism having an ethnic tinge, its centrism as authoritarian¹⁴ and its statism as a bureaucratic-authoritarian form of organizing state and society.¹⁵

During his lifetime, Atatürk proclaimed these six principles to be the "main focal points" in the path of Kemalism.¹⁶ If taken as very rigid ideological construct, "secular" and "religious" versions of Kemalism become invisible. It is

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precisely because it was sometimes said to be a “collection of principles” or at other times an “ideological project to last forever” that it brought to the fore any initiative paving the way for the flourishing of Kemalism within society.

This article argues that Kemalism emerged in its “religious” appearance within the society of Turkey where religion and spirituality is very effective, in order to be able to deepen the institutional and political practices that it has been conducting at the “official” and “secular” dimensions. In other words, “consent” based “religionist” Ke-

malism –dressed with religion and spiritual holiness that would make the manipulation of the masses possible– was introduced in order to complete what “secular” Kemalism based on “coercion” was not able to accomplish. This model enabled the creation in the 2000s of Turkey as a model country through “conservative capitalism.” As Şerif Mardin said many years ago, the AK Party’s rise to power in the 2000s is the success of Kemalism.¹⁷ However, what we should not forget is that it has also led to the corruption of Muslimhood through conservatism that emerged as the by-product of Kemalism.

Although at the outset Gülenism seems to have emerged holding a position in opposition to the Kemalist secular state, as shown here there are commonalities in the following spheres: (1) understandings of knowledge and education; (2) forms of organization (approach to governance); (3) state-society relations; and (4) nationalism. Because of the use of religious vocabulary and its transnational character, the Gülen movement’s statism, organism, corporatism, scientism and ethnic nationalism did not attract scholarly attention. However, it is precisely because of the use of religious terminology that it has been successful in building consent among “religious” citizens for the basic elements of Kemalist ideology. As is well known, Kemalism had been influenced by Western conceptions of modernity and through the construction of a centrist unitary state and corporatist model of state-society relations aimed to reshape society as a secular, modern, Turkish nation. Positivism –the use of Western modern science and technology as the guiding principles to reach and surpass the West– was a major theme of Kemalist ideology, whereas religion was to be contained at the level of individual conscience. Whereas “secular” Kemalism failed to produce consent among the religious conservative segments

of society, "religionist" Kemalism has become a complementary project with common elements of authoritarianism, centrism, hierarchical organization, cult leadership, Turkish nationalism, and the raising of a "golden generation" through education. In addition to its role in the production of consent, as a "religion of legitimation" the Gülen movement has also worked against what Shariati calls "religions of revolutions."

Sacralization of Modern Knowledge/Science and Positivism: Education and School as Ideological Tools

The founding elites and especially Atatürk held a firm belief in modern positive sciences as the guide for progress in all aspects of social life (i.e. positivism). Accordingly, for Atatürk, religion was not supposed to be influential in social life, but rather transform into a belief system within an individual's conscience.¹⁸ Furthermore, it is through the positivist and secular education that the new Republic would modernize. While "secular" Kemalism's ideological position is clear, for scholars analyzing Gülen's discourse on education as well as the practices within the schools affiliated with him, there seemed to be a puzzle. It was the fact that schools operated by Gülen's followers provided secular education. The assumption was the focus of these institutions which belonged to a movement professing to be an Islamic educational movement, "aiming to revitalize faith,"¹⁹ should have been on religious studies.²⁰ In this section, we analyze Gülen's concept of education in comparison with "secular" Kemalist ideas on the subject. While some scholars have argued that Gülen was influenced by Said-i Nursi's ideas of reconciliation between religion and positive sciences, we argue that Gülen's discourse to "liberate science from the connotation of being opposed to Islam,"²¹ which has been the assumption of both secular Kemalists as well as many pious Muslims, has resulted in the sacralization of modern knowledge and science or in other words, "Islamization of secular knowledge."

Firstly, just as the founding ideologues of the Republic, Gülen firmly accepts the need to adopt and learn modern sciences and technology. Furthermore, it is through the study of matter that he believes we walk towards faith. He argues that it is a religious duty and obligation to prove the existence of God through the study of matter. "We need to prove that science and technology are not the opposite of and hostile to religion. As opposed to materialists, such as Marx, Engels and Lenin who have through their study of matter reached atheism, it is a religious obligation (*vacip*) for us to study the same material and walk towards faith."²² As a result, two major journals of the movement, *Sızıntı* (Creep) and *Zafer* (Victory) have in almost all of their issues devoted large segments to proving the names of God and his signs by the study of nature.

Furthermore, similar to "secular" Kemalist ideology's positioning of science as the guide for progress and transformation of society in building a future, Gülen also interprets the changes that Turkey has to go through in order to reach the

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out science. Everything is in the final analysis related to science. Without it, there is nothing the earth can give to humanity. Science means the understanding of what matter and events tells us and what laws of Allah regarding creation (*tekvin-i emirler*) reveal to us and through them we intuit the higher goals of our creator. Human beings have been created to govern matter, with the ability to see, read, perceive and learn. After he learns, he will search for ways to influence the world. This is the point that it is by the command of the creator that matter surrenders to humanity and humanity to the creator. Every day through its many branches –physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine– science gives gifts to humanity in the service of humanity. Science and technology is at the service of human beings and there is no serious reason to be afraid of it. The threat is not in constructing a world based on technology. The real threat rather is in being uneducated and unconscious, and seeking to evade responsibilities.²³

Gülen carries an anxiety similar to “secular” Kemalism about the demise of the nation if Western science and technology is not adopted:

There is no doubt we are in need of the developed countries’ science and technology. How could there be any doubt when the world is racing along the path of progress and development at head-spinning speed without pausing for a minute. It is necessary that we participate in this flow with the same speed and become a nation living in the present century. A little bit of hesitation on this matter might, God protect us, cause us irreparable damage and result in us being erased from history.²⁴

Secondly, there are similarities between how “secular” Kemalism and Gülenism see the role of education and schooling. Replacing the traditional education system with secular state education, and the connection between modern science and the school was emphasized by Atatürk on many occasions: “Through school and science, and the knowledge that these will provide the Turkish nation, Turkish art, economy, poetry and literature will develop with radiant beauty.”²⁵ The positivist notion that through (modern) science all troubles could be overcome is quite clear in this quote. Similarly, Gülen describes sci-

position she deserves on the world stage through the lens of modern science. He criticizes the resentment of science and technology:

Some believe that governance of the world according to science will bring about the mechanization of humanity. This is absolutely not true. Just as there is no past without science, it is impossible to imagine a future with-

ence/knowledge as "a word that smells of enlightenment, religion, a poem of reality that breathes truth; a source of light."²⁶

Falih Rıfıkı Atay, one of the most prominent ideologues of "secular" Kemalism, had identified the decay of the *madrassa* system in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire when these institutions ceased to be places of learning, but became centers of rote memorization and the students of religious learning were prone to rebellion against reforms.²⁷ Gülen also criticizes traditional *madrassa* education:

One day, the golden age comes to an end. No more is the *madrassa* a place for discovery. It starts to engage merely with transmission of the old. For example, it was content with annotations on Avicenna, al-Battani and al-Ghazali. And of course, from such a *madrassa*, no longer did al-Ghazali or al-Battani emerge. Everywhere was taken up by those who were like parrots, repeating the ideas of their predecessors.²⁸

In secular Kemalism, the goal and role of education and school is to raise "acceptable" citizens for the nation and state. Schools are instruments for ideological training, disciplining the uneducated masses, transforming them into acceptable citizens who are inseparable elements of the state, and instilling in them a new national identity. Thus, the state is very much concerned with the education and schooling of the citizens. For one, it makes elementary school education necessary and schooling is under the control of the government.²⁹ Thus, the 1924 Law on the Unification of Education declared that "the nation's unity in feelings and thought" depended on the school. Without realizing that integration with the state and government would damage freedom of thought, Gülen also argues that schools must be integrated into the state. For him, any school (*madrassa*) that hasn't become one with its state does not deserve the name *madrassa* or a *tekke* (religious lodge).³⁰ According to Gülen, schooling should first provide a child language, ideals, faith, morals, and character, and then, based on these foundations, a social identity. Furthermore, "taking into account the circumstances of the time, he should acquire a reformist, or in other words with a never-ending revival, an always new and fresh understanding. Only after these elements should a student be acquiring skills for art, trade, agriculture, science and technology."³¹

He also refers to school (*mektep*) as:

sending beams of knowledge to life matters and thus allowing the pupils to comprehend their surroundings. At the same time, it opens up the road to discovering matter and events, and takes one to unity of thought, direction in contemplation and oneness within plurality. Thus, in this way school is a place of worship and teachers are its saints.³²

In Gülen's words, we see a yearning for an "authoritarian system" and his calls for submission to authority using religious references

In order to save society from paralysis, scientists, intellectuals and guides need to be raised within schools. In other words, for Gülen the progress of the nation is directly linked to the education of the new generation. He sees a positive correlation between a nation's social structure and the principles and methods of education, between the education of the individuals of the nation and the livelihood of it.³³ Thus, similar to one of the main influences on Kemalism – Ziya Gökalp, and his understanding of "national/social education" – Gülen emphasizes the

importance of "national education" (*milli terbiye*) in order to create "acceptable citizens." Education must shape individuals around a particular social morality and transform them into national beings. These views of the function of education overlap with the views of Saffet Engin, an educator influential during the founding period of the Republic on education: "Education... has shrunk the notion of individual interest, it has united individual movement and activity with the national goal. According to this view, what is essential in life is national movement and experience."³⁴

Similar to Atatürk's emphasis on the mission entrusted to teachers as bringing enlightenment to "uneducated masses," Gülen describes "a golden generation" brought up by teachers as follows: "[Those following the path of knowledge]... In the hands of the teachers, metals get purified, become pure gold and silver. In those mysterious hands, the raw and worthless become diamonds. No factory can work at such a high speed and so systematically."³⁵ Gülen's disciples carry out a similar mission.

The notion of Gülen's "golden generation" as the savior of the state, nation, and country emphasizes an elite cadre of people whose essence will be found in the *Quran* and *Sunnah* and who will be likened to the companions of the prophet.³⁶ Attributing them religious qualities of the highest order, Gülen claims that teachers of the "golden generation" are providing "religious" guidance (*irşad*)³⁷ to the youth engendered from their strong faith, but coupled with their transmission of secular knowledge. In other words, he convinces the movement's teachers that providing secular education is a "holy duty."³⁸ This religious discourse in describing "the golden generation" contributes to the movement's recruitment and continued commitment of willing and devoted volunteers. Within this group of volunteers, unquestionable devotion to the elders, loyalty, obedience and compliance are sustained through the cult of leadership.

Gülenism's understanding of education rests on modern scientific techniques, but with religious, national and ethical elements at the forefront. Thus, schools

and students excel in science and math education while social sciences and humanities take a back seat. In the schools opened in Turkey and in other countries, education is given according to the curriculum of the host country and Islam is never taught directly. In fact, this is avoided as much as possible. In terms of methodology and curriculum, positive sciences carry the weight, and "Islam's place was in appealing to the feelings of morality such as helping one another, cooperation, solidarity, interdependency, sense of duty, and respect for elders."³⁹

Gülen's education move has transformed into the creation of "Islam" compatible with positivist philosophy. According to an analysis that points to the boundaries of Gülenist modernism, "while Western and rationalist life sciences are accepted, doors are closed to social sciences."⁴⁰ Thus, according to Çobanoğlu:

After all, Gülen movement's education system does not promote free will and individualism and it is similar to [the Kemalist] Turkish educational system in its emphasis on collective consciousness, and feelings of responsibility towards high values above oneself. To this end, discipline and respect for authority are two important aspects of this education.⁴¹

Authoritarianism in "Secular" and "Religionist" Kemalisms: Instrumentalization of Kemalist Thought through Militarism /Centrism

The 1924 Constitution was written to establish a new political system, but in practice it was used to perpetuate the single-party regime and instituted the "chief system." According to the bylaws of the People's Party (*Halk Fırkası*), founded by Atatürk, candidates for the parliament would be chosen by the party general secretary and the president. And in 1927, Atatürk was declared permanent leader of the party as well as the new Turkish state. Any amendment to the party bylaws was forbidden.⁴² This amounted to the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Turkey, despite officially being founded as a Republic.

It is important thus to discuss the authoritarian positions of Gülenism, i.e. what is claimed to be the "religionist" version of Kemalism. In Gülen's words, we see a yearning for an "authoritarian system" and his calls for submission to authority using religious references. He believes that "(nobody) should convey (*tebliğ*) anything to anyone superior to themselves." Furthermore, he says "a son should not say anything to his father, nor a student to his teacher, and nor an apprentice to his master" and ties these ideals to "traditional values" and states that: "They are like roots that ennoble the nation, and trying to corrode them means to scare and move the nation away from its honorable history."⁴³ Çobanoğlu argues that this worldview is serving to legitimize the submission to authority.⁴⁴ For Gülenism, respect for authority is necessary for order and



The front pages of four mainstream newspapers in Turkey proclaim Gülen's call for a military coup d'état. Gülen urged Erbakan's government to leave as he considered the military to be more democratic.

security of society. Even if that authority is an unjust and oppressive power, nothing is worse than the disruption of order and security. Thus, Gülen prioritizes the survival of the state above all else. Within this worldview, he stresses that if you have a critique against the state, even if certain of its decisions have been wrong, you should be careful to say it because if you damage the state, then it will be difficult to reconstruct. Unless you have a reasonable alternative, anyone who openly talks about those wrong policies or decisions or attempts to work against them would be a traitor.⁴⁵

In addition, Gülen's views on protecting or submitting to the "existing order" (*biat*) are clear in his attitudes, speeches and writings during and after the 1980 military coup and the 28 February process, i.e. the so-called post-modern coup of 1997. They point to Gülenism's tendency to accept the authority of the state and furthermore the military.

His articles that appeared around the time of the military coup of 1980 praise the military and make references to the "military-nation." In an article entitled "Soldier (*Asker*)" in the fifth issue of the journal *Sızıntı* (Creep), five months before the September 12, 1980 coup, he praised soldiers.

Military service is considered a great honor both by God and the people. There is no other group as supreme, no other duty as great in this ephemeral world.

Our worries vanish with the soldier's existence. Our uneasiness transform into peace of mind and comfort with his songs and lullabies. Humanity reaches civilization and prosperity with the soldier. Conquests and later cultural flows reach everywhere with his flag and spear, and with these, new civilizations are born... In the history of all nations, the soldier is the top being... If he wasn't fast enough to avert the dark desires that had been prepared for years, we, as a nation, would not have any other choice but to cry.⁴⁶

Gülenism's view on the soldier and the military –and consequently the state– have become the foundation of his rhetoric that has served to support the authoritarian structures and use of force

And in an article entitled "Last Police Station" (*Son Karakol*) in the same journal one month after the 1980 coup, Gülen likened those who carried out the coup to "*Khidr* (*Hızır*, godsend)." Presenting his organism, he claims that:

However, it was obvious that an organism [referring to the state and society] who had been damaged with a thousand attacks would not have been cured right away with one intervention. We needed a movement more radical and from the heart, so that cancerous cells that had been eating the national body for years could be eliminated. And, now, with a thousand hope and happiness, we regard this last resurrection that we revere to be the birth of our wait for a century as a sign of the existence and the survival of this last police station. We salute the soldier (*mehmetçik*) a thousand times, because he has come to our rescue like *Khidr* when we had lost all hope.⁴⁷

Both of the military interventions discussed above are interpreted by Gülen as necessary for the good of the country. While the actors of the 1980 coup are praised for their sensitivity to matters of religion, the February 1997 coup is also seen in a positive way, because it was able to separate those who use the name of Islam and harm the oppressed Muslim majority. Comparing the March 12, 1971 military intervention with the September 12, 1980 coup, Gülen praises the latter for introducing a compulsory religious course into the school curriculum:

I know the process that brought Turkey to March 12. I was one of those wronged during that period. I know the September 12 period well too. I was a civil servant, a preacher (*vaiz*)... We could have been like one of those states in Asia: miserable, in ruins, and under the Russian tutelage. It is for this reason it is not right to judge all military interventions or to say they are all inappropriate... Those people who carried out the September 12 operation have been sensitive to religion. They have added the ethics-religion course to the curriculum. These days, they have said it should not be mandatory. However, they

have said if religion is to be taught, it should be within public schools and part of the existing curriculum. So, the committee has adopted this. They have done very important work. They acted sensitively to the reality of religion.⁴⁸

Hüseyin Gülerce, one of the leading supporters of the movement and columnist for *Zaman*, the Turkish daily of the Gülen movement, wrote in this article in February 2000 regarding the measures of the post-modern coup process of 1998:

The sources of the problem could be identified as the compatibility of Islam with secular democracy. This question is important for both the “domestic front” and the “foreign front”... It might come as a surprise, but February 28 has been beneficial for both... It separated the oppressed Muslim majority and those who use our religion as a tool for violence. Both those who say “political Islam” and our nation have been awakened.⁴⁹

Gülerce continues his column by suggesting that the 28 February process was beneficial for the transformation of the Islamic sectors. Gülen, himself also sought to legitimize the intervention by the military during this period especially pointing out its necessity: “There has been an intervention by the military... This should not have taken place in a democratic country. However, it was as if a gangrene has occurred. So, what was done was to amputate this. To move from a chaotic situation to order, regularity, harmony suddenly is not possible.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, Gülen has proclaimed his love of the army following the 1997 coup and when asked if there was any problem between the Turkish military and the army, he answered as follows:

I do not accept that there is tension between us and the army... You might ask what I mean when I say I respect the military. But my ancestors are soldiers. Şükrü Pasha, who fought against the Bulgarians in Edirne, is my biological grandfather. I have always heard stories of soldiers’ heroism in my family. Influenced by these stories of heroism, I have thought I should get an education and become a soldier. I have love for the soldier.⁵¹

As suggested by the quotations above, Gülen’s words have served to rationalize the necessity of military interventions in the eyes of the faithful by telling them how the coup-makers were protecting religion. Gülenism’s view on the soldier and the military –and consequently the state– have become the foundation of his rhetoric that has served to support the authoritarian structures and use of force. Thus, it should not be so surprising that the July 15 coup attempt was carried out by those sympathetic to, if not directly working with, what the Turkish government has labeled as the “Gülenist terror organization.” Gülen has praised and legitimized the use of “coercion” as a means to “save the state.”

Similar to "secular" Kemalism's recurring emphasis on internal and external threats to and enemies of the state, "religionist" Kemalism's "secular spiritual" leader Gülen also points to the same issue and praises those who would save the state by using the language of religion:

Beware! If someone, who stands guard there, against the threats surrounding the country, to observe through which whole or which breach will disaster penetrate the country and who works to close that breach by building a system, says he has done a deed more beneficial than the Kaaba and swears on it, he would not be lying.⁵²


Statism and Corporatism in "Secular" and "Religionist" Kemalisms

In the second half of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s, "statism" was the guiding principle/ideology strengthening authoritarian and centrist tendencies of the secular Kemalist state. All of the political steps taken during this period were instruments to reinforce the "secular" Kemalist regime based on coercion. Between 1933 and WWII, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) declared itself the "state party" and no opposition was allowed, thus establishing a single-party regime. This understanding of government based on strict "statism" was practiced to institute a centralized unitary state, monistic authority structure and create a homogenous nation-state.⁵³

It is imperative in this regard to consider Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's understanding of state-society relations. In the following quote, we can observe his views on the "ideal citizen" and on the state as the instrument in shaping the society to strengthen the country against internal and external threats.

The state seeks healthy, robust citizens with a high degree of national feeling and love of country in order to provide order and protect the homeland. The state needs citizens with a high level of capability to conduct the affairs of the nation domestically and abroad. The state deems it important for the security and protection of the country that the citizens understand the laws of the state and appreciate the necessity to obey them. The state is concerned with the success of all citizens in any art or profession at the level required for the current age of progress and for this reason it is necessary to be concerned with the citizens' education, discipline and health.⁵⁴

As this quote suggests, this approach to the state-society relations is influenced by corporatism as practiced by the fascist regimes of the 1930s. Şevket Aziz



Gülen has always stressed his ideas on the importance of the state and statism and further his repeated declarations stated that harming the military and the state in any way is a grave error

Kansu, one of the bureaucrats of the period, was also highly influential as suggested in the following quote:

All of us are rightly insisting on our grand and important cause repeatedly. We are enlightening Turkish citizens on the meaning of this cause... It is necessary to prepare these fertile, rich and beautiful lands for following generations. Human hand, human desire, human quarrel and human spirit need to knead the Turkish nature with a dynamic spirit... Capturing of Turkish lands by the enlightened and technical expert sons of the fatherland, colonization of the country on behalf of the country, for the country!⁵⁵

The state as the agent molding society to ensure its survival and enhancement among the nations, the ideal of a people led by a vanguard of enlightened individuals, the concern for holistic transformation of the citizen and the vision of the society as an organic whole are all elements of the Kemalist vision of state-society relations of the 1930s that we can also see in Gülenism.

According to Taşkın, Gülen and his movement are the realization of the secular Kemalism's "success in constructing a certain collective identity" in all of society. He argues that the Gülen movement's effective organizing in education, in market structures, and within the state apparatus has been in the "service" of internalization of secular Kemalism by society.⁵⁶ Identifying the cultural codes of society well and able to use them for his own "service," Gülenism has been functioning as an "organizing practice" with an enchanted religious and spiritual language. Gülenism's preference for individuals with internal discipline

and consciousness of duty points to his views of society as an organism.

Ali Ünal who works on Gülenist thought points out that Gülen's understanding of education first of all aims to transform the individual who has been saved from narrow and particularistic thinking.

He is looking for reformers; in other words, he wishes for human beings endowed with a value system envel-

oping their physical as well as non-physical aspects. And he is waiting for the changes they will bring about in societies. The education that he is concerned with is by its nature aiming to transform the individual. According to him, these individuals have escaped thinking parochially and narrowly, but have self-discipline and accountability. Only these individuals can make permanent contributions in society.⁵⁷

Gülen's self-appointed role in the name of the state's survival, its compatibility with the Kemalist regime's understanding of the state and the secularization process has made Gülenism much more than a religious community



A few days before the July 15 coup attempt, Gülen appears in a video wearing a khaki jacket, a color which is commonly used by the Turkish military, as a message to his followers.

Gülen has always stressed his ideas on the importance of the state and statism and further his repeated declarations stated that harming the military and the state in any way is a grave error. His views on the 1996 Susurluk incident, where a car accident revealed the connection between the state intelligence agencies, mafia, business and politicians, are instructive:

If this is an event where the state was at fault, then there is a possibility that the state, statism and the conceptualization of the state could be punctured when this event is exposed... From the very beginning, did the media have the right to investigate openly every little detail and to pursue this issue as if a prosecutor working on an indictment? Can this be accepted within the parameters of strong statism? If a murder or a social crime has been committed in Susurluk, I would not want it to be covered up either. However, I can always critique the style in every platform. If there was something in its foundation that might harm our national unity or conceptualization of the state, then this door should not have been opened. If, once you pass through this door, trust in the military, in the security forces, in the parliament, and in the people will be shaken, then an alternative method should have been found to solve this problem. The perpetrators should have been identified and prosecuted, but the media should not have acted as the prosecutor and the judge... I don't know if maybe there was a concern about ratings... I do not want to entertain the idea that patriotic people would attempt such deeds for such trivial pursuits, shaking the foundations of our state and puncturing our conceptualization of it.⁵⁸

In the statement above, Gülen's view on the primacy of protection of the state over and above the pursuit of individual or collective interests is very clearly

conveyed. For all its “religionist” façade, Gülen’s self-appointed role in the name of the state’s survival, its compatibility with the Kemalist regime’s understanding of the state and the secularization process has made Gülenism much more than a religious community.

Although having lived in different time periods and having produced languages different in form, Gülen’s and Atatürk’s thoughts on and the mechanisms for the “reform” of the individuals that make up the society have generated similar outcomes in content. The greatest threat for Muslims who had refused to obey the homogenizing Kemalist “secular *gemeinschaft*” is the homogenizing “religious *gemeinschaft*.” A variety of authoritarian, inward-looking religious and political organizations based on particular religious, sectarian and ethnic communities expect utmost obedience from members and act to “other” outsider individuals and groups. One of the most important reasons for this is the homogenizing, populist and communitarian political culture centered on state power and based on the Turko-Islamic imperial tradition. Another factor is trauma generated by the “secular” and “religionist” versions of Kemalism that have been working to shape society through positivist and instrumental rationality methods. Various social groups with differing worldviews have sought to lean on “an organic leader cult who is able to ensure the unity and strength of the community” both internally as well as in their relations with outsiders. Regardless of its “secular” or “religionist” character, they display utmost intolerance towards any deviation from their “secular” or “religious” orthodoxy. In this regard, we argue that there is no essential difference between “secular” Kemalism’s physical and mental educational policies that sought to construct a society of “submissive bodies” and “docile citizens” and Gülen’s “religious” ideology, even though they may have differences in form. Moreover, Gülenism is more dangerous specifically because it can produce consent among the people using “religion.”

In the following quote, Gülen clearly states his views that in order for the state to be viewed as eternal, the society needs to be gathered around a leader or a hero, in other words he views the society as an organism that cannot survive without a state.

Heroes who will re-build a society are born, nursed and formed by history and an earlier society and later on these heroes will prepare the following society history and nation... these heroes who are pure light, whose every thought is guidance, who would never be captivated by our bewildered and scattered wishes, who will on the contrary be lifeblood to our bodies, shining light of our minds, and essence of foresight... These wise soldiers who will no doubt protect the meaning and contents of the thousand year old blessed history with extraordinary diligence, they will instill in the future generations the national spirit continuously, will ensure that it will remain alive and once again will say “the eternal state” (*devlet-i ebed müddet*) However, for this to happen fast, it is necessary

not to elicit the difference within society, not to transform righteousness into a violence weapon, and not to side with the devil against the servants of God.⁵⁹

In the above quote, we see Gülen's emphasis on the need to suppress diversity within society as he points out to "wise soldiers" or in other words a "disciplined youth" who will "serve" the state, is similar to Atatürk's views. In his "Address to the Youth,"⁶⁰ Atatürk called on the Turkish youth to protect the Turkish state and to lead the nation to prosperity and modernity. Thus, the future of the nation was entrusted to the youth.⁶¹ As Hendrick points out, Gülen also uses Kemalist categories, i.e. "overlapping notion of "youth," "citizen" and "nation"⁶² in the following quote:

A nation's durability depends on the education of young generations, upon their being awakened to national spirit and consciousness and spiritually perfected. If nations cannot raise perfect generations to whom they can entrust their future, their future is dark indeed.⁶³

For Kemalism, citizens' capacity to serve the state required a "national education" to remedy the deficiencies of the individual and the nation as a whole. A nation that has not been educated and disciplined would not be able to attain national ideals. Accordingly, educators and families had grand duties. Gülen also sees "education" (*terbiye*) as a national issue:

The issue of training and education (*talim ve terbiye*) that is very critically connected to every nation's vitality and survival is one of the top problems of every country. Especially during transition periods which are considered to be time of crisis for nations, this issue attains higher importance. During such times, not being able to comprehend the conditions of the country, prioritizing emotions over reason in policy making, planning under the pressure of the crisis and getting confused by the uproar of the masses and changing direction will shake the "national body" without possibility of recovery and destroy it.⁶⁴

The importance of education to reach "national aims" is more important for "religio-Kemalism" than secular Kemalism. As Çobanoğlu suggests, "Gülen's goals are compatible with the goals of the Republic's nationalist founders, who wanted to protect and enhance the national family."⁶⁵

It is the duty of an elite group with "superior" qualities (the "contemporary generation" according to secular Kemalism and the "golden generation" ac-



Gülen's emphasis on Turkish nationalism is one of the defining characteristics of the movement that separates it from other Islamic movements in Turkey and ties it deeply to "secular" Kemalism

ording to religio-Kemalism) to prepare the country for the future. Accordingly, both types of Kemalism give utmost importance to the upbringing of this elite group and to the institutions who will be responsible for it.

Sacralization of Turkish Nation and Language

In the construction of Turkish national identity, “secular Kemalism” has worked hard to overcome the theoretical and practical problems arising from the fact that Anatolia was home to many different ethnic and religious communities. Kemalist thought constructed Islamic and Ottoman past as the “other” in form; although in fact maintaining its mentality as mentioned in previous sections. To fill the void left by the negation of this past, an “abstract” Turkish history was emphasized. This was an important step in the Turkish national identity construction of Kemalism that has continued to be one of the problems that still affects us today.

Within this framework, Turks needed to move away from an Arab (associated with Islam) and Ottoman identity towards a Western identity. To accomplish this, Turks were portrayed as a nation that has contributed to “civilization” in the periods prior to Islam and the Ottomans. Thus, it was argued that although joining these families had regressed the Turkish nation, it could not eradicate its “civil” features. This thinking led to the emphasis on Turkish ethnicity and moved away from the Republican territorial understanding of identity.

Gülen’s emphasis on Turkish nationalism is one of the defining characteristics of the movement that separates it from other Islamic movements in Turkey and ties it deeply to “secular” Kemalism. The term “Turkishness” in Gülen’s conceptualization of the nation is assumed by some as not referring to ethnic identity. However, in his talks on the Ottomans, he makes reference to the “five percent of the general population that is pure Turk”⁶⁶ or the “ten million pure blooded Turks.”⁶⁷ This suggests an understanding of Turkishness that comes through the lens of ethnic nationalism.

Gülen’s discussions of Turkish nation’s qualities and history also point to its ties with “secular” Kemalism. When discussing the assertion that “Shamanism, the oldest religion of the Turkish nation” is similar or almost the same the religion of Abraham and thus consideration of the Turks as among the people of the book, Gülen says while he thinks these are exaggerated claims, the founding Turkoman Kayı tribe of the Ottoman state is on *a par* with the companions of the Prophet. He says “They [the Kayı] are the second most worthy of praise after them.” He claims that “it was as if Prophethood was resurrected with them.”⁶⁸

Giving the founders of the Ottoman state a religious legitimacy, Gülen also claims that “our society was one of the world’s most pure, clean, gentlemanly nations... In all segments of society, there was a serious love of the truth, a pas-

sion for research, a thirst for knowledge, just morality and compassion based on faith and connected to devotion to God (*Hakk*).⁶⁹ In this quote, we see that Gülenism's understanding of strong state/society is close to the standards of Turkish conservative nationalism.⁷⁰

The following quote also suggests that Gülen's Turkish nationalism is similar to "secular" Kemalism's in its emphasis on Turkic populations of Central Asia: "The structure that

will be formed through the unification of Turk, Uzbek, Kirgiz, Azeri, Kazak, Turkmen and Tajik will construct our real identity. And I think it will be possible to come to terms with our century... and to have our place in the balance of states, is only possible with this identity."⁷¹

The idea in "secular" Kemalist nationalism of the 1930s that the Turkish nation has contributed to all civilizations in the world throughout history appears in a different form in Gülenism, in the form of many nations being grateful to the Turks throughout history. Ünal, one of the ideologues of Gülenism has conveyed this idea as follows:

As a conqueror nation, Turks have not tried to Turkify the various nations under their authority, they have respected their religion and traditions. It was good fortune that Romania was under Turkish administration rather than Russian or Austrian. Otherwise, there would not have been a Romanian nation today. A Syrian writer named Michael has suggested that "God has sent us (Seljuk) Turks to save us from the harms of deviant *Rum*'s."⁷²

Gülen's understanding of nationalism stresses patriotism as well Turkish language. Similar to "secular" Kemalism's conceptualization of Turkish national history beginning from pre-Islamic past, Gülen also describes nationalism as being conscious of sharing the same fate whose foundations go back to two, three or four thousand years ago.⁷³ Gülen also stresses language as one of the main tools of a cultural revolution very akin to Atatürk's understanding of "pure Turkish" as the basis of Turkish nationalism. In the founding period of the Republic, Turkish language research centers were set up by the state, and language days were celebrated every year. Furthermore, through state policies, the official language was utilized as a tool to eradicate local dialects or ethnic languages.⁷⁴ Gülen also gives a high priority for language in the "construction" of the future. According to him "Language is one of the basic dynamics of

The idea in "secular" Kemalist nationalism of the 1930s that the Turkish nation has contributed to all civilizations in the world throughout history appears in a different form in Gülenism, in the form of many nations being grateful to the Turks throughout history

culture. The strength of a nation is proportional to the strength of its language and thought.”⁷⁵

He continues to say that a strong language is needed to keep the intellectual heritage of a nation. While developing one’s language and using it well seems like a premise not to be disputed against, in Gülenism these notions are sacralized. In his words, “not to use Turkish well is a national sin and to use it well towards the attainment of our goals is good deeds (*sevap*).”⁷⁶ Thus, religious notions such as sin and good deeds are “nationalized.” Furthermore, Gülen claims that “to make Turkish a world language is *vacip* [that which is obligatory according to Islam], to use it well is *sünnet* [the path of the Prophet Muhammed], and to know its intricacies is *müstehap* [what is recommended, but not required in Islam].”⁷⁷

Linking the usage of language and its spread to “good deeds” and “sin” are in conformity with Gülen’s understanding of social morality. Thus, rather than following the principles and rules of Islam, according to Gülen, “good deeds” are attained by working selflessly like soldiers towards the goals of raising faithful generations of the future and protecting the social order and peace. Furthermore, Gülen sought to mobilize the religious segments of the population for working towards the goal of the Turkish nation (re)emerging as a world power through the use and spread of national language. This was most evident in the Turkish Olympics conducted every year where hundreds of children from all over the world would sing popular Turkish songs or recite the national anthem.

Conclusion

Many studies have been carried out on Kemalism, the official ideology of the Turkish Republic. However, we cannot say that there is agreement on Kemalism’s parameters. As an ideology without clear boundaries, it has had many forms: the single-party period’s authoritarian Kemalism, conservative-nationalist version of the Democrat Party period, the 1960s and 1970s Kemalism with social democracy rhetoric and the 1980s militaristic-judicial Kemalism. Thus, it can be argued that it has managed to influence and penetrate the society through power and been able to coopt any alternative ways of thinking.

Kemalism is an ideology without clear boundaries. Taking its power from praxis, it has changed its form and content according to the *zeitgeist* and expanded in eclectic ways. One of the common elements of Kemalism of each period since the founding is its effort to transform the bureaucratic power into a hegemonic one that can permeate the whole society. Historically, every time it encountered resistance (social change), it did not hesitate to use coercion. However, when coercive power was no longer effective or sufficient, metamorphosis process became inevitable.

The first example of Kemalist metamorphosis was the leftist turn of CHP, the political wing of Kemalism, beginning in the mid-1960's against the rising tide of the socialist movement under the leadership of the Turkish Labor Party. What this resulted in was the wiping out of the left in Turkey by the military in defense of Kemalist principles, renamed as Atatürkism with the 1980 coup. This episode in Turkish Republican history has shown how Kemalism has used both political tools as well as civilian and military bureaucratic coercive tools to eliminate a major social opposition movement. Kemalism has used both "carrot and stick" to remove the anti-systemic character of political Islam in Turkey. Thus, this paper has argued in this current context, there exist "secular" and "religionist" Kemalisms that at the surface seem to be "enemies" but in fact share many ideological features.

Despite its use of religious language, Gülenism is not a religious movement, but a secular and worldly one that has been used to gain consent of the dominated classes

Utilizing Gramsci's concept of hegemony, this article showed Kemalism to be the hegemonic ideology of Turkey that has penetrated the society. It has sometimes used force in order to shape people, and other times sought to produce spontaneous consent. "Religionist" Kemalism has arisen when coercive methods such as force, military coups and oppression were not sufficient to eliminate social opposition. Essentially, "religionist" Kemalism could be described as what Ali Shariati has called "religion against religion," i.e. similar to Islam, but against its main principles, it seeks to create a new form of religion. "Religionist" Kemalism has served as an "ideological tool" to spread the worldview that "secular" Kemalism had been influenced from among all segments of society. Thus, it has worked to create a "hegemonic religion" that prescribes absolute obedience to authority and is based on the position of a dominant ethnic element. Here, the analyses have focused on the elements of this religion that serve to legitimize state power rather than its practices.

Firstly, it was argued that for both "secular" and "religionist" Kemalisms, the explanations of the world by positive sciences, without any discussion, are truths. While for the former, there is no God that science cannot prove, for the latter scientific theories are proof of the existence of God. Even though they reach different results, their acceptance of science as a supra-religion and their failure to question scientific arguments is presented here as evidence of their sharing similar worldviews and philosophical genealogies. On the contrary, as Karl Popper has said, falsifiability is the basic scientific principle.

In terms of their goals, while "secular" Kemalism aims to create "acceptable citizens" (modern generation), "religionist" Kemalism aims to raise the "accept-

able faithful” (servant “golden generation”). Both have a vision of a hierarchical order of society and governance, and demand utmost obedience to authority. ■

Endnotes

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12. Levent Köker, *Modernleşme Kemalizm ve Demokrasi*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), pp. 154-155.
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