The Dialectics of Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: The Case of Said Nursi

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE DIALECTICS OF SECULARISM AND REVIVALISM IN TURKEY: THE CASE OF SAID NURSI

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY
ZUBEYIR NISANCI
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY 2015
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I cannot adequately thank my beloved wife and friend Aslıhan for the emotional and intellectual support she gave me especially during the writing of this dissertation. Our children Mediha and İbrahim have also been sources of joy and inspiration for me. I wrote the entire dissertation at home and I excelled in making maneuverable paper planes for them from the print outs of this work. Thusly, the writing of the dissertation became a connecting point for us rather than disconnecting us.

Last but not least, my thanks go out to my friend and neighbor Muhammed Ali Asil who helped me in printing and submitting the finalized hardcopies of this dissertation to the graduate school as I was overseas during this process.
To my family
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CUP  The Committee of Union and Progress

Trans. Translated by

ZN Zubeyir Nisanci

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<td>EL</td>
<td><em>Epitomes of Light</em> [Mesnev-i Nuriye] by Said Nursi (2004c [1922-1926]).</td>
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<td>HŞ</td>
<td><em>Hutbe-i Şamiye</em> [The Damascus Sermon] by Said Nursi (2004f [1911]).</td>
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<td>İ</td>
<td><em>İşarat-ul İcaz</em> [Signs of Miraculousness] by Said Nursi, (1995b [1914-1915]).</td>
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Note on abbreviated references: Two types of in-text abbreviated bibliographic reference are used when citing the writings of Said Nursi in the fourth and the fifth chapters of this dissertation. These are (1) reference to a specific page in a specific book and (2) reference to a specific chapter in a specific book. Abbreviated references with colon (:) are references to a specific page and abbreviated references without a colon refer to a specific chapter. For example, (W:25) refers to page 25 in the book The Words. However, (W25) refers to Chapter 25 in the same book.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse and mobilization strategies in the context of the development of secularism in Turkey. This study starts with the exploration of the development of the secularist movement and its discourse with regard to philosophical foundations of (1) the construction of reality, (2) the self and (3) the society. This is followed by the analysis of Said Nursi’s discourse of revivalism before and after the establishment of the Turkish Republic with respect to these three areas and by the exploration of the discourse and mobilization strategies of the Nur Movement (established by Said Nursi) vis-à-vis the mobilization strategies of the secularist establishment.

This study is based on discourse analysis of the texts produced by the secularist movement, and the texts produced by Said Nursi and the letters he exchanged with his followers. I also analyze material and non-material mobilization strategies of these two movements.

One of the main conclusions of this dissertation is that secularism and revivalism do not have fixed boundaries and natures. Sociopolitical contexts, socio-economic and educational backgrounds and ideological orientations of actors, their relationships with the state, with religious forces played significant roles in the emergence of substantial variations in the discourse and mobilization of the secularist movement. Said Nursi’s approach to religious revival, too, showed considerable
variations. Although he first advocated macro level societal reform for reversing the
decline of the Muslim World, Said Nursi started developing a dialectic approach to
religious revival after the introduction of explicitly secularist ideas (e.g., materialism
and naturalism). Following the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic, Said
Nursi started writing treatises with the purpose of challenging the philosophical
foundations of secularism rather than directly engaging the secularist establishment. In
so doing, he embraced a micro-level mobilization strategy which aimed at appealing to
and transforming individuals. By challenging its philosophical bases and not
developing a politically intonated discourse against secularism, Said Nursi and the Nur
Movement embraced an effective mobilization strategy of “simultaneously engaging
and disengaging” the secularist establishment.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation project is to systematically study socially organized responses to secularization in the Muslim World by focusing on the revivalist ideas of Said Nursi and the development of the Nur Movement in Turkey.

Having taught a sociology course on Islamic Movements in which I covered major revivalist movements around the Muslim World, I realized that there is a considerable amount of variation in the responses of religious revivalist movements to secularization in the Muslim World depending on their analyses of the challenges posed by secularization and by the dynamics of the contexts in which these movements emerged. However, one of the questions which puzzled me the most was that, the response of Said Nursi was different from other revivalist movements in the sense that his response to the philosophical aspects of secularization dealing with (1) the ontological foundations of the construction of reality, and (2) moral philosophical foundations of the construction of the self was more central in his writings. And, unlike the other Islamic revivalist thinkers and movements, his response to the secularist (3) political philosophy regarding the construction of the society was much more peripheral in his revivalist writings. Said Nursi, as part of his response the rise of modern secularist paradigm, formed the Nur Movement which has been one of the oldest and largest revivalist movements in the Muslim World.
I believe that a systematic sociological investigation of how and why Said Nursi and the Nur Movement responded to secularization would contribute significantly not only to the social scientific studies of revivalist movements in the Muslim World but also to the broader spectrum of secularization debates.

As I endeavored to sociologically explore Said Nursi’s and the Nur Movement’s response, I realized that sociological debates heretofore have not adequately addressed sociological implications of the ontological and moral philosophical aspects of secularization which concern the construction of reality and the self respectively. The same is true for the studies of revivalist movements as well. Social scientific studies hitherto focused almost exclusively on responses to the sociopolitical dimensions of secularization. However, socially organized responses to the ontological and moral philosophical aspects of secularism have not been adequately studied which, I argue, is related to the inadequate conceptualizations and theorizations of secularization.

One of the main arguments of this project is that studying ontological and moral philosophical aspects of any social action, both at individual and structural levels, in addition to its sociopolitical aspects, is critical in terms of comprehending the nature of social interactions, societal organizations and socio-historical transformations. Hence, sociological studies should account for the ontological and moral philosophical dimensions of secularization in addition to its socio-political aspects. One of the main goals of this project is to offer such formulations as a prerequisite for studying Said Nursi’s and the Nur Movement’s responses to secularization.
As I discuss in further detail below, I argue that secularization can not be fully understood without reference to the ideology of secularism. I also argue that secularism and revivalism are always mutually constructed and that thorough understanding of one of these categories requires the comprehension of the other. Similarly, I suggest that studying either side (secularism or revivalism) contributes directly to the understanding of the same core question of secularization. Therefore, I propose that studying the response of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement to secularization in this dissertation project would simultaneously be a significant contribution to the social scientific studies of both secularization and revivalism.

The next chapter of this dissertation consists of a critical review of sociological debates about secularization and in the meantime the development of a theoretical framework of how this dissertation approaches these issues. The main argument of such a review will be that we need broader definitions and conceptualizations of secularization which involves deeply rooted fundamental changes in the meaning systems of modern societies.

I maintain, in this regard, that we need to inquire into the underlying philosophical implications of every major sociological issue we explore in the context of secularization. I uphold that secularization cannot be fully understood without reference to secularism as an ideology. By definition, ideologies are about meanings, worldviews and ideals.

A comprehensive analysis of an ideology like secularism which has far-reaching implications in the meaning systems of modern societies requires deciphering its
underlying philosophical positions with regard to the construction of reality, the self and the society\(^1\).

Another implication of perceiving secularism and revivalism as mutually constructed categories for the purpose of this dissertation is that we need to take into consideration the collective action side of the construction of secularization and revivalism. This entails looking at collective mobilization and counter-mobilization dynamics of secularization which is based on the idea that secularization should be studied from the movement-countermovement perspectives. In order to address these issues in a comprehensive way, I will study sociological implications of the ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical bases of how Nursi and the Nur movement problematized the construction of reality, the self and the society \(\textit{vis-a-vis}\) the contestations and mobilization of the secularist movement in these areas.

The secularist movement has been a broad movement at the international and national levels. This dissertation narrows down its focus on secularism to the ideas and mobilization of the Young Ottoman and the Young Turk movements of late Ottoman Era and to the founding cadres of the Turkish Republic such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. I explore the development of secularization and the secularist movement in Turkey in the third chapter of this dissertation. However, I also discuss, albeit briefly, the development of secularist ideas in the late Ottoman society with regard to and in the context of the development of similar ideas in the West. The revivalist discourse of

\(^1\) An explanation of what I understand from the philosophical foundations of the construction of reality (ontology), the self (moral philosophy) and the society (political philosophy) and how I will employ these concepts for the purpose of this dissertation project is provided below.
Said Nursi before and after the establishment of Turkey and the mobilization strategies of the Nur Movement are investigated in the fourth and the fifth chapters respectively.

**Ontology, Moral Philosophy and Political Philosophy in the Sociological Context**

In my understanding, there are three major components of social action. The first is about the ontological foundations of the construction of reality, the second is the moral philosophical aspects of the constructions of the self and the third is about the political philosophical bases of the construction of the society. This leads me to suggest that social scientific studies should also inquire into the socially organized ontological (reality) and moral philosophical (self) dimensions of secularization in addition to its widely studied political dimensions.

Sociology offers a wide variety of methodological tools and concepts for studying the society. Nevertheless, sociologists also find it imperative to incorporate methodological tools of other disciplines to their sociological inquiries as they deem it necessary. The entire rational choice theory literature is only one example of such interdisciplinary borrowing in sociology. The theory was originally developed within the discipline of economics to explain economic behavior at individual (micro) level but it was adopted by a considerable number of sociologists and by academicians from other social scientific disciplines (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997; Satz & Ferejohn, 1994).

Because of its broader implications, secularization has already been studied from the perspectives of different social scientific disciplines including sociology, political science, history and philosophy and from multidisciplinary approaches. By the same token, I will incorporate the concepts of ontology, moral philosophy and political
philosophy to sociological study of secularization with regard to the construction of reality, the self and the society.

Before borrowing methodological tools and concepts from other disciplines, it is imperative to justify why already existing sociological lexicon available to us are not sufficient for the study of our sociological questions. The closest sociological formulations of what I understand from ontology and moral philosophy were offered by sociologist Peter Berger (1966). He argued that societies construct a set of worldviews of how things work and convince their members that it is the unchangeable objective truth. He called these sets of worldviews Nomos. For Peter Berger, societies also construct a set of values which he called Ethos. He contended that Nomos and Ethos are (or should be) consistent. His conceptualizations of Nomos and Ethos are similar but narrower forms of what I understand from ontology and moral philosophy respectively.

As I understand it, any conscious human action and as a result any societal organization is guided through some sort of implicit or explicit reference to meaning which has various dimensions. One of these dimensions is about answers given to the ontological questions such as “what is existence?”, “what is the source of existence?”, “what is the source of the attributes of a given object?”, “why does something exist?” and “what are the actual mechanism by which things exist and interact with each other?” These ontological questions are also related to the epistemological questions such as “what is (true) knowledge?,” “how is knowledge acquired?” and “what is the justification for (the truthfulness of) knowledge?”
It is not hard to say that most of the actions of human beings, be it individual or collective, are conscious actions which involve intentional or unintentional thinking processes. Thinking is, among other things, about processes of construction of meaning which leads to or is supported by an established (constructed) form of knowledge. Human beings are without any doubt social beings. Their (collective) action do not only include the production and exchange of material things but also the construction and exchange of meaning and knowledge. Therefore, we can conclude, one of the core dimensions of social action is about the construction of reality and production of knowledge. This side of human action can also be traced back to certain ontological positions with regard to the implicit or explicit answers provided to the aforementioned questions.

It is generally understood, in the context of secularization debates that, religion was to a greater extent the institution which dominated the dynamics of the production of meaning and knowledge in pre-modern times. Science and secular art replaced the dominant role of religion in modern societies in these areas.

If we were to use Berger’s conceptualization of *Nomos*, it would be difficult to construct exclusive definitions of religion and (positivist) secular science. If the fundamental question, as it is presented in Berger’s use of the concept of *Nomos*, was about “how things are,” then both religion and positivist science would be in agreement in many areas. For example, a religious individual’s and a secular scientist’s descriptions of how biological mechanisms of our bodies work can be very similar. However, their explanation of where our bodies came from and about the ontological
nature of the relationship between causes and effects, including the ones in our bodies, might be very different. For this reason, I chose to use the concept of ontology instead of using *Nomos* to refer to the sociological dynamics of the construction of reality and the production of meaning and knowledge.

A second dimension, of social actions, which in my understanding is a major one, is about answers given to the questions about the nature and purpose of human beings and their actions including the questions of “what are human beings?” “what is or what should be the goal and purpose of their actions?” and “what makes them happy?” (or what is the most desirable human state?). All of these questions can be summarized into the moral philosophical question of “what is the good?”

Social organizations produce material and immaterial goods depending on their understanding of what human beings are, what the purpose of their actions should be and ultimately depending on their definition of what is “the good?” (in the moral philosophical sense). Therefore, the second dimension of social action is about the construction of the self and about the definition and production of “good(s)” in both moral and economic meanings of the word.

I also think that the dynamics of moral philosophical side of social actions are related to their ontological dimensions. The ontological idea that things do not exist by and in and of themselves supports the moral philosophical idea that things do not exist

---

2 The questions of “what are human beings?” and “what their nature is like?” are questions about the ontology of human beings. However, I consider these questions as part of moral philosophy because these issues are specific to human beings (the self) and because they are closely linked to other moral philosophical questions.
for themselves but for the purposes intended by their source of existence. Thereupon, the 
measure of the good, for this type of a worldview becomes serving the purposes intended 
by the source of their existence (i.e., God). This, I believe, has been generally the 
viewpoint of religion or, to put it in another way, such perspectives are called religious. 

However, the idea that things do not exist by an external source but by 
themselves supports the idea that things exist for themselves and thus, the measure of 
the good becomes the degree to which things including social relations produce 
“goods” (utility) for the things themselves and when the society is concerned, it 
becomes the production of utility exclusively for the society and for individuals living 
in it or by it. This, I believe, is the opposite of what is generally understood as religion 
and thus can be called the general ideology of secularist moral philosophy. Any form of 
division of labor or organization of means of production which produces material and 
immaterial “goods” (utility) based on this moral philosophical position can be taken as 
one of the foundational cornerstones of the secularist paradigm. Capitalism and 
socialism are two outcomes of such a secularist moral philosophy. The first focuses 
more on the production of utility for individuals whereas the latter focuses more on 
providing utility to the society as a whole. Perhaps, this is the reason why private 
property and private enterprise has been the backbone of capitalism and communal 
property and state enterprises dominated socialist economies to varying degrees. 

Materialized dynamics of capitalism and socialism are not at the center of this 
project’s definition of moral philosophy. Capitalism and socialism are outcomes of 
utilitarian moral philosophies and they are mechanisms of producing utility (good)
depending on their moral philosophical understanding of “what is the good?” and “what is the most desirable condition of human existence?”. One of the contentions of this project is that we need to look deeper into the moral philosophical implications underlying these and other social systems especially when we study such concepts in the context of secularization.

Similarly, sociological explanations of “values” and “norms” are generally limited to outcomes without referring to the moral philosophical underpinnings behind modes of thinking and action which are called as values and norms. When Berger says that societies construct a system of values which he calls Ethos, he is referring only to the external outcomes, not to the moral philosophical implications of such value systems. Among other things, secularization is about a fundamental paradigm shift in the meaning systems of contemporary modern societies. Therefore, transformations in the fundamentals of value systems should be included in the list of issues to be considered in sociological debates about the question of secularization and modernization. This is the reason why I decided to use the concept of moral philosophy instead of using narrower descriptions like Berger’s Ethos in order to study differences and interactions between religious and secular moral philosophies.

Although I think that religious and secular moral philosophies are exclusive in theory, I don’t think that they have always been radically exclusive in practice. We need exclusive definitions for our analytical formulations but this does not mean that such things are fully separated from each other in social relations. The issue in these debates is about whether religion lost its dominant power over other societal institutions
and in the lives of individuals. If religious forces are dominant over other societal organizations including the production relations, such a society is generally considered to be a religious society. Secularization is generally understood as the process by which religion has had a declining influence over these institutions. In order to be able to determine to which direction the society is going, we need to have exclusive definitions of these two opposite sides. Therefore, I argue that we can compare religious and secular moral philosophies as dichotomous categories although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive at all times in practice in the society.

I also think that there is a third major dimension of social systems which is related to the first two (i.e., ontology/reality and moral philosophy/self) dimensions. The third dimension of social action, in my understanding, is about the question of “who and under which principles will regulate the production, exchange and distribution of meanings and goods and who will have the monopoly over the use and abuse of coercive power in terms protecting this entire system from dysfunction?”. Establishment and protection of such a system involves regulative -in some cases physically coercive- power and control over societal institutions including politics, education, health, military, economy and judiciary. This is what I take as the political philosophical foundations of the construction of the society.

In the way I see it, the first two dimensions of social action, namely the ontological bases of the construction of reality and moral philosophical foundations of the construction of the self are mostly, if not exclusively, related to micro level sociological processes whereas the third, (controlling institutions) is mostly related to
macro level dynamics. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the first two aspects are independent from the third. In many cases, micro processes of the construction of reality and the self are facilitated, managed or determined by macro social forces including societal institutions.

It is also worthwhile to note that the employment of the concepts of ontology, moral philosophy and political philosophy in this dissertation will be confined to their sociological connotations relating to the construction of reality, the self and the society. I should also mention that I do not see ontology to be the same thing as the social construction of reality, and moral philosophy as the social construction of the self, etc. They are different but related concepts in my understanding. For example, the sociological concept of the self has various aspects such as its relationship with socialization and with power (Callero, 2003) but I only look at the moral philosophical dimensions of the construction of the self in this study. Reality and the society have multiple dimensions as well, but this dissertation only inquires into the ontological foundations of the construction of reality and the political philosophical foundations of the constructions of the society in the context of secularization.

The main reason why this project proposes the addition of ontological and moral philosophical aspects of secularization to the equation is to better understand the dynamics and dialectics of the social construction of (1) reality, (2) the self and (3) the society in modern times. The secularization theory’s descriptions of disenchantment and demystification of the world (Weber, 2012; Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2000; Berger, 1967; Martin, 1978) imply changes in the way reality of the world is understood and
presented. Proponents of the secularization theory described disenchantment and
demystification as the removal of “the sacred canopy” from the face of the world and as
the process through which objective reality of the world started to be seen without any
ideological bias.

As it was suggested by Charles Taylor (1989), Giddens (1991) and Bennett
(1987), the culture of (secular) modernity involves the reconstruction and reorientation
of the self towards alternative definitions and articulations of the good. Therefore, it is
essential to construe and account for the moral philosophical underpinnings of how
secularism envisioned the reconstruction of the self. Focusing only on the interactions
between institutions might obscure our perceptions of what secularization is and
weaken the methodologies of how it should be studied.

There is no doubt that the investigation of the development and transformation
of institutions and conflicts over controlling them are crucial for studying macrosocial
processes including secularization. This dissertation will dedicate a great deal of
attention to such issues as well. However, it is equally important to look at micro level
dynamics such as the reconstruction of reality and the self especially when we
investigate transformations in the meaning systems of societies. Such transformations
are not only about suppressing and marginalizing groups with opposing worldviews,
they are also about transforming and reorienting them and others as individuals. For
example, conflicts over controlling educational institutions are not only for establishing

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3 Giddens and Bennett acknowledge that modernity transforms the self but they, unlike Taylor,
did not discuss this issue with regard to the concept of the good.
a monopoly for exploiting resources and opportunities of these institutions but also for controlling one of the commanding heights of educating members of the society which involves the reorientation of individuals towards specific goals and the transformation of their worldviews. Such transformations include changes in the moral philosophical orientation of the self and ontological aspects of the construction of reality especially when a conflict between the secularist and the religious is concerned.

As I describe below, the Nur Movement I study in this dissertation was established around a body of discourse presented in the works of Said Nursi whose writings include ample reference, albeit indirectly in most cases, to the ontological and moral philosophical foundations of the construction of reality and the self. In addition to studying the interaction of the religious and secular paradigms at the institutional level, I also discuss the dynamics of the construction of reality and the self when I explore the response of this movement to secularization.

Studying the dynamics of the development of reality and the self might also be instrumental for exploring mobilization strategies of religious movements not only in the Muslim World but also around the world at large. In the absence of control over major societal institutions, interest groups including social and religious movements might develop alternative non-institutionalized strategies of mobilization seeking change through other forms of action (e.g., individual level). It is possible that, some movements might find it more feasible and effective to engage the individual even when they are not denied of institutional channels (Kniss & Numrich, 2007). In this regard, I analyze and discuss if and how Said Nursi’s methodology of the construction
of reality and the self had changed when the characteristics of the institutional settings of the society was transformed after the establishment of the secularist nation state in Turkey.

This dissertation looks at secularization in the context of the development and transformation of a broad historical social movement mobilized by the ideology of secularism and therefore it theorizes secularization as a paradigm consisting of alternative forms of socially constructed ontology, moral philosophy and political philosophy. In addition, this dissertation aims at studying the processes of secularization in the context of movement-countermovement dynamics by viewing secularization as a dynamic process involving often conflicting interests and maneuvers of the secular(ist) institutions and religious responses to different dimensions of this movement. However, this study is based on the argument that secularization is generally described by the proponents of the secularization theory (Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2000) as a one way natural process of emancipation from religious forces (ideas, values, norms, practices and social classes) and not as a broad historical social movement characterized by the conception of alternative ontological, moral philosophical and political ideologies. Moreover, this study emphasizes that sociological studies mostly focused on religious responses to the sociopolitical and, to a very limited degree, to the moral philosophical aspects of secularization. Socially organized responses to the ontological dimensions of secularism have been largely ignored which is an area this study aims to significantly contribute to.
Significance of the Study

As it has been observed by many (e.g., Davison, 1998; Yavuz & Esposito, 2003; Kuru, 2009; Baran, 2010) one of the battlegrounds of secularist and religious social forces in modern times has been Turkey which was established as a secularist nation state after the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Secularization processes in the Muslim World, including the territories controlled by the Ottomans, started before the decline of the Empire but since the inception of the new Turkish Republic in 1923, the divide between the secularist and religious forces started to become more visible as the newly established Turkish nation state continued introducing top down secularist reforms in a wide range of areas. Similar trends of secularization emerged in the other parts of the Muslim World including Iran and Egypt in the twentieth century. At the same time, socially organized responses to secularization started to emerge in these societies in the form of revivalist religious movements. One of the earliest socially organized responses to secularization in Turkey and in the Muslim World was the revivalist movement established by Said Nursi who wrote extensively, among other things, about the underpinnings of the challenges posed by what he broadly called “the [atheistic] philosophy” and criticized the ontological, moral philosophical and to a limited extent sociopolitical aspects of this philosophy.

Said Nursi’s ideas were not confined to mere philosophical or theological discourses as he also formed a large movement (the Nur Movement) organized around reading and distributing the texts (The Risale-i Nur Collection) he produced. Perhaps
this was the reason why, he, was prosecuted and why his writings were banned for several decades by the secularist establishment in Turkey. After the death of Said Nursi in 1960, the Nur movement grew into several branches (e.g., Okuyucular, Yazıcılar, Zehra, Yeni Asya and Yeni Nesil movements) (Yavuz, 2003) which are mobilized around different interpretations of Said Nursi’s ideas. These movements have been at the center of the movement-countermovement dynamics of the secularization processes in Turkey and to a certain extent in the Muslim World.

In the final analysis, this dissertation project aims at contributing to the sociological discussions about secularization and religious revivalist movements in several ways. The first of these goals is to contribute to the conceptualizations of secularization by employing the concepts of ontology, moral philosophy and political philosophy in a comprehensive approach and thus by studying secularization with regard to the social construction of reality, the self and the society.

Although the assumptions of the secularization theory, which for decades dominated social scientific studies of religion, have been challenged on grounds of contrary empirical evidence, methodological inconsistencies and theoretical fallacies, I think that the concepts of secularism and secularization are still relevant in contemporary societies. Even if we assume that secularization is not as triumphant as it has been described by the proponents of the secularization theory, we still need to understand the theoretical and practical implications of secularization as a process of social change and secularism as an ideological force. By looking at secularization within the framework of a broadly organized social movement mobilized around an
ideology, this research postulates that secularization cannot be truly understood apart from secularism as an ideology and as a movement. Regardless of whether secularization is real or not, the ideology and the movement of secularism, which I believe has been one of the largest social movements in the contemporary world, is worthy of thorough investigation.

It might be argued that secularization is already an overstudied subject and it is time for recycling it into the dustbin of intellectual history. My contention is that sociological perceptions of secularization thus far have mostly been influenced by the ideologically laden narratives of the secularization theory. The same theory’s and the same movement’s depictions influenced sociological descriptions of religion as well. To put it differently, the secularist movement constructed and in some ways dictated its own theory of the secular and the religious. Validity of the assumptions of this theory has been highly contested in the last several decades but theoretically informed post-secularization theory articulations of the secular and the religious and their interactions are yet to be produced.

Although not a sociologist per se, Taylor (1992 and 2007) provided a promising approach by contending that secularization was a result of a committed movement and by emphasizing the need for analyzing moral philosophical foundations of the self in this movement. Casanova (1994), too, acknowledged that secularism had its peculiar epistemological positions. Nevertheless, neither Taylor nor others provided adequate articulations of the discursive and material mobilization strategies of the secularist vis-à-vis the religious movements. That is why I think that contemporary descriptions, with
the exception of a few like Taylor, have not gone far beyond classical views of religion as enchantment, sentimentalism and communalism even in the thinking of those who criticized the secularization theory and those who somewhat recognized that secularization was related to the emergence and domination of alternative ontological and moral philosophical perspectives.

I argue that theoretically and methodologically consistent conceptualizations of both the religious and the secularist can only be articulated when these two terms are conceptualized with regard to common parameters of comparisons. I also contend that these parameters should include and explore how the religious and the secularist differ in their ontologies, moral philosophies and political philosophies and therefore in the ways they envision the construction of reality, the self and the society.

I am aware that not every religious perspective are exactly the same nor are their secularist counterparts. As I argued above, we need exclusive definitions, at least at the analytical level, of the religious and the secularist in order to be able to discuss the direction or lack thereof of social change especially when we are dealing with the question of secularization. Therefore, I argue, we need to distinguish the secularist from the religious on the bases of common parameters of comparison primarily including the construction of reality, the self and the society. Such a comparison, in my opinion, can better be done by looking at secularization or religious revival in the context of movement-countermovement dynamics which I believe would enable us to see how the two sides defined their positions vis-à-vis the other and how they were mobilized accordingly.
I believe that studying the response of Said Nursi and the Nur movement to secularization might reveal much in this regard for since this movement did not only produce a body of textual discourse including implicit and explicit responses to various aspects of secularization, it was also mobilized around these ideas as one of the largest and most influential revivalist movements in the Muslim World. Therefore, such a study would provide an opportunity to explore understudied aspects of secularization within the discipline of sociology such as the ontological and moral philosophical dimensions together with its political aspects. It is important to note that the purpose of this dissertation is not to answer the question of whether religion has been losing its social significance or not as it has been extensively debated around the arguments of the secularization theory but to broaden the scope of secularization debates by employing these concepts.

It might be asked about how secularization could be better understood by studying a revivalist movement. One of the departure points of this dissertation project is that we need to look at secularization (or modernization) from a broader and more comprehensive perspective by exploring its philosophical aspects with regard to the construction of reality, the self and the society. Second, I suggest that we can and should look at secularization with regard to secularism as a social movement. Even if we do not attribute it totally to social movement dynamics, I see studies of secularization and modernization ignoring social movement dynamics as inadequate. Much of what we understand from the concept of modernity even today is pretty much a reflection of the Enlightenment philosophy (Bennet, 1987). There is a vast amount of
literature in other social scientific disciplines (History, Political Science, Philosophy and Literature) which describe and study the Enlightenment as a movement (Bennet, 1987). Although limited in number, there are studies in sociology which approach modernization and secularization from the social movement perspectives as well. Third, following Casanova (2011), Chavez (2004) and Asad (2003), I suggest that religion (revivalism in particular) and secularism are always mutually constructed. Understanding of one of these sides requires the study of the other at the same time. In other words, I suggest that we study these issues from the movement-counter movement perspective. Similarly, I suggest that studying a reviverist movement against secularization (and or modernity) would contribute significantly not only to the studies of reviverist movements but also to secularization. However, I don't suggest that focusing only on the reviverist movement would be enough for a sociological study about secularization. We also need to look at the secularist side simultaneously. Otherwise, this would not be a study relating to secularization; at best, it would be a limited and inadequate study of a reviverist movement.

In short, there are three core areas of investigation in this dissertation: (1) philosophy (discourse), (2) mobilization (social movements), (3) counter-mobilization (movement-countermovement dynamics). I cover these three areas in different stages, in some cases in different chapters, of this dissertation.

Starting from the first step, the Nur Movement has been a discursive movement and their core practice has been reading the works of Said Nursi and distributing them. I understand that all social movements have some sort of discourse but the movement I
will study is mostly based on a textual discourse widely read and circulated among its members. Just like studying the response of a (hypothetical) Marxist movement (to the rise of capitalism) which is in greater part shaped by extensively reading of the works of Marx and distributing his ideas (publishing his books, when it is forbidden handwriting hundreds of thousands of copies of them) require in the first place an understanding of what is in the texts produced by Karl Marx. Only if and when we and our audience already know Marx’s ideas very well, we can skip this step. Otherwise, we have to address it. Second, we also need to understand what kind of strategies Marx (or any other ideologue) used in the text he/she produced to convince (or to convert) and mobilize masses. As the third and one of the most important of these steps, we need to understand how the movement following Marx is mobilized vis-à-vis the capitalist establishment and what role do Marx's ideas play in their mobilization strategies. Such an endeavor also necessitates that we understand the capitalist (system) as well, especially if we are studying a historical Marxist movement (or a movement with a considerably long history).

For good reason, I don't claim and I don't anticipate in any way that my study will have the same impact but I can relate to the idea, for example, that contemporary sociological studies of capitalism owes greatly to Marx and Marxist ideologues who embraced emancipatory approaches against capitalism which were also turned into social and political movements. Even if we don't agree with all of their analyses, their conceptual tools significantly contributed to the studies of capitalism. Similarly, our sociological understanding of patriarchal nature of societies owes much to the feminist
movement. I see a similar potential in the analysis of the discourse of a revivalist movement for developing certain conceptual tools and critical perspectives for a broader and more comprehensive study of secularization. The difference, however, is that I don't suggest borrowing concepts directly from Nursi and from the Nur Movement but to develop or at least help contribute to the development of new concepts and approaches to the study of secularization by focusing on the case of this movement.

My way of saying that studying the Nur Movement's response would also significantly contribute to the studies of secularization is similar to a sociologist of gender relations contending that studying a major feminist movement's discourse and mobilization strategies would not only help us in our understanding of the dynamics of the feminist movement in question but it would also significantly contribute to the study of patriarchal societies (or to the gender relations in general). If we consider a scenario in which theories of gender studies were dominated by male dominant ideologies, such a suggestion might offer some new promising opportunities. Even if it does not do a perfect job, such a proposal might help pave the way for methodologically stronger approaches. This is very similar to the way I approach to the study of Nur Movement's response to secularization.

Perhaps finding a one-word description (like gender, race, inequality or class) referring to secularist-religious relations might facilitate the presentation and the study of these issues as part of one main problem. One might wonder, why not continue using the concept of secularization which is as concise as the concepts of race, class and
gender. The difference is that the concept of secularization was by and large formulated and substantiated through the lenses of the secularist ideology. As I have argued, the concept of secularization is two sided (secularity vs religion), but it was mostly the secularist paradigm, as the dominant paradigm of the twentieth century, which determined the content and the direction of the secularization debates. On the contrary, the concepts of class, race and gender were mostly substantiated from the perspectives of the marginalized. One of the implications of this is that these concepts were more reflexive in the sense that they have had critical approaches towards the dominant paradigms (upper class, majority races, women etc.). That is why it was easier for the scholars specializing in these areas to say that class, race and gender are social constructions and they have political implications with regard to the distribution of resources and opportunities in the society. Because of this reflexivity, studies of either side were considered to be part of the same problem. In gender studies, for example, explorations of the construction of femininity and masculinity are considered as part of the same problem. Likewise, studying sociological aspects of the construction of both a dominant race and minority races are perceived as the two sides of a unified system.

Even though secularization is a relational concept like gender, race and class, sociological studies of secularization have not been as reflective as the studies of other areas. That is why I suggest that studies of secularization entails the awareness of both secularism and revivalism (religion). Studies of either side (revivalist vs. secularist) are related to the same core question of secularization. It is for these reasons that I suggest
that this dissertation would contribute to the studies of secularization and revivalist movements at the same time.

At the final analysis, I am not claiming that this dissertation is exclusively about secularization and its only main goal is to understand what secularization is. It is about a religious movement's response to secularization. However, I claim that existing sociological conceptualizations of secularization are inadequate in the first place. I discuss in detail the reasons of why I think this is the case and share my suggestions in my literature review (Chapter II). The first of these suggestions is to incorporation of the philosophical dimensions of the construction of reality, the self and the society in the sociological studies of secularization. Second, I argue that neither secularization nor revivalism can truly be understood without reference to the movement and counter-movement dynamics. This issue is more obvious for revivalism but not so much for secularization (secularism) mostly because secularization is understood as an abstract process of social change unfolding as a result of some other agentless social forces such as modernity, rationalization, demystification, disenchantment and institutional separation. Therefore, I believe that a systematic sociological study of the response of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement which involves these issues (philosophy, mobilization and counter-mobilization) would contribute not only to the studies of revivalist movements in the Muslim World but also to the much broader spectrum of the secularization debates.

On the other hand, this dissertation dedicates a relatively long chapter to the study of the development of secularist ideas and the secularist movement in the history
of the late Ottoman society and in the formative years of the modern Turkish Republic. In doing so, this dissertation directly analyzes the secularist movement for contextualizing the development and transformation of Said Nursi’s revivalist ideas and the Nur Movements mobilization and countermobilization strategies.

It could also be argued that studying the response of the Nur Movement might help us explore these issues only in the geographical context (Turkey) in which this movement was established. Firstly, my preliminary reading of the discourse of Said Nursi and the Nur movement indicates that this movement did not perceive the challenges of secularism to be the product of a particular geographical entity as their discourse contains ample reference to naturalism, positivist science and materialism which for many are characteristics of the modern paradigm across the border. Secondly, the scope of secularism was not confined to geographical boundaries in the first place. In agreement with Giddens (1991), I think that the modern (secular/post-traditional) paradigm has had a globalizing character and it has become part of the world-history. Even though each and every modern society has its own peculiar history of secularization, the ideology of secularism which maintained a somewhat unified character at least as opposed to religion has been part and parcel their histories. Thirdly, I don’t suggest that studying Said Nursi and the Nur Movement or any other movement will answer all of the relevant questions definitively. The main goal of this study is to meaningfully and systematically contribute to the ongoing sociological discussions about secularization by articulating alternative directions of theoretical conceptualizations and inquiries.
I also believe that the theoretical framework I developed in this dissertation for studying the Nur Movement’s response to the ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical foundations of secularization—which also deal with the social construction of reality, the self and the society—can be instrumentalized to explore the dynamics of other revivalist movements especially the ones in the Muslim World including the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-i Islami, Tablighi Jamaat and others. The same framework can also be employed to explore which of the three aspects of secularization and in what degrees a particular revivalist movement responded and how they have done it. For example, one might argue that the Muslim Brotherhood’s response focused more on the political and moral philosophical aspects of secularization whereas the Nur Movement focused more on ontology and moral philosophy.

This structure can also be used to determine in which of the three areas a religious reviver movement has/had conflicting or accommodating relations with secularist regimes. When I propose the use of this framework, I don’t argue that all religious movements necessarily have antagonistic relations with secularist establishments in all of these three areas. Some religious movements might be mobilized against only one of these three aspects of secularization and they might have non-conflicting relations in other areas.

Even though its core focus is secularism and revivalism, I believe that the conceptual framework of this dissertation would also contribute to the sociological discussions about social movements as a side objective. Social movements are not only
about mobilizing resources, they also produce meaning (Casas-Cortés et al, 2008).

Indeed, Kurzman (2008) contended that meaning-making is one of the core aspects of social movements because “they raise questions about the possibility of alternative worldviews and alternative dispensations, and in so doing they challenge participants and observers to re-think meanings that are too often taken for granted” (p. 6).

Nevertheless, Kurzman argued, studies of social movements have not adequately investigated meaning-making sides of social movements. I believe that this study would also be a response to the rightful call of Kurzman by helping develop methodological tools for investigating the ways social movements produce meaning and challenge alternative meaning systems.

Finally, “[Said] Nursi did not attract much attention in the West because he did not advocate political Islam per se,” as it is observed by Abu Rabi (2005, p. xv). Although he established one of the largest revivalist movements in the Muslim World around a body of discourse he produced in his writings. I think that another reason why Said Nursi’s and the Nur Movement’s response to secularization has not been adequately studied is related to the difficulties about deciphering and contextualizing his discourse.

I observed that Said Nursi purposefully tried to simplify some of the complex (philosophical) points he wanted to make. For example, he sometimes compares different perspectives (Ex: religion vs. positivist science) by using parables. He then goes on to interpret the ontological and moral philosophical implications of the parables he tells, without saying that he is dealing with ontology and moral philosophy.
Although most of his writings are populist in stylistic character (Vahide, 2005, p. 193), there are places in Said Nursi’s writings where his discourse and discussions get loaded with theological and philosophical terminology. What is more, his writings are not about mere philosophical or theological debates but about his understanding of challenge posed by secularization.

Discernment of his discourse requires employing sociological and philosophical tools together. That is why I think that studies of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement’s response to secularization remained largely limited to descriptive studies rather than systematic analysis of the discourse of Said Nursi and the dynamics of the movement he established. One of the purposes of this dissertation project is to fill this gap in the social scientific studies of revivalist movements in the Muslim World. I think that such a study would also pave the way for theoretically informed studies of the sub-branches of the Nur Movement which were established after the death of Said Nursi.

**Methods and Content Outline**

This study rests on a combination of macro and micro level sociological, historical and to a limited degree philosophical analyses. Describing the biographies of influential figures in both the secularist movement and the Nur Movement and analyzing sociological and philosophical implications of their discourse constitutes the micro level analysis. Issues relating to the sociological contexts in which these movements grew, and the discussions regarding the mobilization and counter mobilization strategies of these movements in conjunction with the socio-historical transformations constitute the macro level analyses.
As argued by Ruiz (2009) “[because] social action is guided by the meaning that individuals attach to their actions, we must account for this meaning when attempting to understand and explain the action”. That is why I will incorporate the methodology of sociological discourse analysis when I analyze the discourse of major figures in the secularist movement and when I describe and discuss the textual response of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement to secularization. Because I contend that we should investigate the philosophical foundations of secularism and revivalism, I also discuss philosophical implications of the secularist and revivalist ideas I explore in this dissertation.

Obviously, the context in which a textual body of discourse is produced is critical for exploring sociological implications of the text. As I outlined above, this study looks at secularization from the movement-countermovement perspective. Any sociological analysis of the dynamics of the discourse of a countermovement, by definition, must contextualize the text and the discourse because a countermovement is something which is against a movement external to itself. Therefore, I will contextualize the discourse of both the secularist movement and the Nur Movement.

I also embraced a historical approach in my analysis of the development of secularism and the secularist movement in Turkey. That is to say, I studied secularism and the secularist movement at (five) different stages. The first is what I call the first wave of modernization (1779-1839) in the history of Ottoman Empire in which the Ottoman state started modernizing its army with technological improvements which was followed by the establishment of modern educational institutions. The second is the Tanzimat Era in which modernization was expanded into and supported by the growing
bureaucracy. The third is the emergence of the Young Ottomans Movement (e.g., İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, Ali Suavi, etc.) which embraced a reconciliatory approach in that they supported modernization and Westernization with religiously intonated discourse. The fourth is the development of the Young Turks movement (e.g., Beşir Fuat, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik) who for the first time in the late Ottoman society started introducing and supporting explicitly secularist ideas such as materialism and naturalism. The fifth and the last stage is the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic during which secularism became the official ideology of the state. I explored the development and transformation of secularist ideas and the secularist movement in these five subsequent historical stages. I also investigated variations in the mobilization strategies of secularist individuals and groups in this context.

I used a similar approach in the study of the discourse of Said Nursi. I studied Said Nursi’s discourse of Islamic revival in two phases. The first is the contextualized analysis of Said Nursi’s understanding of reform and Islamic revival before the establishment of the Turkish nation state. This includes the articles he published in the newspapers during this time. When I studied Said Nursi’s revivalist thinking before the establishment of the Turkish nation state, I studied it in the context of socio-historical transformations and intellectual debates of the time.

Among the issues I paid extra attention in the first part of Said Nursi’s life is his criticism of the madrasa education and his project of establishing a university in the Eastern provinces. I discuss if and how this project was related to Said Nursi’s
understanding of Islamic revival and his portrayal of the challenges posed by secularization at that time. I also explored his discourse of İttihad-i İslam (Muslims Unity) in this context.

The second part of the same chapter (Chapter IV) of this dissertation includes contextual and textual analysis of Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse after the rise of the Turkish nation state. Among the sources I analyze in this context are the treatises Said Nursi wrote during this period and the letters he exchanged with his followers. Analysis of the discourse of Said Nursi’s articles, treatises and his Risale-i Nur Collection are at the core of studying Nursi’s response to the ontological, moral philosophical and political aspects of secularization.

Data

I used a combination of primary and secondary sources in my analysis of the development of secularism and revivalism (Said Nursi and the Nur Movement) in the history of Turkey. I used secondary sources for the exploration of the particular socio-historical transformations and contexts in which these movements were developed. I used secondary sources for the description of the biographies of influential figures in both the secularist movement and the Nur Movement. However, I used primary sources for analyzing the discourse of these figures. For example, I presented and analyzed passages (articles, poems, interviews, letters, memoirs etc.) from newspaper and journal articles as well as books published by the Young Ottomans, Young Turks and other ideologues who played significant roles in the development of secularism in Turkey. I analyzed the discourse of these texts in line with the core questions of this dissertation.
which explore ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical dimensions of secularism. I also analyzed the discourses of the founding cadres of the Turkish Republic (primarily including Atatürk) with regard to similar questions.

Similarly, I used secondary sources to describe and discuss the biography of Said Nursi and his students. However, I used primary sources in my analysis of their discourse. These sources include the articles Said Nursi published in several Ottoman newspapers, the treatises and the books he published before and after the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923) and the letters he exchanged with his students⁴.

*The Risale-i Nur* includes three volumes containing hundreds of letters exchanged by Said Nursi and his followers as well as several hundred pages of Nursi’s and his students statements of defense against the allegations they were prosecuted for. Analyzing the letters of Nursi’s students and followers helped me explore how the members of the Nur Movement perceived the ideas of Said Nursi and how they were mobilized around these ideas.

I used a sampling strategy to determine which of the letters written by the members of Nur Movement will be included in the analyses of this project based on several criteria. The first is that only the letters of those whose background information such as gender, ethnic origin, occupation and possibly approximate age at the time of writing the letter are available. Volumes of *the Risale-i Nur* containing the letters were titled according to the place of residence (exile) of Said Nursi. For example, the volume titled as *Barla Lahikası* (translated as Letters of Barla) includes letters written by Said Nursi.

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⁴ An extended biography of Said Nursi is provided as an appendix at the end of this dissertation.
Nursi and his students when Said Nursi was living in the village of Barla in the Western province of Isparta between 1926 and 1935. Likewise, *Kastamonu Lahikası* (Letters of Kastamonu) and *Emirdağ Lahikası* (Letters of Emirdağ) include letters written between 1936 and 1943 and between 1944 and 1960 during the Kastamonu and Emirdağ exiles respectively. Letters written when Said Nursi was in prison were added to the other volumes of the Risale-i Nur primarily including *Şualar* (The Rays) (Beki, 2008).

Details about the lives of the first generation of the Nur Movement members especially the prominent students of Said Nursi were published in secondary sources by the members of the Nur movement. For example, Necmeddin Şahiner, published a series of books (*Son Şahitler* - Last Witnesses) with the aims of collecting information about anybody whose name is mentioned in *the Risale-i Nur*. His books include information about 200 people. He collected most of this information by doing in person interviews with those who were alive and by interviewing the relatives of those who passed away.

**Content Outline**

**Chapter I.** The first chapter sketches out the theoretical, conceptual and methodological framework of how and why I will study the response of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement to secularization.

**Chapter II.** The second chapter is dedicated to the critical review of sociological debates around the question of secularization. A brief review of the literature covering Islamic revivalist movements, including the Nur Movement, is included in this chapter as well. The literature review I provided as part of the second
chapter is also part of how I conceptualize these issues. In this section, I also discussed some of the inadequacies I see in the existing literature and shared my suggestions of how to better address these issues. I start with a somewhat detailed critical review of the secularization theory. I expressed towards the end of this review that although I criticize the theory I still think that some of the conceptual tools as analytical tools (such as rationalization, institutional separation, privatization and disenchantment) can be employed for the investigation of the dynamics of secularization especially at the macro level. In addition to describing the background of the intellectual debates pertaining to my dissertation project, my review intends to rectify the theory to clarify how I approach these issues.

Because it has been the major front against the secularization theory, I also presented a critical review of the rational choice theory in the second chapter. I offered my criticism of the Rational Choice Theory as well and discussed its inadequacies in terms of addressing the issues I raise (Ex: Social movement dynamics of secularization) in this dissertation. In the same chapter, I also critically reviewed alternative perspectives (Ex: Taylor, Smith, Casanova and Asad) to secularization (other than the secularization and the rational choice theories) which I incorporated into the analytical tools of this dissertation.

**Chapter III.** The development and transformation of secularism and the secularist movement in the history of Turkey is covered -at length- in the third chapter of this dissertation in five different stages which are described above. In this chapter, I
also discussed philosophical implications and social movement dynamics of the
development of secularism in the history of Turkey.

Although I will be focusing on Said Nursi’s (1878-1960) revivalist discourse
and the mobilization strategies the Nur Movement he established, my investigation of
the secularist movement in Turkey will not be limited to this period. The Nur
Movement was a response to changes in the society which had already been taking
place before the emergence of this movement. Therefore, my analysis of secularization
and the secularist movement in Turkey stretches back to the second half of the
nineteenth century of the Ottoman Era in which modernization reforms were initiated.

The reason why I embark on a retrospective historical-sociological analysis of
the late Ottoman history is not only because I intend to better explore transformations
taking place in this era as a precursor to understanding the change Nursi and the Nur
Movement was responding to, but also for understanding the root paradigm of the
secularist establishment which had been the politically dominant ideological front
during the Republican Era. As historians Zürcher (2011) and Hanioğlu (2011)
observed, secularist establishment of the Republican Era was a continuum and a
reflection of some of the aspirations of the secularist movement (the Young Turks) of
the late Ottoman society.

This, however, is not to say that that the secularist movement(s) of the late
Ottoman Era and the secularist establishment of the early Republican Era did not have
their own peculiarities. Most of the cadres who established the Republican system
including Atatürk were part of the secularist elites of the Ottoman Era, too. However,
the contexts in which these two generation of secularists operated were different. First of all, secularists of the late Ottoman society were for the most part in opposition especially until the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918). Only between 1908 and 1918, The Young Turks, which had been the most influential front of the secularist movement during the imperial times, enjoyed a considerable executive power in the government albeit under the surveillance of the monarchical power of the Sultan. However, the secularists of the Republican Era had enjoyed an absolutist monopoly over the social and political institutions and over the use and abuse of coercive power. Secondly, the first generation secularists’ perception of religion was more diverse than that of the later generation, as Hanioğlu (2011) contends. They had mix reactions towards the role and place of religion in the society.

**Chapter IV.** The fourth chapter is a discourse analysis of Said Nursi’s works with regard to modernization and secularization. I started with the analysis of the reformist and revivalist discourse he used before the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Among the issues I paid extra attention in the first part of Said Nursi’s life is his criticism of the madrasa education and his project of establishing a university in the Eastern provinces. I discuss if and how this project was related to Said Nursi’s understanding of Islamic revival and his portrayal of the challenges posed by secularization at that time. I also explored his discourse of İttihad-i İslam (Muslims Unity) in this context.

In the next section of the second chapter, I investigated the sociological and philosophical implications of Said Nursi’s revivalist ideas and his discursive strategies
after the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923). His response to the ontological and moral philosophical foundations of secularism constitute the main axes of my investigation.

I have discussed above that construction of the self is (and I, following Charles Taylor, think should be) included in the studies of secularization (and modernization). I used this approach in my investigation of the dialects of how Nursi wanted to transform his followers (readers) and or the individuals in the society. I also suggested above that we look at the dynamics of the construction of reality as well. Indeed, Nursi’s ideas regarding ontology and epistemology greatly shaped the Nur Movement's discourse of religious revival. I contended that a systematic analysis of Nursi's discourse would be instrumental to and necessary for the understanding of the discourse of the Nur Movement and therefore for the dialectics of secularization. That is why I also analyzed the sociological implications of Said Nursi’s response to the ontological foundations of secularism in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter V. The fifth chapter investigates the formation and the development of the Nur Movement between 1926 and 1960, starting with the exile of Nursi to the Western provinces (Barla and Isparta) three years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923) and in the aftermath of the Şeyh Said incident (1925).

The kaleidoscope of the formation, development and transformation of social movements is already very complex and broad. Adding meaning and ideology to the list of primary constitutional components of social movements makes the picture even more complicated. The enormous diversity in the social movements literature is a
testament not only to the multiplicity of methods and theoretical approaches to social movements in social scientific disciplines but also to the wide variety of issues pertaining to social movements (Goodwin and Jasper 2009).

Even though issues associated with social movements are integral to it, the main goal of this project is not about exploring social movement dynamics per se. The core question this dissertation addresses is the relationship between secularism and religious revivalism with regard to the construction of the reality, the self and the society by also paying attention to how social movement dynamics play a role in such encounters. Covering all of the major issues related to social movements is beyond the scope of any dissertation, let alone one or two of its chapters. Especially when problems related directly to social movements as an area of social scientific investigation is a secondary concern in a research, contributions to the sociological studies of social movements would hardly go beyond side benefits, which is the case with this dissertation project.

There are three core problems I will try to answer about the Nur Movement. The first is about how this Movement interpreted Nursi’s ideas. The second, will be about its core activities and their sociological implications. The third will be dealing with how the movement was mobilized against the secularist establishment in Turkey.

Below is a list of questions which provide more detail about these three lines of inquiry.

In what ways members of the movement (re)interpreted the ideas of Nursi with regard to religious revival? If so, what are the sociological implications? Are there any variations among the members of the movement in terms of the way they interpreted
Nursi’s works and if so what are the correlates of these variations? What are some of the core activities of the Nur Movement and what role do they play in terms of the construction of reality, the self and the society? How was the movement mobilized against the secularist establishment in Turkey? Was there any change in the nature of these activities and mobilization strategies over time (from 1926 to 1960)?

The fifth chapter starts with the exploration of the role of the development or lack thereof of the civil society in the in Turkey in order to understand the dynamics of how the Nur Movement was structured and mobilized vis-à-vis the secularist establishment.

Chapter VI. In the last chapter, I discuss the implications of the issues covered in the previous chapters of this dissertation for the ongoing secularization as well as revivalist movement debates and suggestions for future venues of research in similar areas.
CHAPTER II
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SECULARIZATION DEBATES

Introduction

Changes in the production relations, meaning systems, moral standards and sociopolitical structures of the societies in Europe during and after the industrial revolution sparked interests in understanding and describing these transformations. Sociology, as a discipline, was born out of the attempts at exploring wide and deep reaching implications of such changes. Having noticed substantial differences of the newly emerging social system from the older, the founding fathers of this discipline sought to provide systematic accounts of what the contemporary societies were going through.

One of the prime questions the founding fathers of sociology wanted to answer was the changing role of religion in modern societies. Durkheim (1996), through the lenses of functionalism, looked at religion as a source of morality and social solidarity and, thusly, described it as something “eminently social”. In the context of social change, Durkheim (1975) discussed if and how the gap left by the withdrawal of religion would be filled in terms of forming new bases of morality and social cohesion in modern industrial societies. For him, modern societies were experiencing a process of institutional differentiation by which other social institutions such as education, healthcare and politics became increasingly independent from religion.
Thereby religion lost its social functions, which for Durkheim are the *raison d’être* of the presence of religion in the society. This, according to Durkheim, leads to the decline of religion altogether in modern industrial societies.

Functionalist descriptions of Durkheim have influenced academic studies, in a wide range of social scientific disciplines, which investigated the role or lack thereof of religion as a source of community building in traditional and modern societies. However, it was Weber’s ideas which, to a much greater extent, inspired sociological approaches to religion as a meaning system. Weber (2011) presented the Protestant work ethic as the driving force behind the rise of capitalism. Unlike other religious traditions which turned to sacramental magic as a road to salvation, Weber argued, Protestants saw mundane achievements as objective measures of salvation.

One of the most indicative of these objective criteria was economic success through profit maximization. In this sense, the Protestants’ motivation for worldly success was not to be able to have access to their worldly desires but to accumulate earnings as a sign of attaining salvation and the grace of God. Such efforts required efficient organization of means of production including formally free labor and technical utilization of scientific knowledge and thus establishing rationalized patterns of work ethic. These religious bases of worldly asceticism, for him, not only gave birth to capitalism but also laid the foundations of the rise of rationalization as one of the most powerful processes of social change in history.

Such a non-metaphysical theology of salvation had two major implications. The first is the practical rationalization of the organization of work and the second is the
theoretical rationalization as a result of the disenchantment of the world from magic and mystical worldviews (Carroll, 2011). While the first is about the rise of modern capitalism, the latter is an account of the decline of religion as a parallel process. In Weberian terms, disenchantment meant the progressive removal of the magical and mystical elements of religious thinking from societal structures and institutions by the growth of the idea that the environment can be manipulated directly by scientific knowledge and technical means. Religion (magic) sees the nature as something under the control of a transcendental power whose concessions and permissions are needed in order to benefit from it. With the rise of disenchantment, as Weber understood it, the idea of getting the consent from a third party is removed from the relationship between the nature and human beings (Germain, 1993), hence the inevitable decline of the social significance of religion.

Although Weber’s descriptions of religious thinking were based on somewhat romanticized portrayal of pre-modern societies, he indirectly acknowledged that the decline of the social standing of religion was related to the strengthening and unification of an alternative cosmology in modern times (Fenn, 1969). Nevertheless, he did not discuss if this alternative worldview was another form of enchantment or not. He saw religion as a construct of the mind or the society which creates an unrealistic imaginary vision of the world. Perhaps, this was the reason why he occasionally equated religion with magic and mystery. His account of rationalization and the rise of modernity, however, was not about an alternative form of the construction of reality. It was in a way the bare reality of the world as it was. Religion weaved a veil of
enchantment (mystery) over the face of the nature but the rise of rationality removed that veil to reveal the unbiased reality of the universe.

It is also interesting that Weber’s conception of the decline of religion was a kind of gradual process of self destruction. In other words, secularization was solely a result of the transformation and transition of the sacred into the secular and it was not about the expansion of the secular into the areas of life which were under the influence of the sacred. The Protestant work ethic institutionalized rationalization which eventually undermined the cosmology of religion as an unintended consequence. Therefore, the fall of religion was not a result of conscious mobilization of certain groups around ideologies and worldviews antithetical to religion (Weber, 1993 and 2011). In a way, the decline of religion was a natural and neutral outcome of the juxtaposition, or elective affinity, of certain historical, cultural and social forces.

**The Secularization Theory: The Same Old Story or the Same Old Question?**

Durkheimian perceptions of institutional differentiation and Weberian descriptions of disenchantment and rationalization constituted two major axes of debates among subsequent generation of social scientists regarding the role and place of religion in modern societies. Even though not all of them totally agreed with Durkheim and Weber, many later generation academicians from various social scientific disciplines shared similar visions about the fate of religion in modernizing societies. The ideas of these scholars were generally called the secularization theory which is occasionally referred to as the modernization theory. Although the assumptions of the
secularization theory were challenged later on, the theory dominated scholarly
discussions concerning the relationship between religion and modernity until 1980’s.

The basic argument of the secularization theorists is that there are ongoing
processes of decline (1) in the importance of religion for the operation of non-religious
institutions including the state, education and economy (Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002;
Dobbelare, 1981), (2) in the social standing of religious roles and institutions (Berger,
1967) and (3) in the extent to which people engage in religious beliefs and practices
parallel to the decline in the social standing of religious institutions (Bruce, 2002).
Mostly inspired by Weberian descriptions of the rise of modern rational and
bureaucratic societies, modernization and secularization theorists, (Wallace, 1966;
Lechner, 1991) generally dated the inception of these processes back to the
Reformation and they predicted a linear decline in the social standing of religion and in
the degree of individuals’ engagement with religious beliefs and practices along the
way of transition from traditional to modern societies.

Bryan R. Wilson was one of the eminent sociologists of religion whose ideas
contributed significantly to the secularization debate. Defining secularization as "a
process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lost social significance,"
Wilson focused on two major themes including (1) the explanation of the process of
secularization and (2) religious responses to it. Wilson based his arguments on the
assumptions that religion was "once great influence over societal institutions" and that
"religious values were the community values and religious institutions had dominance
over other societal institutions such as education, military, law and economics" (1969,
However, he contended, the dominance of religion started to decline with the rise of modern national societies in the West. Asserting that the major function of religion is the institutionalization of emotional gratifications, Wilson argued, parallel to Weber, that modern societies experienced a process of demystification, which increasingly diminished the role of the religion in providing emotional attempts in responding the challenges of the nature. Thusly, religious consciousness was dethroned by a more rational and empirical worldview. Religion, in return, responded, albeit unsuccessfully, to such challenges. Ecumenism was one of these responses.

Even though he changed his position later (Berger, 2001 and 2006), Peter Berger was among the prominent supporters of the secularization theory in mid-twentieth century. In his book Sacred Canopy, he discussed how religion functioned as a source of legitimization to social institutions “by putting them in a sacred and cosmic frame of reference” in traditional societies (Berger, 1967, p. 33). During these times, he said, the society as a whole used to “serve as a plausibility structure for a religious world.” However, with rise of modernity religion lost its monopoly over the society which started not to wholly serve as a plausibility structure for religion and traditional meaning systems. Consequently, religion fell into a “crisis of credibility,” which accelerated the decline of its monopoly over other social institutions (p. 127). This resulted in a decline in the social standing of religion and therefore in a decline in the extent individuals engage in religious beliefs and practices.

The scope of the application of the secularization theory has not been limited to the sociological studies of the role of religion in contemporary Western nations. As
observed by Volpi (2010) the secularization and modernization theories, heavily informed by Weberian approaches to religion blended with Orientalist perspectives, dominated social scientific studies of religion in the Muslim World as well. While studies of the West focused on describing how secularization emerged there, studies of the Muslim World, for the most parts of the twentieth century, largely focused on understanding the factors which prevented or delayed the development of secularity and modernity.

Niyazi Berkes (1964) was one of the pioneers who applied the secularization theory's conceptual tools to the social scientific study of secularization in Turkey. For him, secularization was a self-propelled linear universal process of social change spreading around the globe including the Muslim World. Even though the diversity of the Muslim World in terms of ethnic origins, historical backgrounds and geographical locations affects the scope, intensity and velocity of the expansion of secularization, this process can be observed in all of the predominantly Muslim societies.

As an introductory note to his book *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, Berkes (1964) makes a distinction between secularization as a process of social change and secularism as an ideology (doctrine). Although he thinks that these two are interrelated, he does not attribute secularization to secularism and or the secularists. Secularization, for Berkes, is a universal process unfolding because of factors which are outside the control of individuals. However, responses to secularization are not universal as reactions to problems arising from secularization vary greatly. These points indicate that Berkes does not attribute, at least at the analytical level, secularization to
human agency. Nonetheless, he sees human agency in responses (reactions) against the development of secularization. Such is a typical approach of the secularization theory to secularization and revivalist responses. Secularization develops independent of human agency but counter-movements against it are results of deliberate (re)actions trying to stop and reverse the expansion of secularization.

Another difference is the establishment of stronger associations between modernization and secularization in the Muslim World more so than it was done in the case of the West. That is to say the concepts of modernization and secularization are more often used interchangeably in the Muslim World.

Of course, there is an overlap between these concepts in English and in the way they have been used in the academia. My point is that the overlap has been much broader in the way these two concepts are used in the Muslim World and especially in Turkey. Indeed, the concepts of muasırlaşma, which literally means to become contemporary or to modernize in the Ottoman Turkish, and its more contemporary variant çağdaşlaşma refer both to modernization and secularization at the same time.

The title of Berkes’ book in Turkish and its English translation is just one example. The original title of the book which was published in 1964 was Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma. Only by looking at the title of this book an average reader would not be able to tell whether it is about modernization, secularization or a combination of both. When it was translated into English, the book was titled as *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*. Only recently, -to be precise, after the decline of the secularization theory-
degree of the separation between the concepts of modernization and secularization was broadened\(^1\) at the conceptual level in academic publications in Turkish.

Furthermore, difference in the application of the secularization theory or similar perspectives to the modern history of the Muslim World as compared to the West is that scholars were interested in the reason of why modernization and secularization was not fully developed in the first while they presented reasons of why it was successful in the latter. Writing in 1968, Weiker argued that the Ottomans faced the challenge of the inevitability of modernization. However, Ottoman modernization project was not fully successful for reasons such as the lack of commitment among the modernizing bureaucrats. By the time they reach the ranks of power, they were already ingrained in the traditional and religious Ottoman values. These bureaucrats were also wary of losing their status and power which could be threatened with broad based changes of modernization movement. Similar perspectives was shared by Ma’oz (1968) who argued that powerful provincial households in the periphery of the Empire resisted change with the fear of being deprived of their privileges.

Yet another distinction between the application of the secularization theory's perspectives to the studies of religion in the Muslim World and the Western World is the more adamant position of the theory in its prediction of the inevitable decline of religion in the West. For the reason that those who studied the history of modernization in the Muslim World from such perspectives were preoccupied with the reasons of the

\(^1\) Nişanyan etymological dictionary of Turkish language reports that the concept of secular (seküler) was popularized starting in 1990s. Accessed at http://www.nisanyansozluk.com on 11/30/2013.
failure of fuller development of modernization, they did not predict that religion will soon lose its social significance in these societies.

Although the assumptions of the secularization theory regarding the demise of religion in the West, particularly in the United States, were challenged by empirical findings and lost ground within the discipline of sociology especially since 1980's, several contemporary scholars (i.e., Lechner, 1991; and Bruce, 1992, 2002 and 2013) argued that the secularization theory's predictions of the decline of religion are still valid. Chaves (1994), for example, narrowed down the spectrum of the assertions of the theory by arguing that secularization does not necessarily refer to the decline of religion in general but to the “declining scope of religious authority.” In this sense, he argued, secularization is still pervasive.

Steve Bruce took a more radical position and attempted to prove the validity of the core assumptions of the secularization theory in his books *God is Dead* (2002) and *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (2013). Bruce, like the former secularization theorists, conceptualized secularization as a universal historical linear process. According to him, the Protestant Reformation constituted the nucleus of the modern secular societies by promoting rationality which is later manifested in the form of positivist sciences and eventually in the form of modern technology. Protestant Reformation and rationalized Protestant work ethic also gave birth to capitalism which brought about economic growth as well as social and structural differentiation. This facilitated the rise of social, cultural and more importantly religious diversity and the rise of secular states and liberal democracies. Finally, religious diversity gave rise to
relativism, compartmentalization and privatization of religion. Like Berger (1967) and Wilson (1969) and most of the secularization theorists, Bruce argued that the processes of privatization and compartmentalization of religion constituted one of the most important proofs of the decline of religion and its social standing.

In my understanding, articulations of the secularization theory were mostly characterized by idealism, progressivism, abstractionism, and ambiguity of conceptualizations. To start from the last, supporters of the secularization theory equated institutional differentiation with institutional autonomy. They asserted that boundaries between different societal institutions became more explicit in modern times. Education, economy, military, politics, religion and media emerged as distinct institutions with clearer definitions of their functions (Berger, 1967). Through these processes major societal institutions gained autonomy. Thence, the supporters of the theory predicted that religion will not be influential over other institutions anymore.

Such arguments could be somewhat agreeable when they imply that religion lost dominance over other societal institutions as a result of institutional differentiation within a certain period of time in history. However, secularization theorists underestimated the dominance of any other non-religious ideology and/or institution over others. For example, the ideology of secularism, as I discuss in further detail below, has been one of the most pervasive ideologies of modern times which by definition bears antithetical tendencies towards religion. Moreover, nation states emerged as the most powerful institutions in the modern world with their own agendas
and interests especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most of the nation states around
the world embraced secularism as one of their foundational principles.

Nation States are unitarian by nature and they consist of centrally governed and
regulated educational, economic, military and other institutions. That is how nation
states in most cases dominated and imposed their agendas upon other institutions. It
might be argued that religion, which was previously a more powerful institution over
others, lost much of its power but it still remained as a possible competitive ideological
force against the secularist character of nation states. This might explain why many
nation states around the world, with their secularist agendas, wanted to pushed religion
to the margins and to confine it to controllable boundaries. As Koenig (2005) observed,
most of the theorists of secularization overlooked the dominant role of nation states in
the expansion of secularization.

Secondly, proponents of the theory attributed secularization to abstract
sociological phenomena without reference to human agency, as argued by Smith
(2003). For them, processes of the rise of capitalism, industrialization, rationalization,
institutional differentiation and the rise of cultural diversity were the dynamos
generating the expansion of secularization (Berger, 1967; Wilson, 1969). Steve Bruce
(2002) provided a long list of factors which gave rise to secularization as an unintended
consequence including structural differentiation, individualism, socialization, economic
growth, science, technology and relativism without discussing the actual tangible
mechanisms by which they influence the society. In so doing, he, like the other
defenders of the secularization theory, left the question of agency unaddressed in his
abstractionist descriptions of secularization. He did not consider whether these processes were driven by the actions of conscious actors motivated by certain ideological positions, political and economic interests.

Presenting the expansion of capitalism as a reason for another sociological transformation without considering the interests of the capitalist conceals much of the real picture. Similarly, talking about the rise of institutional differentiation apart from the ones whose interests and agendas have influence over the operation of these institutions disguises an important component of what needs to be included in the study of pertinent sociological issues. Secularization of other societal institutions is no exception.

Almost all of the prominent supporters of the theory approached secularization from macro sociological perspectives but by way of abstractionism they avoided the inclusion of human agency and thus social movement dynamics into their conceptualizations of secularization. In my opinion, such an inadequacy is, among other things, related to the appropriation of modern progressivist ideology. In the eyes of these theorists, religion constructed its own version of reality and imposed it on the society at large. The rise of rationalization, industrialization and institutional differentiation ipso facto ignited the process of emancipation from religion. In Berger’s (1967) own words,

“[S]ecularization manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian churches of areas previously under their control and influence -as in the separation of church and state, or in the expropriation of church lands or in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority” (p. 107).
When he directly addresses the question of “what socio-cultural processes and groups serve as vehicles or mediators of secularization”, Berger says that it is “industrial society in itself that is secularizing” (1969, p. 109). For him, proximity to industrial production processes and its concordant lifestyle can be a determinant of secularization, too.

Niyazi Berkes (1964) applied similar perspectives to the study of secularization in the Muslim World when he defined secularization “as the differentiation of social values into the areas removed from the authority of religion, by which various sectors of social life are freed from the domination of sacred rules” (p. 7). The first areas freed from the domination of religion include science, technology and economy. Similar perspectives were supported by contemporary social scientists as well. Citing Adorno and Horkheimer, Zafirovski (2010) argued that;

>[A]utonomous secular culture, notably science and education, as the constitutive value and institution of modern Western democratic societies, including America, derives, first and foremost, from the Enlightenment, in conjunction with and continuation of the Renaissance, especially with respect to the autonomy of the arts, as well as classical Greek-Roman civilization. Conversely, there had been no such thing as independent, autonomous or free secular science, education, art, philosophy, and culture in general in relation to theology, religion, and church in the pre-Enlightenment. The pre-Enlightenment specifically incorporated the medieval Christian and other religiously overdetermined, especially Islamic, world in contrast and nihilistic opposition to its classical “pagan,” especially ancient Greek, civilization. The latter was characterized with relative scientific, educational, artistic, philosophical, and other cultural and other autonomy and creativity in relation to religion and politics. (p. 108)

In this sense, secularization was about progression from a (religiously) constructed (enchanted) world towards a world characterized only by the deconstruction of the religious worldview. It was not about the construction of an
alternative world. Such a discourse also implies that secularization is a transition from unfreedom to freedom and from abnormality to normality. By abnormality construction of an alternative paradigm is meant and by normality deconstruction of the abnormal is implied. In such an approach, religion is a construct but secularization is not. Perhaps, that is the reason why, Peter Berger (1967) explicitly defined secularization as the lack of religion. In a similar way, Wilson (1982) understood secularization as “the abandonment of mythical, poetic and artistic interpretation of nature and society in favor of matter-of-fact description”. Shiner (1967, p. 207-220) saw secularization as “the desacralization of the world”. Similarly, Loen (1967) defined secularization as the historical process of de-devinization of the world. For Collins (1998), it was the emancipation of intellectual production from the authority of the church.

However, none of these scholars defined religion as the lack of secularization or the secular. If secularization is the lack of something, it is not a construct, and if it is not a construct, there is no need to look for human agency behind it. If there is no human agency, studying secularization with regard to collective action (e.g., social movements) is irrelevant, if we were to follow the line of thought of the secularization theory.

As observed by Casanova (2011), there is another side of defining secularization as the residual category after the withdrawal of religion. Such descriptions, for him, perceive religion as the “superstructural religious addition and sees the secular as the natural objective universal substratum (p. 55-56).” When religion is an addition but secularization is not, there is no need to define what secularization is.
Therefore, it is only religion which has been defined by the secularization theory but substantive definitions of the secular has not been not elaborated. Agreeing with Casanova, I suggest that we need post- secularization theory elaborations of the religious and the secular. The secularization theory formulated its own understanding of the religious in line with its modernist and progressivist ideological position. Such perspectives were adopted and taken for granted by many other social scientists.

Another issue with the general doctrine of the secularization theory is that supporters of the theory dated the inception of secularization within the boundaries of modern times, the earliest of which is the Reformation (Weber, 2011; Wilson, 1982; Bruce, 2002). By limiting the scope of secularization to the modern times, they were able to attribute secularization solely to unprecedented factors. The rise of modernity best exemplified in the use of technology and science was something completely new and thus the roots of secularity were novel, too. It is not that secularism existed as an ideology or a (body of) movement(s) before modernity and gained momentum at a certain time in history, it rather was a byproduct (unintended consequence) of some other newly emerging sociological transformations the world, especially the west, has experienced in the last several centuries. Therefore, secularization, for the proponents of the theory like Bruce (2002), was not a result of intentional mobilization, which is an idea implicitly denying -or at least neglecting- human agency in the history of secularization.

I am aware that everything that is social has a beginning in history and that modern societies witnessed the birth of many things including various forms of social
movements. The issue here is that the theory established a causal connection between secularization and the abstract notion of modernity which in and of itself has no agency. These kind of abstractions are appropriations and constructions in our minds. We can use them to describe and transmit our observations in an efficient way but to attribute causal power to these notions without due account of human element is ambiguous and misleading. There is no modernity without modernizing forces and there is no modernizing force without human agency behind it. It is us who are objectifying modernity in our minds. As such, modernity does not have executive powers *per se*. Therefore, it is not logical to attribute the cause of something, in this case secularization, exclusively to modernization.

To better illustrate such equivocations, we shall consider the case of globalization which is a concept like modernization. Sociologists often use expressions like “globalization increased inequalities around the world.” Such statements are not problematic when they point to an association between globalization and other sociological phenomena such as increasing inequalities. However, they are questionable when they attribute causality to abstract sociological notions, in this case globalization, which are devoid of human agency. Put differently, we might say that there is an association between globalization and increasing inequalities and that in order to understand the reasons of why inequalities are on the rise, we need to look at the dynamics of globalization. This entails the investigation of the role of globalizing forces such as the multi-national corporations and supranational organizations like IMF
and the World Bank. All of these institutions and organizations are driven by the interests and ideologies of those who have control over them.

However, if we were to use the same language the secularization theorists did, for explaining the relationship between globalization and inequalities, we could say that neoliberalism, export oriented economic growth models, the erosion of national borders and the decline of welfare state policies are responsible for the current economic conditions around the world. Using this ambiguous language will be omitting the role of human agency in the expansion of globalization and the increase in inequalities. Welfare state policies and national borders did not decline coincidentally and export oriented developmental models did not emerge as an unintended consequence of some other sociological phenomena. Most of what we define as part of the factors leading to globalization including the ones listed above as examples and their consequences are results of deliberate actions on the side of globalizing forces. Likewise, it can be argued that there is an association between secularization and modernization and a better understanding of secularization requires the comprehension of the dynamics of modernity which also necessitates analyzing the role of modernizing forces. Nevertheless, we cannot establish a direct causal relationship between different aspects of modernization and secularization without engaging the issue of human agency.

An inconsistency in the articulations of the secularization theorists concerning these issues is that, on the one side, they (Weber, 2011; Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002), argue that modern times are characterized by rationalization which is about calculability, efficiency and planning but when it comes to the question of
secularization, they disregarded intentionality, planning and therefore human agency and simply attributed secularization to abstract notions. Rationalization, as it is described by the secularization and modernization theorists, is about increasing levels of conscious deliberations and subsequent choices on the side of human beings, individual or collective. In this respect, rationalization does not exist somewhere exclusively outside the minds of human beings although it has manifestations in the outer world. For example, rationally structured bureaucratic institutions, as we see them in the descriptions of Weber, are, among other things, materializations of the decisions made by the ones who decided to restructure or establish those institutions anew. Institutions, bureaucratic or not, might have unique characteristics compared to individuals and other social entities but they do not develop independent of human agency. Even when there is a conflict in the establishment and operation of an institution, human element is still present. Agreements, bargains, compromises as well as resistances in these conflicts must involve some form of decision making by human beings.

This is one of the reasons why this dissertation project asserts that the human element (agency) should be an important part of the discussions regarding secularization. And if we are studying the human element in connection with macro social processes, we need to look at the dynamics of collective action. This is the point where sociological study of social movements become relevant. As I outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, I propose that studies of secularization should look at secularization in the context of social movement dynamics.
Another dimension of attributing secularization to abstract phenomena and omitting human agency is the presentation of secularization as a natural universal linear process of social change, which is a position taken by most of the supporters of the secularization theory. If secularization is not a result of human agency, as it is implied by this theory, then it is irreversible because human agency cannot reverse something which is natural and not socially constructed. Once the modernization processes are unfolded, it will naturally bring about secularization. At this point, it will be impossible to reverse it. Perhaps that is the reason why the proponents of the theory were very assertive and confident about their predictions of the future of religion in modern societies.

In criticizing such aspects of the theory, I am not arguing in any way that there is no secularization or that secularization was reversed by certain groups. What I argue here is that there are significant problems in the ways the secularization theory conceptualized and historicized modernization, secularization and the role of religion in contemporary societies and that a better understanding of these issues requires critical review of some of the concepts and notions used by the supporters of this theory. I also argue that such inadequacies were not limited to the secularization theory alone. Even those who systematically criticized this theory’s assumptions, including the supporters of the rational choice theory, failed to sufficiently address these issues.

On the one hand, the secularization theorists predicted that various aspects of modernization such as rationalization, and the rise of science and technology will diminish the demand for religion and the rise of culturally diverse modern industrial
societies will strip religion off its functions and therefore religion will lose its social significance altogether. On the contrary, the supporters of the rational choice theory, which has been the major intellectual front against the former, contended that the rise of modern society will not eliminate the demand for religion and that certain religious institutions will thrive in pluralistic environments (Warner, 1993).

**The Rational Choice Theory: A Reductionist Fallacy?**

The rational choice theory was originally formulated in the discipline of Economics. The theory sees individuals as agents making cost and benefit calculation and thus maximizing their utility. Core assumptions of the rational choice theory have been borrowed by a group of social scientists to explain social behavior (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997; Satz and Ferejohn, 1994). Central to this theory’s assumptions is the idea that individuals make rational calculations of costs and benefits not only in their economic transactions but also in their social relations (Swedberg, 1990). Their participation in religion also involves costs and benefit calculations. If the benefits of being religious overweight the costs in the eyes of an individual, odds are higher that this individual will be religious.

Rodney Stark’s and his colleague William Sims Bainbridge’s interpretations of the theory for explaining participation in religious behavior played a significant role in the development of the rational choice theory within the sub-discipline of Sociology of Religion (Warner, 1993). According to Stark and Bainbridge (1996) “Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and avoid what they perceive to be costs” and because “some rewards are limited in supply some do not exist in the physical world” they turn
to compensators (p. 161). The difference between rewards and compensators is that rewards are the things wanted and the compensators are the proposals about gaining the rewards (in the future). Human beings always prefer rewards to compensators, but because there is the scarcity of rewards and because some rewards such as the desire for an eternal life cannot be attained here and now in this world, they will turn to compensators. Although it is not the only one, religion is a powerful source of compensators because it offers instructions of how such compensators can be obtained in the long run. Therefore, religion appeals to all, even to those who have power because everyone is deprived of an everlasting life in this world (Stark, 1997, p.7-8) which is one of the main reasons why religion survived the challenges of modern times and will survive in the future.

Proponents of the rational choice theory also asserts that the supply-side dynamics of products in a given market affects the nature of demand for these products. Multiplicity and availability of different variations of a product are likely to increase the demand for it. If individuals do not like one version they might like the other, hence the increase in demand for this product. A number of social scientists applied the rational choice theory's understanding of supply-and-demand relationships of economic markets to non-market realms (Becker, 1976; Friedman, 1996) including religion. These scholars (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987; Finke & Iannaccone, 1993) argued that availability of different religious products would increase the overall demand for religion. In other words, they claimed that pluralism is conducive to religion because

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2 Also see Stark (1997, p. 6-7) and Bainbridge (1997, p. 9).
multiplicity of religious movements, denominations and sects will cater to different demands of different groups of people. Religious organizations will compete with each other to produce the best religious products in order to attract more members in pluralist environments (Finke & Stark, 1988 and 1998; Iannaccone, 1991; Chavez & Cann, 1992; Hamberg & Peterson, 1994; Hall & Bold, 1998). Such a competition will yield higher numbers and better qualities of products available for the taste and demand of individuals (Finke, 1997, p.44-64). While religious organizations which fail to appeal to the demands of the market declined, the ones which are able to meet the demands in the religious marketplace and the ones which carve out their own market niches thrive. That is how and why, the theory claims, religion survived and will survive the challenges of modern times (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

In addition to trying to provide a theoretical account of why religion remained salient in contemporary societies, advocates of the rational choice theory presented statistical findings as contrary empirical evidences in order to disprove the assumptions of the secularization theory (Finke & Stark, 2002). Nevertheless, I don’t think that the rational choice theory adequately identified the weaknesses of the secularization theory in greater part because this theory was also afflicted by some of the deficiencies of the secularization theory. Articulations of the rational choice perspective, like the secularization theory, remained mostly at abstract theoretical levels and as Simpson (1990) justifiably argued, the theory heavily relied on deductive thinking. The potential of religion for providing compensators is a generalist assumption which could sound
plausible theoretically but it needs to be substantiated with evidence to see if this assumption holds true in practice in different contexts.

I don’t deny the rational choice theory's argument that religion can be a source of compensators but I don’t think this necessitates that individuals will turn to religion for compensator at all times. The theory could explain why certain groups of individuals in a given society are more religious simply by indicating with empirical evidence that those individuals chose to be religious for the compensators offered by religion. Such an evidence could be an explanation for an observed case but it does not necessitate a deterministic outcome for “the future of religion.” The best the supporters of the theory like Stark and Bainbridge could say, I contend, is that the fact that religion can provide compensators which cannot be provided by other things increases the likelihood of the survival of religion but it does not and cannot guarantee “the future of religion”.

We don’t need any data to show that not every individual is religious. Indeed, there are societies around the world especially in Western Europe where most people are reported not to be religious per se. It is not also difficult to say that nonreligious people, too, fail to have access to the rewards they wish for. However, not all of them turn to religion for compensators. This indicates that there is no such deterministic relationship between the need for compensators for the rewards missed and turning to religion. If not every individual is turning to religion for compensators, it is possible that a greater proportion and perhaps the entirity or at least the vast majority of a society could cease turning to religion in order to compensate the rewards they could
not obtain otherwise. Then, it is possible that religion could dissolve and disappear from the society entirely or become insignificant. This would be the conclusion if we were to carefully follow the deductive reasoning of the rational choice theory's hypotheses, of course when we fill in some of the gaps between the deductive axioms of the theory.

In an attempt to defend the secularization theory, Steve Bruce (1999) wrote a book against the counterarguments of the rational choice theory. Arguing that it is mostly the social and cultural environment which is forcing individuals to adapt certain religious beliefs and practices, he denied that cost and benefit calculations can be a part of religious preferences. Although it is contestable whether or not rational choice is involved in religious preferences, it would be simplistic to deny that socialization and other social forces are part of the processes of the transmission and expansion of religion. Even if we assume that rational calculations of costs and benefits are part of religious behavior, we still need to address the issue of how individuals will get to know what different religions has to offer. Not every individual categorically knows what religion supplies. As the theory’s arguments about the nature of pluralistic religious environments indicate, not every religion supplies the same products. There needs to be mechanisms by which individuals are introduced to and convinced about the value (truthfulness and reliability) of the “products” made available by religion(s), or as Bruce suggests, they must be socially and culturally forced to accept the teachings of religion. Therefore, contextual factors are part of the story either way.
The only macro level social factor upon which rational choice theorists agreed to be an external force with the potential of affecting the prospects of religion in a given society is the regulation of religious markets by governments (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Iannaccone, 1997, p. 25). If the government regulates the religious market, it will violate free-market dynamics and natural supply and demand relations which will subsequently inhibit the number and quality of religious goods available for potential demands. For the supporters of the theory, this is the primary reason why religion flourished in America but not in Europe (Stark, 1997, p.3-24). Monopoly of centralized religious organizations such as the Catholic Church prevented the flourishing of religion in Europe but diversity in a deregulated religious marketplace fostered the presence and growth of certain religious movements in the United States.

I think that establishing such a causal connection needs further inquiry and substantiation. Coexistence of two things do not necessarily indicate a deterministic causal relationship between them. Briefly put, coexistence of pluralism and religious vitality in the US and the presence of regulation (as opposed to plurality) but the lack of religious vitality in Europe does not indubitably point to the deterministic role of pluralism. There are two ways such deterministic claims can be challenged. Firstly, there might be other differences between the American and European societies which could help explain differences in the levels of religiosity in these places. As an example, it might be argued that socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic background of Europe especially in terms of the role religion and counter-religious forces played in these societies are significantly different from that of the United States.
which could explain the differences religiosity levels. A second argument could be that when the cases of only Europe and the United States is compared such an explanation might seem plausible but we should also test similar hypotheses by increasing the number of cases compared. For example, most of the governments in the Muslim World have been regulating religion—in some cases with a heavy hand—with a monopolistic approach (Ex: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey), but these societies have been considerably religious especially in terms of the number and proportion of people who practice religion. Proponents of the rational choice theory made universalistic claims about the nature of religion. Therefore, it should and can be tested in different contexts to see whether the assumptions of the theory hold true across the border. If the theory fails to explain differences when the number of comparative cases are increased, other social factors should be investigated, which is something the proponents of theory has barely done.

Sherkat (1997), who has been one of prominent supporters of the theory, admitted that the rational choice perspective underestimated the role of social forces in its explanations about how individuals become religious. In order to address such shortcomings of the theory, he offered an explanation of how social factors are part of the processes through which individuals become religious. For him, individual level religious choices are embedded in social relations and market offerings which disseminate information about religious products. There are three different ways social relations affect religious choices. The first is by sympathy and antipathy. Individuals’ choices might be influenced when they think that choosing a particular thing will make
those are closer to them happy. For example, a child might chose to be religious and follow their parents’ tradition in order to please them as a result of sympathy towards his/her parents. It is also possible that some children will turn away from religion in order to distance themselves from their parents and from older generations out of antipathy for them. The second is example-setting motivations. Some people chose to be religious in order to be a role model for others whom they want to be religious. In support of such claims, Sherkat cites a long list of studies which show that having children in their formative years increases religious affiliation, membership and participation. Thirdly and most importantly, social sanctions (i.e., rewards and punishments) play a significant role in individual’s engagement and participation in religion. For example, individuals might choose to be religious not because of the supernatural compensators but because of other “in process” benefits [quotation emphasis is original] such as friendship and confirmation of social legitimacy. On the other hand, failure of participation might lead to ridicule and exclusion from the group and thus it might produce the consequence or the cost of defection (Sherkat, p. 65-85).

These statements indicate that Sherkat recognizes the role of social sanctions. However, he argues that sanctions are not intrinsic to religious goods, they are only externalities. Therefore, he claims, sanctions can only affect (religious) choices and not preferences.

I see two major problems in these ideas of Sherkat. The first is that he looks at the role of social sanctions only from the religious participation side. That is to say, he only discusses the benefits of participation in religion and the costs of not participating
but he does not look at the issue from the social costs of participation and social
benefits of defection. Although it might sound as if these two are the same, they are not.
In the way Sherkat describes it, everything is at the hands of religion or religious
establishments as they somehow can determine the benefits of participation and the
costs of defection. However, outsiders might have control over the costs of religious
participation and the benefits of defection. For example, social forces antithetical to
religion might establish stigmas that religion is dogmatic, unintellectual, unmodern,
irrational and that it feeds conflict and violence might very well hold back individuals
from being involved in religious activities because being religious in environments
where such antithetical forces are influential will not be socially desirable. This means
that the costs and benefits of being religious as well as the costs and benefits of not
being religious (or being secular) might be socially constructed in different ways.

The success and failure of the forces in a society or community establishing
(increasing) these costs and benefits might very well determine the success and failure
of religion. Talking about the issue only from the benefits of participation and the costs
of defection ignores the role of social forces (groups, institutions, etc.) antithetical to
religion. Such a misconception gives the impression that the fate of religion is in its
own hands. If religion successfully tailors and markets the value of its products and
successfully appeals to the demands of potential customers, it will survive. Such
arguments of Sherkat are in line with the general perspective of the rational choice
theory.
The second problem I see in Sherkat’s arguments is that he looks at the effects of social sanctions but ignores other social factors and therefore easily contends that talking about social sanctions is not about something intrinsic to religion. Thus, he implies that social sanctions do not alter the intrinsic qualities of “religious goods.” That is why he says that sanctions can alter the choices individuals make but cannot change their preferences, which, as I understand it, means that social sanction do not affect individuals’ tendency to be religious but they might affect their choices of whether they will engage in particular religious practices or not.

Sherkat might be right when he argues that social sanctions are not intrinsic to religion, but his arguments are questionable when he implies that (other) social forces cannot alter intrinsic qualities of religion. I think that Sherkat would not deny that religious teachings (ideas, theologies, etc.) are intrinsic to religions. Religious ideas and theologies are in most cases the defining characteristics of religions given that there is no religion without religious teachings. Any social force which can challenge the teachings of religions would be diminishing the value of things that are intrinsic to religion and therefore they would pose existential challenges to it. Teachings of religions might be challenged in such ways that they lose credibility in their truth claims (e.g., existence of God and resurrection after death) and thus tendencies of being religious and incentives for religious commitment might be reduced dramatically.

In distinguishing religion from magic, Stark (1997, p. 12), another prominent Rational choice theory’s supporter, acknowledged that unlike magic, religions involve theologies which are meaning systems offering alternative truth claims. I think that it is
for this reason that those who engage in religion are called “believers” but those who engage in magic are not. This implies that “believing” (or having “faith”) in the reality of certain ideas is one of the defining characteristics of religions. If the belief in the truthfulness of these ideas are seriously challenged in the society, the capacity to which they yield religious commitment might decrease significantly.

Secularization theorists have argued that the rise of science undermined the teachings of religion in modern times (Loen, 1967; Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002). Indeed, Stark and Bainbridge, in their book *The Future of Religion* (1985), agreed that some of the teachings of religion can be challenged by science but they argued that science cannot provide the satisfaction about the existential issues related to the purpose of existence and the issue of death. Hence, religion, for them, will prevail in the future. Apparently, they confused two different things at this point. The idea that science cannot provide answers to these questions does not mean that ideologically laden interpretations of science (e.g., scientism, positivism, naturalism and materialism) cannot undermine the truth claims of religion and therefore weaken religion. In other words, the idea that science cannot substitute religion in terms of providing compensations does not mean that scientism cannot hurt the capacity to which religion can offer compensations by challenging its core teachings. I don’t think that we need to collect data to show that core teachings of major world religions such as the existence of an omnipotent God creating everything were seriously challenged by the positivist, determinist, and naturalist interpretations of science in contemporary societies.
Stark and Bainbridge also contend that only intellectual elites can live without religion and that scientific rationalism will not have massive triumph over supernaturalism (religion). There are several problematic sides of this argument. First of all, secularist ideologies and worldviews are not confined to the upper classes or the educated elite. Secondly, it is not only the elite who are informed about counter-religious interpretations of science. One of the characteristics of modern societies is the growth and expansion of formal education and the mass media. It wouldn’t be unrealistic to say that the vast majority of individuals in contemporary societies are informed about scientist arguments against the core teachings of religion through the formal education they receive and through their exposure to such arguments in the mass media. Third, like the secularization theorists and other rational choice theory's proponents, Stark and Bainbridge overlooked social movement dynamics in the processes of secularization and thus they did not pay much attention to the collective mobilization of the relationship between religion and secularism.

Stark and Bainbridge acknowledged and to a certain extent studied social movement dynamics of religion especially when they discuss which religious groups prevail and which do not. However, they did not perceive secularism as an alternative movement against religion which might affect the prospects of religion’s survival. In my opinion, this could be related to two misconceptions. The first is looking at secularization as a result of abstract processes of modernization, which, as I described above, was also done by the supporters of the secularization theory. Another reason might be that in contrast to the presence and multiplicity of religious communities,
movements, denomination and sects, there are not many formally organized and institutionalized explicitly secularist movements which disguises and makes it more difficult to be identified as a movement with its own agendas.

Based on the idea that the expansion and withdrawal of both religion and secularization just like any other sociological phenomena are not self-propelled processes of social change, I argue that the survival of religion is related to the success and failure of the mobilization of religious and secular(ist) movements vis-à-vis each other. In The Future of Religion, Stark and Bainbridge did not explain how they define the elites but it seems like they underestimated the possibility that the secularists including the elite will be (or they are) mobilized (as a social movement) towards the goal of expanding secularization and marginalizing religion in the society. Therefore, I suggest, we have to account for such contextual factors before putting forth generalist statements about the fate of any religion. Because these contextual factors will vary from society to society and from religion to religion, we cannot rely only on micro level theorizations and deductive axioms of why individuals chose religion and if and how religion has and will survive the challenges it has faced in modern times.

Going back to Steve Bruce’s (1999) point, it is rather naive (interesting) that he accepts the idea of religion being socially and culturally forced to people but he does not consider the possibility of secularity being socially constructed and forced by similar forces as well. As I have discussed above, these kind of inconsistencies are related to the ways secularization theory and secular(ist) social scientists defined religion and secularity. That is why, I argue, we need broader and more substantive
definitions of both secularity and religion *vis-à-vis* each other and reflexive discussions of the interactions between the two. It would be meaningless to discuss whether or not religion is declining without having exclusive definitions of both sides. The same is also true for understanding the interactions between the religious and the secular. As I outlined in the introduction section of this dissertation, these definitions should encompass differences in ontology, moral philosophy and political philosophy which correspondingly deal with the construction of reality, the self and the society. This would also help us explore various dimensions of religiosity and secularity at the same time.

To sum up, I argue that both the secularization and the rational choice theories fell short of providing (1) theoretically and methodologically well-grounded articulations (definitions) of religion and secularity and (2) systematic accounts of the role of social forces (collective action) primarily including social movement dynamics in their sociological studies of secularization.

Although, I criticize the secularization and the rational choice theories for their methodological and theoretical shortcomings, I think that these two theories’ theoretical tools could still be used to study religion and secularization in contemporary societies in addition to other necessary conceptual and theoretical tools. I will utilize the conceptual tools of the secularization theory especially when I explore macro level dynamics of the development of secularization and the conceptual tools of the rational choice theory especially I will also revisit the secularization theory's theoretical tools when I do the contextual analysis of this movement’s articulations of the challenges
posed by secularization. Similarly, I will consider some of the assumptions of the rational choice theory perspective in my textual analysis of the discourse of the Nur Movement when it tries to convince its members and audience for choosing religion over secularity.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to make the case for the sociological reconsideration of the conceptualizations of secularization and religiosity. In so doing, I don’t imply that sociologists should formulate their understanding of religion and secularity independent of how religious and secular groups perceive their respective positions. I rather argue that it would be constructive to explore how religious groups define religion as opposed to secularity and (in comparison to) how the secularists describe secularity as opposed to religion. Much of what has been put forward as definitions of religion and secularity in the context of these debates came from the secularization theory perspective which in general adopted the secularist modernist worldview. Although proponents of the rational choice theory refuted the assumptions of the secularization theory, they have not contributed significantly to the sociological conceptualizations of religion and secularity.

**Alternative Perspectives: Human Agency and Secularization as a Socially Constructed Meaning System**

Sociological perspectives regarding secularization debates are not limited to the rational choice and the secularization theories despite the fact that these two theories occupied a central place in the debates concerning the role and place of religion in modern times and its prospects in the future. I will not attempt to review the entire
literature outside these theories here. However, I will draw attention to two perspectives presented by sociologist Christian Smith and social philosopher Charles Taylor whose sociological ideas offer insights to the issues I raised in this and in the introduction chapter.

Two of the major departure points of this dissertation project are that (1) secularization should be studied with reference to human agency and collective action, in other words, with regard to social movement dynamics and (2) that we need substantive definitions of secularity and religion which inquire into the ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical dimensions of the two sides (secular and religious). Christian Smith offered novel perspectives about the first of these departure points while Charles Taylor presented noteworthy ideas about the second.

Christian Smith edited a volume titled The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life (2003) in which he criticized sociological approaches which ignored human element in the expansion of secularization contending that such perspectives attributed secularization to agentless abstract notions such as modernity. In order to draw attention to social movement dynamics, he conceptualized the augmentation of secularization in the United States especially towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first several decades of the twentieth century to a social revolution led by certain groups of like-minded intellectuals. For him, these intellectuals were mobilized around the common goal of overthrowing the mainline Protestant establishment. In Smith’s (2003), own words:

[This] rebel insurgency consisted of waves of networks of activists who were largely skeptical, freethinking, agnostic, atheist, or theologically liberal; who
were well educated and socially located mainly in knowledge-production occupations; and who generally espoused materialism, naturalism, positivism, and the privatization or extinction of religion. They were motivated by a complex mix of antipathy toward the Protestant establishment's exclusivity and perceived outdated-ness; by their own quasi-religious visions of secular progress, prosperity, and higher civilization; and often by the material gain that secularization promised them. (p.1)

Even though Smith’s main argument in the book he edited and in the excerpt I quoted above is to repudiate descriptions of secularization as a byproduct of modernization and to highlight the role of human agency (social movements) in such processes, his descriptions implied the idea that secularization was about the establishment and the triumph of alternative ontological and moral philosophical worldviews against a religious one. Ontology of this worldview was shaped by materialism, naturalism and positivism and its moral philosophy was characterized by the secularist conception of the idea of progress and development as a means for the establishment of a higher human civilization which would promise material gains to its adherents and maximize their happiness in this world.

Although descriptions about the ontological and moral philosophical sides of secularism are obscurely traceable in Smith’s analysis, he did not explicitly emphasize philosophical differences between religion and secularism. Instead, he compared secularist perspectives to a quasi-religious ideology. In a way, he suggested that secularist worldview is another religious (or religion-like) perspective. However, it would be more theoretically informed if he more elaborately compared these two alternative worldviews along the lines of their philosophical differences. To say that these secularist attitudes are quasi-religious values further equivocates the issue
because such a statement still begs a comprehensive definition of what religion is. It would be more informative if he compared (identified) religious and secular worldviews according to common parameters of comparison instead of vaguely suggesting that they are similar things. They might be similar in terms of their functions in that they both serve as (alternative) worldviews but in essence they should be differentiated. Otherwise, we would not be able to conceive religion and secularity as different (opposing) categories.

To reiterate, Smith challenged the secularization theory for being limited to the superficial descriptions of secularization processes and for not expounding actual mechanisms by which secularization was promulgated. Yet, he, too, left substantial definitions of secularization and religion unaddressed.

It might be argued that it is methodologically legitimate to omit one aspect of this topic and to focus only on the other, in this case to the social movement dynamics of secularization. I agree with this and I fully appreciate these remarkable perspectives offered by Smith and his colleagues in this volume. I also hope that this work will help reorient studies of secularization to a direction which is more reflective in terms of understanding the human element aspects of such issues. However, when our analysis is confined only to the question of human agency (social movement dynamics) and authority over institutions, our conceptions of secularization will be limited only to the study of secularization at the organizational and institutional levels. Perhaps, that is the reason why all of the contributors of the volume edited by Smith focused on the role of directly and indirectly controlling -and in some cases marginalizing- institutions such as
public education (Beyerlein, 2003; Thomas, Peck, & De Haan, 2003), publication censorship (Kemeny, 2003), the legal system (Sikkink, 2003), journalism (Flory, 2003), science and medicine (Evans, 2003; Garrautte, 2003; Meador, 2003).

When Smith says that the secular elites “were well educated and socially located mainly in knowledge-production occupations” he acknowledges that secularization is, beside other things, about meaning production. Institutions such as schools, as we see it in the descriptions of Smith and the other contributors of this volume, are among the commanding heights of knowledge production but, in my understanding, it is ultimately the individuals who will consciously or unconsciously interpret the knowledge produced in these institutions. Controlling public schools, the publication industry and journalism is about giving new directions to the education and information of the masses which means that institutional secularization has implications in the reorientation of individuals towards goals imagined by the secularist elite. Therefore, we need to understand if and how the self was socially constructed through the secularist ideology. And as I argued in the introduction chapter, deciphering the codes of social construction of the self (moral philosophy) of any ideology entails elucidation of the ontological foundations of this worldview. That is why we also need to understand how the secularist movement socially constructed its own understanding of reality. A thorough understanding of these two aspects of secularization requires systematic analysis of the discourse of the secularists which is missing in the work of Smith and his colleagues.
This weakness, as I contended above, is related to and concomitant with the lack of a comprehensive definition of secularity vis-à-vis religion. The entire volume which includes more than 150 pages written directly by Smith hardly includes any discussion regarding the question of what Smith and the other contributors understand from secularization. The only place where Smith addresses these issues is when he briefly mentions that he conceptualized secularization, following Chavez’s (1994) and Dobbelaeere’s (1981 and 2002) descriptions, as declining authority of religion over other societal institutions.

When sociologists who did not adhere to the presuppositions of the secularization theory in the West, especially those who studied the case of the United States, saw that church attendance and membership rates in religious organizations were not declining, some of them completely denied secularization (i.e., gradual withdrawal or trivialization of religion) (Martin, 1965; Hadden, 1987; Hout & Greeley, 1987; Finke, 1992; Stark & Iannaconne, 1992; Stark, 1999) and some partially accepted it (Chavez, 1994; Dobbelaeere, 1981; Lechner, 1991). The second group mostly favored the idea that religion lost its power over the operation of other social institutions but it was not reflected in the secularization of the self. Smith (2003) joined the second group and focused solely on the secularization of institutions.

I argue that persistent membership and attendance rates and even higher levels of direct religious participation do not necessarily negate the existence of secularization at the individual level. It is conceivable that individuals can knowingly or unknowingly appropriate certain secularist ideals while continuing to be religiously active. For
example, an individual might follow a religious ontology to make sense of his/her existence and that of the universe but at the same time accord to a secularist moral philosophy. It would not be easy to contest whether this individual is secularist or religious. Perhaps, we might need a theoretically guided multidimensional understanding of individual level religiosity and secularity in order to better address these issues. Therefore, it is not an easy task to focus only on institutional secularization—as it is done by Smith (2003)—and neglect the dynamics of social construction of the self simply because numbers indicate that religious participation is not declining.

Notwithstanding such weaknesses, I believe that Smith’s work is a groundbreaking milestone in the discipline of sociology in terms of studying the role of human agency (and social movements) in secularization. An additional strength of this volume is approaching these issues also from the movement-countermovement dynamics. While the volume was dedicated primarily to the exploration of the mobilization of the secularist movement, at least one article (Evans, 2003) concentrated on the (unsuccessful) countermovement of re-sacralization of medicine and science after 1960’s in the United States. Being aware of its shortcomings, I will incorporate the strengths of Smith’s approach to the general framework of this dissertation project, especially when I study the social movement dynamics of secularization.

Another approach I will incorporate into the ways in which I conceptualize secularization for the purposes of this dissertation will be the perspectives offered by social-philosopher Charles Taylor who has written extensively about the philosophical
underpinnings of the rise of modern societies. Providing a critique of the widespread approaches to secularization in social sciences, he articulated a meticulously detailed account of what he understood from the emergence and succession of secularity in modern times.

Taylor identified two main approaches to secularization. The first, for him, sees secularization as a result of the withdrawal of religion from the public space to private realms which is what the secularization theorists called ‘the privatization of religion’.

The second type understood secularization as the decline of belief in God and a consequential downturn in the degrees to which individuals engage in religious practices. Taylor suggests a third way which, for him, better encapsulates the conditions of secularity in contemporary societies. He summarized his approach in the beginning of his book *A Secular Age* (2007).

 [...] The change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one’s faith. There will be people who feel bound to give it up, even though they mourn its loss. This has been a recognizable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century. There will be many others to whom faith never even seems an eligible possibility. There are certainly millions today of whom this is true. (p. 3)

In this approach, Taylor does not see secularization as the withdrawal or the decline of religion. He rather sees it as the conditions in which religion is an alternative option among others. In traditional societies, belief in God was not challenged and it
was unproblematic. In modern societies, however, religion does not enjoy such levels of comfort as there are other alternatives. The real challenge of such conditions, for Taylor, is not about other alternatives directly undermining (challenging) religious belief but it is the mere presence of these alternative options which makes it more difficult to sustain a particular faith.

That is why, he suggested, the focus of studies of secularization should be shifted to the conditions of belief, experience and search. In so doing, he criticized approaches which see secularization as a result of science weakening religion and forcing it to abandon spheres of life hence the unbiased, objective, rational and realistic reading of life as it is and as it has been. Taylor (2003) called such approaches as “subtraction [theories]” and argued that they failed to provide equitable accounts of secularization.

I’m not satisfied with this explanation of secularism 2: science refutes and hence crowds out religious belief. I’m dissatisfied on two, related levels. First, I don’t see the cogency of the supposed arguments from, say, the findings of Darwin to the alleged refutations of religion. And secondly, partly for this reason, I don’t see this as an adequate explanation for why in fact people abandoned their faith, even when they themselves articulate what happened in such terms as “Darwin refuted the Bible”, as allegedly said by a Harrow schoolboy in the 1890s. Of course bad arguments can figure as crucial in perfectly good psychological or historical explanations. But bad arguments like this, which leave out so many viable possibilities between fundamentalism and atheism, cry out for some account why these other roads were not travelled. (p. 4)

It seems that Taylor’s dismissal of the possibility of science being able to challenge religious faith is only based on his own opinions and convictions. The fact that he does not think certain scientific arguments cannot refute religion does not necessarily indicate that the same thing holds true for others. As a philosopher, such
arguments might not convince Taylor but others might be easily convinced or at least perplexed. Personal rejections of examples of individuals—such as the extreme Harrow schoolboy example he mentions—thinking that science refutes religion does not offer a realistic contribution to the social scientific studies of these issues. It would be more meaningful to systematically study how these things play out in the society. We can only make inferences about our own lives based on our own philosophical perspectives.

Another reason why Taylor dismisses conceptualizations of secularization as a consequence of the decline in religious belief due to the challenges from science is that he does not think that the definition of religion should go beyond belief in the transcendent and that it should primarily involve conceptions of human good. He argues that,

Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: What constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for? (Taylor, 2007, p. 16)

Taylor says that answers given to these questions can be traceable in philosophical theories, moral codes and in religious and non-religious practices. These codes and practices are nourished in the society and they offer individuals a moral map of how they should lead their lives. It is about the contents and the direction of these moral maps that distinguishes religion from secularity. Human flourishing, Taylor (2007) contends, is the ultimate goal (human good) for non-religious (secular) worldviews but for the world religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism, the ultimate goal for the actions of human beings goes beyond human flourishing. Even though there are doctrinal differences between these religions, they are similar in the sense that
they call the believers to “break with the goals of flourishing in their own case (p. 17).”

He cautions that religions see human flourishing as “good,” too, but they don’t see it as the ultimate goal.

For the first time in history, he says, a “purely self-sufficient humanist” conception of human good which does not go beyond human flourishing became available as a widely available option in modern societies which was not the case in ancient societies. Only a small minority (elite) followed this exclusive humanism in pre-modern times. However, the emergence of the modern paradigm is not about the dominance of the exclusive humanism but about the condition in which there is conflict between a religious moral philosophy which sees human fullness “outside of or beyond human life” and a wide variety of exclusively humanist moral philosophy which places human fullness “within human life” (Taylor, 2007, p. 15).

In this account, the secular age is characterized by the conflict of alternative (religious vs exclusive humanist) moral philosophies. In the two major books (A Secular Age and Sources of the Self) he wrote, Taylor has intricately various aspects of the non-religious moral philosophy of modern times. Nonetheless, he did not investigate the responses of the other (religious) side of the conflict. Moreover, his discussions fell short of articulating the role of science and scientism in the expansion of secularization although Taylor offered a meticulous analysis of the moral philosophical backgrounds of secularization. He built a connection between “the ontology of human beings” and “moral philosophy” and thus was able to easily leave the relevance of what he called “science beats religion” arguments out of the equation.
When a connection is built only between the ontology of human beings and moral reaction, the issue is presented in a way that science, with all of its ideological derivatives such as positivism, materialism and determinism, is excluded from the equation. Because ontology of human beings seems to be more open to subjective articulation and not so much to systematic (scientific) investigation. Therefore, the ontology of human beings is not within the reach of scientific discourse, which is what seems to be the underlying assumption of Taylor.

However, things look different when an additional and broader form of ontology is added to the equation which is the ontology of the cosmos. I argue that the ontology of human beings drives from or at least are related to the ontology of the cosmos and everything therein. Science might seem to be irrelevant when a connection is built only between the ontology of human beings and moral reaction. However, when the ontology of the cosmos is added to the equation as a preceding and overarching determinant, science with all of its ideological uses and implications becomes situated at the heart of the matter because science is a form of investigating the principles that are observed in the cosmos.

Simply put, a line of connection can be drawn from the ontology of cosmos to the ontology of human beings and a subsequent line of relationship can be established from the ontology of human beings to the moral philosophy. If ideologically laden interpretations of science can confront a particular ontology of the cosmos, it bears the potential to challenge the ontology of human beings which drives out of this particular broader ontological position as well. It is not difficult to say that religion and science,
as it is generally practiced and presented in modern societies, are not coming from the same ontology of the cosmos. Then, it is possible that challenges posed by scientific (positivist, determinist) ontological contentions to religious ontology might have implications at the moral philosophical level, too.

The issue here is also about the question of whether construction of the self is related to the construction of reality. Ontology of the cosmos deals with the construction of reality but the ontology of human beings is mostly about the construction of the self. Taylor puts the analysis of construction of the self at the center of his analyses of the rise of modern societies. That is why his first major work which was dedicated to the investigation of the philosophical underpinnings of secularization was titled as “Sources of the Self.”

I argue that the investigation of the philosophical roots and the sociological implications of the construction of reality is of equal importance not only for a theoretically informed understanding of other philosophical aspects of secularization but also for the systematic study of religious responses to it. Even when the philosophical question of whether there is a relationship between the ontology of the cosmos (construction of reality) and the ontology of human beings (construction of the self) and how science/scientism plays role in this relationship is contested, the sociological question of if and how secularist and religious movements produce discourses based on their perception of science remains as a legitimate sociological question for further inquiry. Such a question constitutes one of the core lines of investigation for this dissertation.
It is also important to note that the addition of the ontology of the cosmos to the
equation does not depreciate the importance of the ontology of human beings and its
implications for the development - and for the analysis - of religious and secular moral
philosophies, especially for the purpose of this research. As it has been stated several
times earlier, the analysis of the philosophical foundations of how the secularist and
religious movements perceived and wanted to construct the self is among this
dissertation’s main purposes. Socio-philosophical approach to such a question entails
paying attention to the construction of the ontology of human beings. As it is (will be)
discussed in the fifth chapter, the Risale-i Nur collection is abundant with textual
discourse dealing with the ontology of human beings. I will analyze these texts with
regard to the response of the Nur Movement to secularization.

Being aware of the shortcomings of the two perspectives I presented above, a
combination of approaches presented by Taylor (1992 and 2007) and Smith (2003) will
constitute the framework of how I conceptualize secularization for the purpose of this
dissertation. Smith, unlike other secularization theorists, emphasized the role of human
agency and collective action in the growth and expansion of secularization. Focal point
of Smith’s analysis was the exploration of how the secularist movement was mobilized
towards controlling social institutions of critical value for the production and
distribution of knowledge in the American society. This dissertation project will focus
on the role of human element (social movements), too. However, its analyses of the
secularist movement and religious responses against the mobilization of this movement
will not be limited to the study of institutions only. Folling and broadening the
approach of Taylor, this study will also inquire into the philosophical aspects of secularization. In so doing, it will explore the question of how the secularist and religious movements imagined and were mobilized around their respective ideas and methodologies for the construction of reality and the self, and the society which is to say that this dissertation will investigate ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical aspects of secularity vis-à-vis religion.

Smith used a macro level approach which probes into the politics of the encounters between the secularist and religious movements. Taylor, however, offered a micro level perspective for the study of the fundamentals of secularity. Given the disciplines these two scholars are coming from, it is not surprising that Smith’s approach is more sociological and Taylor’s is more philosophical. Therefore, this study blends a combination of micro and macro level approaches as well as an amalgamation of sociological and philosophical perspectives in its approach to the study of the development of secularization in the modern history of Turkey and in its study of the response of the Nur movement to these processes. The third chapter which is dedicated for the discussions of historical backgrounds of secularization in the Muslim world will employ micro and macro level sociological analyses of the development of secularism as an ideology and secularization as a process of social change.

The first part of the fourth chapter where I will analyze Said Nursi’s understanding of religious revival before the establishment of the Turkish Republic will also be weighted towards a macro (institutional) level sociological investigation. I will, among other things, discuss sociological implications of Nursi’s plans of establishing a
university with the promotion of the Ottoman sultanate and his ideas regarding İttihat-ı İslâm (pan-Islamism) in this chapter. However, the rest of the fourth chapter will largely be concentrating on the issues pertaining to the philosophical underpinnings of the construction of reality and the self in the Risale-i Nur collection and in the letters exchanged by Nursi and his students. Hence the rest of the fourth chapter will mainly, but not exclusively, be a micro level discourse analysis. Sociological analysis of the discourse and mobilization of the Nur Movement against the secularist establishment explores the macro level dynamics of this movement in the fifth chapter.

I believe that this study would be a meaningful contribution to the academic studies of secularization and religious movements not only in the Middle East but also in the other parts of the world. However, it might be argued that analyses of the Nur Movement in the context of secularization would only be relevant to the studies of religious movements and secularization in the Muslim World because every civilization has its unique history. That is why such a studies contribution to the studies secularization in the west would be minimal because Western civilization has its own unique history and sociological dynamics.

I do not agree with the contentions that the Western European secularization is totally unique to the Christian world in Europe (Casanova, 2011). It is obvious that every society and every civilization has its own unique history when the details are taken into consideration. However, it is not difficult to say that different societies also experience similar, if not exactly the same, patterns of change. Nation states were born in Europe but it is almost impossible to find a country in the contemporary world which
is not a nation state. Although there are variations in the ways these nation states were established and in the ways they have been operating, they share certain characteristics across different civilizations and continents (Opello & Rosow, 2005). Widespread formalization of education and the development of universities, as we know it today, were first established in Europe but they are everywhere in today’s world including the remote parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Frankema, 2011). The structure of the (scientific) language used in academic circles around the world is a sign of similarity across the border as well. The idea of development through economic growth has a very recent beginning in the entire human history and its roots are in Europe but with the exception of a few (like Bhutan) all of the nations around the world have embraced the idea. True, there have been different developmental models such as capitalism, socialism and import substitution industrialization but the idea of national development does not differ much.

Similarly, secularization, as we understand it today, has a lot to do with the European history and its Christian past. Nevertheless, secularism together with other heavily Western originated ideologies (e.g., developmentalism, progressivism and scientism) were adopted, albeit in different ways, by a large number of non-European, non-Christian societies around the world. Variations in the ways different nations understood and adopted, or were compelled to adopt, secularism and secularity does not negate the idea that secularization around the world has some unifying characteristics. I argue that these similarities are more pronounced when philosophical foundations of the religious and the secular(ist) are analytically compared.
When I agree that secularization as it has generally been conceptualized has its origins in the European history, I also admit that in depth studies of secularization should take the European history into consideration which is why this dissertation project pays a great deal of attention to the development and discussions of secularization in the West as well. However, this is neither to mean that studies of secularization should be limited to the geographical boundaries of the Western world nor to say that studies of secularization outside Europe or the United States can only help understand the dynamics of secularization outside the West. Therefore, I argue that studying the response of the Nur Movement to secularization would significantly contribute to the studies religion not only in the Muslim World and but also around the globe. As I discuss in the next chapter of this dissertation, since the 19th century most of the intellectual debates in Europe including the role of religion and science in the society were simultaneously, in some cases subsequently, taking place in certain parts of the Muslim world including the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, Iran and India (Pakistan). Although these societies were predominantly Muslim, challenges posed by secularization to religion in these places were very similar to the ones faced by Christianity in Europe.

I agree with Talal Asad (2003) when he contended that “any social scientific discipline which aims to understand religion must also try to understand its other (secular) (p. 22)”. I argue that the opposite is true as well. Understanding of the secular is contingent on the understanding of its other, religion. As Chaves (2004) suggested, the way religion is perceived determines the way secularization is studied. Casanova
(2011), too, have argued that religion and secularity are always mutually constructed. Understanding of one requires the study of the other at the same time. He also contended that such reflexive approaches have not been adequately developed yet.

One of the weaknesses of studies of religion in social scientific disciplines is the lack of comprehensive studies of how religious groups define religion and secularity as their other as opposed to how secularist groups’ definitions. In general sociologist, like other social scientists, relied heavily on their own inferences of what religion and secularization are in greater part because not many religious and secularist groups provide explicit and articulate definitions and comparisons of religion and secularity. As I argued throughout this dissertation such conceptions were also inadequate in terms of systematically conceptualizing and analyzing philosophical foundations how these two alternative worldviews imagined and (if they did so) constructed reality, the self and the society.

One of the ways of abridging such inadequacies, I believe, is directly studying religion and secularization in the context of movement-countermovement relations and by systematically analyzing their perceptions of themselves and their others in order to better understand their conceptions of religion and secularity. I think that studying revivalist movements would be a good starting point for such an endeavor. By definition, revivalist movements are movements against challenges faced by religion. Especially in the contemporary context, the concept of revivalist movements refers to religious movements formed and mobilized around different ideas of responding to the challenges posed by modernization and secularization. Doing so requires the existence
of some sort of implicit or explicit understanding of what religion is and what modernization and secularization are on the side of the revivalist movements. In the absence of explicit references discourses, practices and mobilization strategies of revivalist movements can and should be analyzed for a better understanding of the dialectical relationships between religiosity and secularism.

As it has been observed by many (e.g., Davison, 1998; Yavuz & Esposito, 2003; Kuru, 2009; Baran, 2010) one of the battlegrounds of secularist and religious social forces in modern times has been Turkey which was established as a secularist nation state after the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Secularization processes in the Muslim World including the territories controlled by the Ottomans started before the decline of the Empire but since the inception of the new Turkish Republic in 1923, the divide between the secular and religious forces started to become more visible as the newly established Turkish nation state continued introducing top down secularist reforms in a wide range of areas. Similar trends of secularization emerged in other parts of the Muslim World including Iran and Egypt in the twentieth century. At the same time, socially organized responses to secularization started to be established in these societies in the form of revivalist religious movements.

One of the earliest socially organized responses to secularization in Turkey and in the Muslim World was the revivalist movement established by Said Nursi who wrote extensively, among other things, about the underpinnings of the challenges posed by what he broadly called “the [atheistic] philosophy”. The Nur Movement, which has been one of the largest and oldest revivalist movements, and its discourse offer a rare
opportunity for the comparative study of religion and secularization. Unlike the majority of other revivalist movements, this movement was organized around a body of textual discourse (Risale-i Nur) which includes explicit articulations of the differences between religious and secularist worldviews pertaining to the philosophical foundations of the construction of reality, the self and the society. However, social scientific studies of religion in the context of secularization have been biased towards politically oriented religious groups especially in the Muslim World. Sayed Qutb’s and to a lesser degree Maulana Mawdudi’s discourses, for example, has been given disproportionate attention in the academia because of their relatively heavier political tones. However, ideas presented by less politicized revivalist thinkers and the movements they established have been understudied even though some of these movements have been considerably influential in the societies they existed. Said Nursi, produced a body of intellectual discourse which included elaborate comparisons of religion and what he called philosophy. Although his analysis of philosophy is not limited to modern times, challenges posed against religion in modern times by scientific paradigms such of naturalism, determinism, materialism and humanism occupied a substantial part of his analyses.

Ali Rahnama edited a volume titled “Pioneers of Islamic Revival”(2006) in which scholars of Islamic revival described biographies, ideas and activisms of Muslim revivalists including Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani (1839-1897 / Afghanistan - Iran), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905 / Egypt), Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989 / Iran), Abul A’la Maududi (1903-1979 / India-Pakistan), Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949 / Egypt),
Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966 / Egypt), Musa al-Sadr (1928-1978 / Iran-Lebanon), Ali Shariati (1933-1977 / Iran) and Muhammed Baqer as-Sadr (1935-1980 / Iraq). This list is quite comprehensive in the sense that it covers revivalists from the Sunni and Shiite parts of the Muslim World, from North Africa to Southeast Asia and to Middle East, from before the establishment of nation states in the Muslim World (Ex: Afghani and Abduh) and after (Ex: All others in the list), from the politically inclined (Ex: Khomeini) to philosophically inclined (Ex: Ali Shariati) and from the major countries in the Muslim World such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. Despite the fact that Said Nursi (1876-1960) was active before and after the formation of the nation states, and that he formed one of the largest and most influential revivalist movements not only in Turkey but also in the Muslim World, he could not make into the list Revivalist Rahnama covered in this volume.

Mansoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof (2000) compiled an anthology of modernist and fundamentalist ideas presented by prominent scholars, theologians, scholars and academics around the Muslim world from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth. They included writings of more than 15 different ideologues in this thematically organized volume which covered subjects of “Islam and Western Civilization”, “Islam and Politics”, “Islamic Modernism” and “Jurisprudence, Rational Sciences and Differentiation of Knowledge.” Writings of most of the pioneers of Islamic revival included in Rahnama’s book were included in this volume as well with the exception of Musa al-Sadr, Muhammed Baqer as-Sadr and Hasan al-Banna.
Nursi’s writings couldn’t make into this volume either even though he had written extensively about many of the topics investigated in this book.

Davison (1998) published a book titled *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration*. Quite interestingly, there is no mention of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement in the book. I think that there are several reasons of why this is the case. The first is that compared to his contemporaries, Nursi’s and as a result the Nur Movement’s discourse was not politically laden which makes it difficult to be analyzed from the more fashionable power relations perspectives. The second is the difficulty of deciphering Nursi’s multi-layered discourse which simultaneously relates to matters pertaining to theology, philosophy and rhetoric. At the same time, Nursi, as he admits, tries to speak to people from various intellectual backgrounds ranging from the most learned to the simple lay people which is one of the reasons of stylistic variations in writings. A fuller understanding of his discourse, therefore, necessitates a command of these interdisciplinary areas as well as an expertise in the socio-historical backgrounds of the contexts in which this discourse was produced. Another reason why academic studies of Nursi was delayed, especially in Turkey, is the secularist establishment’s strict censorship of the publication of Nursi’s works as well as its censorship of academic works covering this movement.

The first serious social scientific study of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement came almost three decades after the death of Said Nursi in 1960. Şerif Mardin provided the first (and to my knowledge the only) systematic sociological account of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement in his book *Religion Social Change in Modern Turkey: The*
Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi published by the State University of New York Press in 1989. As a historical sociologist specialized in the late Ottoman history and in the history of modernization in Turkey, Mardin started his book with extensive descriptions of the socio-historical transformations in the last century of the Ottoman Empire and the first years of the Turkish Republic with the aim of contextualizing Said Nursi’s ideas and the emergence of the Nur Movement.

Mardin does a fairly good job in terms of providing such a background. However, his analysis of the actual discourse of Said Nursi gets lost in his deterministic reductionism when he to a much greater extent focuses on descriptions of the context as precursor to understanding the emergence of this movement while depending on brief analyses of the discourse of Nursi and the Nur Movement. An indication of such an approach is that direct analysis of the discourse of Nursi can hardly be found in Mardin’s book with the exception of several quotations and sporadic anecdotal notes. Thus, Mardin embraced a methodological approach which heavily relies on a causal path from the context to the text where the first is the determinant of the latter. I argue that such cases (like that of the Nur Movement) should be studied from both directions: from the context to the text and from the text to the context. If our methodology is biased towards one of these directions, we would be imposing our own reading either to the context or to the text. Mardin’s book is heavily biased towards the first (context) and widely ignores the second (text).

3 Although Mardin published his book abroad (U.S.), he was stripped of his membership from the Turkish Sociological Association on grounds that he popularized one of the enemies of the secular Republic.
What is more, philosophical implications of Nursi’s discourse especially his understanding of modern science are mostly misunderstood by Mardin. In the only chapter of the book dedicated for the study of philosophical discourse of Nursi (chapter titled “the Machinery of Nature”) Mardin claims that Nursi appropriated the Newtonian mechanistic paradigm and that in a way Nursi championed modern science and technology. In so doing, Mardin overlooked the dialectical nature of Nursi’s approach to the rise of modern science which I think is because Mardin did not understand that Nursi’s broad conceptualization of Philosophy includes modern positivist sciences as well. In his writings, Nursi presents his criticism of modern positivist science when he criticizes what he broadly class philosophy. Second, Mardin’s discussions of Nursi’s ethics are rather superficial as they are limited to explicit moral codes such as respecting the elderly and being truthful. Such issues are scarcely found in about 6,000 pages of Nursi’s writings, not because Nursi doesn’t think they are not important but because Nursi was more concerned about the root causes of deviation in the moral philosophy dealing with existential questions such the purpose of existence and the source of human happiness.

As I describe in the fourth chapter, Nursi’s writings include a great deal of moral philosophical discourse which do not contain direct mention of explicit moral norms. I think that such issues are much more central to Nursi’s revivalist methodology and they should be investigated first. In his discussions of Nursi’s ethics, Mardin mostly relied on secondary commentaries of Said Nursi (e.g., Mürsel, 1976; Şahiner, 1979) in his formulation of Nursi’s ethics rather than analyzing moral philosophical
implications of Nursi’s revivalist discourse vis-à-vis the development of secularist moral philosophy and his discursive strategies of reorienting the self towards religious definitions of the good.

In the excerpt below Mardin (1989) discusses why Nursi’s ethics appealed to the rural periphery.

[Said Nursi’s] stress on the personalistic element provided the rural population which flocked to him with a map of social relations that Kemalism had neglected. Kemalist ideology was long on views concerning the virtues of Turks, the benefit of secular republicanism for personality expansion, and the contribution of universal education to progress. It was short on methods that would enable individuals to tackle issues arising in the family circle. It did not answer queries relating to the authority of the father or as to what the new place of women in society would be after republican secularization and the adoption of Swiss Civil Code in anything approaching the detail of the most commonplace Islamic “catechism” with rural diffusion. Neither did the Kemalists have a view of rituals that would give meaning to life-stations such as birth, adolescence, marriage and death. Anyone who has had the occasion to witness the groping attempts of brides, bridegrooms and their families to infuse some color and warmth into the bleak process of Turkish civil marriages will know what I mean. The superficiality and lack of organic linkages with society, of Kemalism — which was successful in many other ways, as we have seen — appeared in such lacunae. Said Nursi’s teachings filled this gap by providing such a map of family norms, in particular the respect to be shown to the father and to elders. (p. 169)

The excerpt above is but one example of how Mardin moved from the context to text⁴. He was preoccupied with the question of how is it that these religious elements still existed in a modern paradigm. The main point of Mardin throughout the book revolves around the idea of how the Nur Movement filled the void left by the inadequacy of the new regime in terms of conquering all areas of life. For such reasons, he did not do an in depth analysis of the text and the discourse it contains. Due in

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⁴ Mardin shared similar observations elsewhere (See, Mardin, 2003).
greater part to these inadequacies, Mardin was not able to see the dialectical nature of Nursi’s discourse with regard to the construction of reality, the self and to a lesser degree the construction of the society. The most important implication of such inadequacy is Mardin’s conclusion that Nursi’s and the Nur Movement’s discourse were part of modernizing forces instead of being contentious towards them.

Besides contributing to the academic debates regarding the question of secularization and the development of the secularist movement in Turkey, this dissertation project aims at significantly contributing to the study of revivalist ideologues such as Said Nursi and religious movements not only in Turkey but also around the Muslim World by suggesting a systematic inquiry into the ways in which revivalist movements were mobilized against secularist conceptions of reality, the self and the society.

I also believe that the theoretical framework I will be developing in this dissertation to study the Nur Movement’s response to the ontological, moral philosophical and political philosophical foundations of secularization -which also deal with the social construction of reality, the self and the society- can be instrumentalized to explore the dynamics of other revivalist movements especially the ones in the Muslim World including the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-i Islami, Tablighi Jamaat and others. The same framework can be employed to understand to which of the three aspects of secularization and in what degrees a particular revivalist movement responded and how they have done it. For example, one might argue that the Muslim Brotherhood’s response focused more on the political and moral philosophical aspects
of secularization whereas the Nur Movement focused more on ontology and moral philosophy.

This structure can also be used to determine in which of the three areas (i.e., reality, the self and the society) a religious revivalist movement has/had conflicting or accommodating relations with secular regimes. When I propose the use of this framework, I don’t argue that all religious movements have antagonistic relations with the secular establishments in all of these three areas. Some religious movements are mobilized against only one or two of these three aspects of secularization and they have non-conflicting relations in other areas. For example, one might observe that some religious movements in the Muslim World have tried to maintain a non-conflicting relationship with the nationalist ideology of the political establishments as they, too, instrumentalized nationalism in their resource mobilization strategies while they had conflicting (in ontology) and somewhat conflicting (moral philosophy) relationships with other aspects of the secularist socio-political systems.
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF SECULARISM IN TURKEY

Introduction

Determining exactly when secularization started in the Ottoman Empire and in its successor Turkey is not an easy task as this question begs a precise definition of what secularization is and as such, requires meticulous historical research. However, historians and sociologists generally contend that the emergence of secularization in the Ottoman Empire coincides with the state-led reforms towards the end of the eighteenth century (e.g., Berkes, 1964; Mardin, 1981), which were undertaken with the aim of preventing the decline of the Empire in the face of external threats such as the emergence of (militarily) overpowering nation states of Europe (Shaw, 1970; Levy, 1982; Davison, 1990; Hanioğlu, 1995), the growth and expansion of European commerce in the Middle East, and internal challenges like the decreasing central authority of the sultan over institutions such as the Janissaries and over peripheral territories and the local valley lords (e.g., derebeys and a‘yans) (Karpat, 1972; Zürcher, 2004; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009).

In this chapter, I will trace the historical background of the genesis of secularization and the secularist movement by focusing on five subsequent stages of reform and modernization in the history of Turkey. The first step will be the description of the first wave of institutional modernization during the reigns of Sultan Selim III and
Sultan Mahmud II comprising the years between 1779 and 1839. As I describe in detail below, modernization during this period was in the form of reformation of governmental institutions, primarily including the army and education, administered and sponsored by the Sultanate. I will mostly rely on secondary resources in my descriptions and analyses of the reforms undertaken during this first stage of modernization. The second step will be the socio-historical analysis of the Tanzimat Era (1839-1876) in which modernization and Westernization further intensified and expanded in the Ottoman society, not only by the will of the Sultan but also by the efforts of a new group of reformist bureaucratic elite. I will use a combination of primary and secondary sources for the study of this period. I will use secondary sources to trace significant developments and key figures of modernization in this era of intensified socio-historical change. Primary resource will include excerpts from the declarations of reform such as the Tanzimat Fermanı and the Islahat Fermanı.

As the third step, I will explore and analyze the emergence of the first generation of oppositional reformist movement, the Young Ottomans such as İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, and Ali Suavi. I will analyze their discourse by reading some of the texts produced by them. Secondary sources will help contextualize the discourse of the reformist intellectuals in the Young Ottomans Movement. Prominent figures in the Young Ottomans were also the pioneers who introduced ideas like constitutionalism, liberty, justice and democracy they were acquainted with through their interactions with Western civilization. I will analyze passages and excerpts from the writings of the Young Ottomans and discuss their implications with
regard to secularization. Mobilization strategies of this intellectual movement and its legacy of reform and modernization will also be discussed in conjunction with the transformation of the Ottoman society vis-à-vis the developments in the West. I will also discuss if and how certain intellectual movements and ideologues in Europe affected the discourse of the Young Ottoman thinkers.

The fourth step will be the examination of what some historians (Karpat, 2002; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009) call the Young Turk Era, starting with the declaration of the First Constitutional Government in 1876 and ending with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks Movement was a very broad based opposition movement mobilized against the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II with the demand of the reinstitution of the constitution and the reopening of the Ottoman Parliament, which were suspended by him shortly after their enactment in 1876. Although they were united against the Sultan, the Young Turks movement was composed of various, in some cases conflicting, ideological factions, including centralists and decentralists, liberals and conservatives, nationalists and multi-culturalists, positivists, materialists, and atheists as well as traditionalists, conservatives, devout Muslims and the reformist ulama. In addition, there were several major organizations such as the Committee of Union and Progress and The League of Private Enterprise and Decentralization, which were established by different factions of the Young Turks Movement.

Investigating all aspects and every ideological block of the Young Turks Movement is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I will focus on the question of if and how ideas promoted by the Young Turks, their organizations and
mobilization strategies contributed to the development of secularization and the
secularist movement in the late Ottoman Society and in the formative years of the
modern Turkish Republic. I will use a combination of primary and secondary sources
for this purpose. Secondary historical sources will help contextualize the emergence the
Young Turks Movement and significant developments in its history, while reading and
analyzing texts produced by prominent members of the Young Turks (e.g., Beşir Fuad,
Ahmet Rıza, Yusuf Akçura, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik) will be part of the
discussions regarding the development of secularist ideologies such as scientism,
positivism, progressivism, materialism and naturalism. Focusing on the development of
these ideologies in the secularist movement will be a major step towards investigating
ontological, moral philosophical, and political philosophical implications of the
discourse of this movement, which pertain to the construction of reality, the self, and
the society.

As I described in the previous chapters, such philosophical questions and their
sociological implications constitute one of the two core axes of the ways in which this
dissertation project proposes to study secularization and revivalism—the other axis is
social movement dynamics. In similar ways to my study of the Young Ottomans, I will
also investigate if and how ideas and intellectual movements developed in the West
influenced the ideology of the Young Turks.

Exploration of secularization after the establishment of the modern Turkish
Republic and until the end of one party rule in 1950 will be the fifth and the final step. I
will continue using a combination of primary and secondary sources at this stage as
well. One of the issues discussed in this section will be the question of if and how the Young Turk Movement, including the Committee of Union and Progress, and their discourse, ideology, and mobilization strategies played a role in the development of the secularist regime in modern Turkey. I will also describe and analyze the discourse and mobilization strategies of the secularist establishment in this period.

Because this dissertation emphasizes the importance of studying secularization by paying attention to movement countermovement dynamics, I will also occasionally discuss reactions to reforms, other socio-political transformations, and ideas promoted in each of these five stages. I will conclude by describing major findings of the investigation of the development of secularization in the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey and by briefly discussing the implications of these developments in the context of secularization as a precursor for the final analysis. Analytical study of the response of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement to secularization, which is the main subject of this dissertation, will be in the following fourth and the fifth chapters.

Reforming the Army, Saving the Empire: The First Wave of Modernization
Reforms (1779-1839)

It was in 1792 that the Ottomans lost decisively a war against the Russians, a newly emerging military might in Europe. When the war ended with the Peace of Jassy, Selim III initiated a series reforms called Nizam-ı Cedid (New Order) purported to increase the power of the state through disciplining the army and the state bureaucracy and “restoring these institutions along their traditional principles” (Levy, 1982). As the primary focus of the reforms, Selim III sought to restore the integrity of the army, the
Janissaries in particular, in the image of the prime times of the Ottoman army of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.

When he realized that transforming the army from within will render ineffective, Selim III established a new army independent of the traditional corps of Janissaries and Sipahis (Zürcher, 2004). Thus, the state-led reforms which started in late eighteenth century were transformed from restorative to innovative character as the Empire from now on aspired to establish strong military power in the like of the European armies.

One of the steps in this direction was acquiring and implementing the military technology of the Europeans (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009) through translating military books¹ (Hanioğlu, 2008) and bringing in European technicians for the design and improvement of the military technology (Berkes, 1964, Zürcher, 2004), which were followed by establishing domestic military technical schools. Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümâyûn (Royall Naval Engineering School) and Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümâyûn (Royal Military Engineering School) were opened in 1773 and 1795 respectively (Somel, 2001) both of which were imitations of French military academies (Hanioğlu, 1995). With the purpose of educating physicians for the army Tersane Tibbiyesi (Shipyard Medical School) was opened in 1806 as an auxiliary medical institutions to the army (İhsanoğlu, 2009, p. 201).

¹ İhsanoğlu (2011, p. 153-154) and Kılınç (2006, p. 254) report that translation of European texts in other areas (e.g., astronomy, atlases) started as early as mid-seventeenth century.
Opening military schools and their ancillaries continued during rule of Mahmud II. *Harbiye Mektebi* (The War School) was established in 1831 to educate soldiers for the reformed army after the abolishment of the Janissaries five years earlier. With the purpose of educating doctors and surgeons mostly to serve in the army, *Tıbhane-i Amire* (Royal Medical Academy) and *Cerrahhane-i Amire* (Royal Academy of Surgery) were opened in 1827 and 1832 (Aydüz, 2007). To meet the needs of military veterinarians, *Baytar Mektebi* (The school of Veterinary Medicine) was opened in 1848 (İhsanoğlu, 2004). These schools were not only the first military technical schools, they were also the first modern high schools in the history of the Empire (Mikaberidze, 2011). All of these schools like the other newly established bureaucratic institutions were based in or around the city of Istanbul which at the time was the capital (Weiker, 1969) and the faculty were comprised of European, mostly French, British, Prussian and Swedish as well as Ottoman instructors (Berkes, 1964; İhsanoğlu 2004; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009).

Obviously, military reforms were not peculiar to the Ottomans for the fact that armies in Europe had been going through transformative reforms starting around the end of the seventeenth century. It was mostly because of these reforms -which showed its impact in the battlefield- that the Ottomans felt the need to transform their own. At this point, it is noteworthy to remember Andre Corvisier’s (1979) caveat that military reforms in Europe should be understood as part of a much broader framework of socio-political transformation (quoted in Levy, 1982). During the emergence of the nation states, the army played to a pivotal role for the establishment of sovereign authority.
through which other governmental operations and institutions were unified under the monopoly of a highly centralized state machinery in this process. Other sociopolitical institutions were transformed, too, alongside the transformation of the army.

The issue here is not that such transformations were merely the result of the changes in the structuring of the army. The argument is that the reformation of the army played a central role, perhaps an instrumental one, in the structural transformation of the European societies especially during the earlier phases of the major historical transformations in the modern history. This was the case in the Ottoman Empire as well (Levy, 1982). Modernization reforms started in the military with the intention of reclaiming the undisputed sovereign authority of the sultanate but to be expanded into other areas later (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009).

As Zürcher (2004) puts it, reforms under the rule of Selim III were a mixture of trying to revive the older system and emulating structural and technical aspects of European armies and their military academies. Reforms undertaken during the reign of his successor Mahmud II were much broader and more innovative in character. State-led reforms which started in the army and military schools were extended into the civil bureaucracy as he transformed older Ottoman institutions in line of modern institutions of the contemporary European states (Findley, 1972, Cleveland & Bunton, 2009) including the establishment of modern municipal administration during his rule (Shaw & Shaw, 1977). These reforms were done in two major areas. The first was the transformation the governmental institutions and second was the transformation of school system. Sultan Mahmud II established ministerial offices for the first time in the
history of the Empire (Sevim, 1978). Sultan Selim III had sent the first permanent representatives in 1793 to major Europeans capitals (e.g., London, Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Madrid) (Berkes, 1964) not only because the Ottomans wanted to be informed about new developments but also because diplomatic relations with European powers was much needed to avert new military catastrophes (Hanioğlu, 1995). However, it was Sultan Mahmud II who transformed foreign relations administration by establishing the centralized office of the Foreign Ministry (Hariciye Nezareti) in 1836 which played a significant role on the transformation of the civil bureaucracy at large. Interior Ministry (Dahiliye Nezareti) was established around the same time (Findley, 1970, 1972 and 1980). With the suggestion of Mustafa Reşid Pasha, Dar-ı Şurayı Bab-ı Ali serving as the Council of Ministers and Meclis-i Vala-yı Ahkam-ı Adliye as the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances to provide consultancy in legal matters and to function as a legislative body, were established in 1837 (Mardin, 1962; Shaw & Shaw, 1977).

Codification of the legal system in a modern sense mainly including the penal code had started by Mahmud II as well (Findley, 1980). In addition, publication of the first newspaper Takvim-i Vekayi (Calendar of Events) started in 1831 in order to inform the bureaucrats, the statesmen and to a limited degree the public about the policies of the center (Hanioğlu, 1995). The first modern postal system was also inaugurated around the same time (Palmer, 2011).

Major transformations in education included, among other things, the establishment of civil vocational schools. As the number of newly established bureaucratic offices increased so did the number of qualified workforce needed to fill
these positions. In order to prepare the required workforce, the Empire introduced broader reforms in the area of education. *Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye* (Royal Educational School of Justice) was the first modern school established during the reign of Mahmud II, in year 1836, for training students, exclusively men, to work in civil bureaucratic positions (Findley, 1972). Yet another necessity was the lack of qualified teachers to be employed in these academies. As a response, *Mekteb-i Maarifi Edebiyye* (The School of Literary Education) was established in the same year for educating teachers who received instructions in French, Arabic, history, political science, geography, astronomy and mathematics (Berkes, 1964; Shaw & Shaw, 1977).

Reformation of the educational system in the first half of the nineteenth century Ottoman society started at the post elementary level with the opening of the aforementioned military technical schools and continued with schools established for educating bureaucrats and teachers. Vocational training at the post elementary level were not overlapping much with other forms of education in the Ottoman society. However, the state felt the need to educate its workforce at earlier ages because education only at these vocational schools were not sufficient for preparing the modern bureaucrats. The first elementary level school outside madrasas was established for the first time again by Mahmud II. The Sultan did not close madrasas which were providing religious education at the elementary level to young pupils. He only established a parallel intermediate level non-religious school system perhaps because he didn’t want to involve in an open conflict with the religious elite (*ulema*) (Shaw & Shaw, 1977) who had supported him in the abolishment of the Janissaries a few year
back. Nonetheless, reforming the educational system and expanding it into the intermediate level indirectly limited the power of the madrasas and the *ulema* in favor of the already centralizing authority of the sultan and the state (Gökçek, 2001). Mahmud II also brought the administration of *Evkaf* (Religious and Civil Foundations) under government control with the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*Evkaf Nezareti*). Such a move further undermined the power of the religious establishment (Züchner, 2004; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009).

One of the common attributes of the reforms during the times of Mahmud II was their Westernized characteristics. All of the military, bureaucratic and educational institutions reformed or newly established in this period were meant to emulate similar institutions in Europe. As a whole, these transformations constituted the nucleus of the development of a centralized nation state in comparable ways in which nation states were emerging in the West. The sultan implemented a new dress code for the civilian officers by replacing the turban with the fez. What is more, he was the first Ottoman Sultan to wear the European style trousers and to have his portraits hung in state offices. Such practices earned him the epithet of “*Gavur Padişah*” (Sevim, 1978; Altindal, 1993; Arığ, 2007; Gürler, 2010) which is translated into English as “the non-Muslim Sultan” or “the infidel Sultan”.

Another major step in the transformation of the educational system of the Ottoman Empire during Mahmud II’s reign was sending students to Europe, starting in 1834, so that they study at European academies and bring back the science and the know-how to be utilized and implemented in the reformation of the state and to be
taught in the newly opened technical academies and schools (Somel, 2001). These students were sent almost exclusively to Paris (Hanioğlu, 1995) because of the friendlier relationships between the Ottomans and the French at that time (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009) and as Berkes (1964) suggested because of Selim III’s admiration for the French civilization. As I discuss in further detail below, these students played significant roles in the expansion of the processes of modernization and secularization in the Empire and subsequently in the path towards the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic.

Reforms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were predominantly state-led programs sponsored directly by the sultans with the purpose of facilitating the transformation of military and bureaucratic institutions. These reforms were implemented with the coercive power of the state especially during Mahmud II’s time (Hanioğlu, 1995).

Even though these reformed institutions did not stop the decline of the Empire, they significantly transformed the structure of the bureaucracy and the educational system. Not surprisingly, changes brought about by such reforms were not limited to these areas only. Bringing in foreign military engineers and instructors as well as sending students and permanent diplomatic missions to major capitals in the Europe during this period started to intensify direct interactions with the Europeans and thus the impact of Western world on the Ottoman society began to be observed in other areas. Borrowing words into academic and subsequently into everyday use from the Western languages mainly from French started as early as late eighteenth century.
(Hanioğlu, 1995). As I discuss in further detail below, these structural adjustments also planted the seeds of the transformation of the class structure of the entire society. These reforms gave rise to a new class of modernizing bureaucratic elites and thusly paved the way for broader social, cultural and political changes.

Reforms in the Tanzimat Era: Centralization and the Rise of the New Bureaucracy

A new era was ushered in 1839 in the history of the modernization reforms in the Ottoman Empire with the proclamation of *Tanzimat Fermanı* (Imperial Decree of Reorganization) under the leadership of Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşit Pasha several months after the ascension of Abdulmecit I to the throne in succession of his father Mahmud II. A declaration, put together by the efforts of the Foreign Minister Mustafa Reşit Pasha who had previously served as the Ottoman Ambassador to London and Paris and sealed by Sultan Abdulmecit I, was read in the presence of a group of Ottoman notables, foreign dignitaries, community leaders, representatives of guilds in front of the royal palace. This declaration announced a series of social reforms to be implemented thereafter (Hanioğlu, 1995; Ufford, 2007; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009).

Hence, reforms implemented after the declaration of this decree in the following several decades leading up to the beginning of the short lived first constitutional era in 1876 are referred to as the *Tanzimat Era*².

Reforms undertaken during the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II were implemented with the intention of rejuvenating the Empire by transforming the state

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² *Tanzimat* is the plural of the word *tanzim* which means reordering and reorganization.
apparatus. As it is described above, those reforms mostly addressed technical and practical matters at the administrative level. *Tanzimat* represented a turning point in the Ottoman and Turkish history as it, for the first time, addressed issues pertaining to social justice and civil liberties in addition to promising the abolishment of tax farming (*timar*), fighting with corruption and standardizing the compulsory military recruitment (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). The declaration announced new laws (*kavanin-i cedide*) guaranteeing life, property and honor. Signed directly by the Sultan who took an oath to abide by these new rules, the *Tanzimat* established that the new laws would be applicable not only to Muslims but also to all including other minority *millet* communities. The idea that new laws will be made in the Council of Judicial Ordinances (*Meclis-i Valayi Ahkam-i Adliye*) in which members are guaranteed to express their opinions freely was included in the declaration (Berkes, 1964; Hanoğlu, 1995). Below are excerpts from the *Tanzimat* declaration.

Thus, full of confidence in the help of the Most High and certain of the support of our Prophet, we deem it necessary and important from now on to introduce new legislation to achieve effective administration of the Ottoman Government and Provinces. Thus the principles of the requisite legislation are three:

1. The guarantees promising to our subjects perfect security for life, honor, and property.

2. A regular system of assessing taxes

3. An equally regular system for the conscription of requisite troops and the duration of their service.

Indeed, there is nothing more precious in this world than life and honor. What man, however much his character may be against violence, can prevent himself from having recourse to it, and thereby injure the government and the country, if his life and honor are endangered? If, on the contrary, he enjoys perfect
security, it is clear that he will not depart from ways of loyalty and all his actions will contribute to the welfare of the government and of the people.

[...].

As for the other points, decisions must be taken by majority vote. To this end, the members of the Council of Judicial Ordinances [Mejlis-i Ahkam-i Adliyye], enlarged by new members as may be found necessary, to whom will be joined on certain days we shall determine our Ministers and the high officials of the Empire, will assemble for the purpose of framing laws to regulate the security of life and property and the assessment of taxes. Everyone participating in the Council will express his ideas and give his advice freely. (Hurewitz, 1975, as quoted in Khater, 2010, p-12-14)

Some (e.g., Jung, 2001: Toprak, 2007: Hekimoğlu, 2010) saw Tanzimat as the first constitutional document and as a significant milestone in the development of constitutional forces in the Ottoman Empire and in the Muslim World, because the Tanzimat limited the power of the Sultan, established the notion of consultation in making laws and proposed to guarantee individual rights. What is more, some considered Tanzimat as a further step towards secularization in the Ottoman Empire for the reason that it undermined the power of religion in judicial matters even if it didn't fully restrain it (Berkes, 1964) and that Tanzimat expedited the decline of the religion based millet system (Taşpınar, 2005, Kösebalaban, 2011). Millets (religious communities) were not seen as independent religious entities anymore in the eyes of the new governmental system. All of them were theoretically united under the banner of Ottomans instead of being Muslims, Christians and Jews. They were now Ottoman Muslims, Ottoman Christians and Ottoman Jews. For Sohrabi (2012) and James and Goetze (2001) such a shift was an indication of the transformation in the identity of the
Empire as it signaled the birth of nationalism and patriotism which have been one of the core components of nation-states.

The opening of the declaration included a statement attributing the decline of the Empire to the neglect of the Qur’an and it maintained that Sharia would be protected. However, some scholars cautiously approach the presence of such statements in the declaration. For Berkes (1964), the fact that the declaration did not make it necessary for the new laws to be approved with the fatwa (religious ruling) of the Şeyhülislam (Shaykh al-Islām) undermined the power of religious forces even though traditional qadis would remain as the judicial practitioners. Because the first draft of the declaration included fewer number of such references, Hanioğlu (1995) suggests that adding such a statement to the declaration can be seen as a symbolic gesture to the religious forces (ulema) whose resistance could hinder the implementation of Tanzimat.

There is an agreement within the scholarly circles that Tanzimat especially including the reforms it initiated in the area of minorities did not come into existence only because of internal dynamics, it was also a result of external pressures (Hanioğlu, 1995; Levy, 2002; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). The Ottomans needed to form alliances with Western powers against threats such as the expansion of Russians into Eastern Europe and the movement of Egypt’s Mehmed Ali Pasha into the southern provinces of the Empire. There was some reluctance and resistance in those nations for forming alliances with the Muslim Ottomans who have long been seen and portrayed as the religious other in European history. Ottoman statesmen might have felt the need for underplaying the Empire’s Muslim identity by ascribing equal status to Muslims and
Non-Muslims in legal and governmental matters in order to appeal to pro-Christian sentiments of Europeans and by presenting the Ottoman Empire from a non-religious perspective. For Cleveland and Bunton (2009), there was another practical reason in gradually abolishing the *millet* system and transforming the identity of the Empire. Ottoman bureaucrats were concerned about growing nationalist sentiments in post-French Revolution political climate and they were desperate to produce policies to keep minorities especially those in European provinces loyal to the Empire. Offering them equal status including job opportunities in state offices with Muslims in *Tanzimat* was part of the new bureaucracy’s response to this challenge.

However, these developments do not mean that reformists of the *Tanzimat* Era fully rejected the centrality of Islam. In matters of legitimization, at least at the explicit levels, reference to Islam remained as a major factor, if not as the absolute one in the beginning of the *Tanzimat* (Berkes, 1964; Hanioğlu, 1995). In this sense, *Tanzimat* appears to be a blend of both religious and secularist ideas.

On the other hand, however, Westernization of the state and the bureaucracy continued in other areas. Codification of the legal system in the modern sense started in the aftermath of the declaration of the *Tanzimat*. French Penal Code, Commercial Code, Maritime Commerce Code and the Imperial Land Code were adopted in this era (Griffel, 2007; Salim, 2008; Hallaq, 2009). The first modern civilian courts *Nizamiye* were established in 1850 (Starr, 1992). The first civil code which was a blend of *Hanafi Fiqh* and the French Civil Code of 1804 (Hanioğlu, 1995) was compiled three decades later to take effect in 1877. The first Bank was opened in 1840’s by Europeans
The economy was also becoming more centralized with the introduction of regulated modern monetary system based on liberalist principles (Hancıoğlu, 2012).

*Tanzimat* reforms which started in Istanbul, the capital of the Empire, were being extended into the periphery by means of establishing provincial councils made up of non-*ulema* and through the development of modern municipal administration (Mardin, 1962, Lampe & Jackson, 1982; Commins 1990). To further facilitate the implementation and the expansion of the modernization reforms, to address new changes in this direction and to please European superpowers with the aim of convincing them to support the Ottoman Empire against the Russians during the Crimean War, another declaration, *Islahat Fermanı* (Reform Edict), was announced in 1856 which was similar to the *Tanzimat* declaration (Karpat, 2001; Hekimoğlu, 2010; Bulut, 2009).

Formal education was further expanded into the elementary and secondary levels during the *Tanzimat* Era (Evered, 2012). In addition *Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye* and *Mekteb-i Ulum-u Edebiye*, a new system of secondary schools, *Mulkiye Mektebi, Rüşdiye Mektepleri*, were opened both in the center and in the provincial periphery with the aim of educating the civilian bureaucrats and expanding the scope of the new reforms (Findley, 2012, p. 159, and p.838-839; Mardin, 1989, p. 108; Zürcher, 1984, p. 12). Around 30 *rüşdiyes* were opened by 1848, of which 7 were outside the capital. The first *rüşdiye* school for girls was opened in 1849 in Istanbul. In 1868, 31 new *rüşdiye* schools were opened in the periphery (Yılmaz, 2009, p. 838-840). A decree was issued
in 1869 requiring all towns with a population of more than 500 households to have at least one rüşdiye (Nohl, p. 20). By 1876, there were a total of 423 rüşdiye schools housing around 20,000 students (Yılmaz, 2009, p. 838-840).

The spread of modern education provided in the schools established during this period gave rise to what Berkes (1964) called the bifurcation of education in which two parallel educational establishments existed side by side, and independent of and disconnected from each other. On the one hand was the traditional madrasas and on the other was the modern educational institutions. The first (madrasa) provided instructions of ‘ilm, in other words the knowledge pertaining to God, to man’s duties to Him, and to the relationships among men in terms of these duties. Those who received these instructions were ‘alim, the learned (ulema is the plural of ‘alim). The second schooling system gave technical and modern scientific instructions. This type of knowledge was called fen. Muteffennin were those who acquired knowledge in these areas (Berkes, 1964, p. 100). The structure and the areas of instructions in these two camps were so different from each other that the two sides could hardly understand the language and the rhetoric of the other. Parallel to this disconnection was the growing hostility between the two camps (Berkes, 1964, p. 177).

**Reactions to the First Wave of Reforms (1779-1839) and the Tanzimat (1839-1876)**

Historians identified three major groups who had unwelcoming reactions to the first wave of reforms implemented under the rule of sultans Selim III and Mahmud II. These three groups were the Janissaries, the local notables (ayans) and the religious ulema. Janissaries were the most belligerent establishment to have resisted change,
understandably so, because reforms in this era focused chiefly on the transformation of
the army, at the center of which stood the Janissaries. Disorganization and corruption of
this central military force of the Ottomans were blamed for consecutive losses in wars
against the Europeans especially the Russians and for the declining power of the state.
Reforms implemented under the banner of Nizam-i Cedid during the rule of Selim III
which included the establishment of new military corps were designed to discipline and
control the power of the Janissaries whose dissent gradually increased over the years. In
return, the Janissaries dethroned Selim III and replaced him with Mustafa V who
pledged not to interfere in their establishment (Hanioğlu, 1995; Cleveland & Bunton,
2009).

After Mustafa IV’s short lived reign of several months, Mahmud II ascended to
the throne with the help of Alemdar Mustafa Pasha. Encouraged by the efforts of
Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, Mahmud II was more adamant about the reforms and about
curbing the Janissaries. However, the Janissaries, in 1808, raided the residence of the
grand Vizier Alemdar Mustafa Pasha who was a supporter of reforms. The raid resulted
in the death of the Grand Vizier and hundreds of Janissaries because of the explosion of
the large amount of gun powder stored in the basement of the Grand Vizier’s residence.
It is believed that the gun powder was put on fire by the helpless Grand Vizier (Yıldız,
2014, p. 41).

In 1826, Mahmud II was able to abolish the institution of Janissaries by force.
As the Janissaries were preparing to depose Mahmud II, the sultan was able to forge a
frontier of public and official support against the Janissaries. A large crowd including
thousands of madrasa students attacked barracks of the Janissaries and pursued those who escaped in the streets of Istanbul. As a result, thousands of Janissaries were killed in an event called Vakay-i Hayriye (the Beneficial Event) on 15 June 1826 (Shaw & Shaw, 1977; Nicolle, 1998; Üstün, 2002). Thus the longstanding corps of Janissaries were disbanded forever which paved the way for the advancement of reforms especially during the Tanzimat Era as it increased the power of the civilian side of the state, the newly emerging bureaucracy in particular (Şakul, 2009; Rubin, 2011).

The second group which resisted change during the first wave of reforms were the ayans, the local provincial notables who were influential people of diverse origins. Ayans included Ottoman governors with somewhat independent local power, wealthy merchants, landowners and religious dignitaries (Züchrer, 2004). Traditionally, ayans recognized the sovereignty of the Ottoman dynasty and provided economic and military resources through taxation and by sending soldiers for military campaigns to the center. However, they gradually formed their own base of power in the periphery over time (Sugar, 1977; Çevikel, 2009; White, 2011). Centralizing dimensions of the first wave reforms gave rise to resentment among the ayans. In an attempt to curb their power and to expedite the process of change the Sultan signed a charter of alliance (Sened-i İttifak) in 1808 with ayans, thanks to the efforts of Grand Vizier Alemdar Mustafa Pasha (1755-1908) who was a former ayan of Ruse (in todays Bulgaria). The charter established the agreement that the ayans will continue recognizing the sovereignty of the sultan and that the sultan will recognize the legitimacy of the ayans. The two parties
also reached an agreement to respect and protect each other’s safety. The 5th article of the Sened-i İttifak included this statement:

> As we all guarantee and undertake to protect the sultan’s imperial person, the sultanate’s power, and the state’s order, let all the local notable houses, notables, ministers, high officials, and dignitaries who participated in this agreement, alike guarantee and undertake each other’s personal safety and that of their families, because it is clear fact that the local notable houses and chief men in the provinces must have confidence in the Sublime State, that the trust between the high officials and dignitaries of the state in the capital is utmost importance, and that security and tranquility of mind may only be acquired through the union and mutual agreement of all and through their joint guarantee and pledge for each other. (Trans. Akyıldız & Hanoğlu, 2006, p. 27)

Ayans pledge that they will support the Sultan in case of a Janissary rebellion was inscribed in the agreement document as well. Another point of agreement was that both the sultan and the ayans will rule justly. The center would set the standards of taxes justly and the ayans would hold true to the principle of justice when they collect these taxes (the 7th article). The charter also maintained that (1) the ayans will support the reforms and the establishment of a new army, (2) that the grand vizier will be regarded as the representative of the sultan, and (3) that “all affairs would be submitted to the Sultan and authorization must be asked from him” (the 4th article). Sened-i İttifak did not diminish the power of the ayans and as historians (Ex: Shaw & Shaw, 1977, Züchrer, 2004) noted, it rather legitimized their status. Nonetheless, this agreement increased the confidence of the sultan and the grand vizier to carry out their modernization reforms including the abolishment of the Janissaries.

The third group which showed resistance to the first wave of reforms was some of the ulema (Voll, 1982; Heyd, 1993; Züchrer, 2004). Consisting of religious teachers,
preachers, shari’a law experts and judges, the *ulema* in some cases held governmental positions “in public policy, diplomacy and politics” in the Ottoman Empire (Heyd, 1993; Davison, 1990, p. 166). As Bein (2011) reports, the *ulema* is generally portrayed as “the other” of the Westernized and modernized elite in the modern history of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. He also observed that the *ulema* is generally portrayed as “a uniform socioreligious group”. Heyd (1993) suggests that at least in terms of the ways in which they responded to the first generation of modernization reforms, they were not a uniform entity. Even though a group of scholars such as Züchrer (2004) argued that the *ulema* during this time openly sided with the coalition of Janissaries and the *ayans* and thus opposed to reforms, Heyd (1993) contends that some of the highest *ulema* from the beginning supported the reforms. The Şeyhülislam, as the highest religious authority, officially approved the use of the printing press. The highest *ulema* together with Şeyhülislam Ahmed Esad Efendi actively supported the reforms of Sultan Selim III as well. Their help in terms of providing legitimization and mobilization of the madrasa students in the day of *Vakay-i Hayriye* played a critical role in the abolishment of the Janissaries by Sultan Mahmud II. The highest *ulema*, Heyd states, even backed the modernization of the army and the state. One of them, Tatarcık Abdullah, Heyd reports, “demanded the adoption of Western military science, translation of Western technical works as well as employing foreign experts and instructors” (p. 30). Mehmed Munib Efendi, an *alim*, supported the establishment of the army of *Nizam-i Cedid* (Mardin, 1962, p. 217). Miller (1964) provides another account that the same person
proposed the abolishment of tax farming and developing mining and manufacturers through special constructors.

Tatarcık Abdullah was not the only supporter of reform within the ulema. Even a generation later, individuals such as Keçecizade Mehmed İzzet and Şeyhülislam Arif Hikmet Bey supported and proposed various modernization reforms (Heyd, 1993; Mardin, 1962, p. 217-218). Mehmed Esad, a notable molla, ardently backed Mahmud II’s reforms, too. Several prominent public preachers surprisingly supported the introduction of the use of fez in public offices which earned the epithet of “the non-Muslim Sultan” to Mahmud II. Another a’lim, Mustafa Behçet, was actively involved in the development of the first military medical school in which he worked as the chief physician. Interestingly, the ulema also supported the establishment of rüşdiyes (middle schools) which were not religious schools (Heyd, 1993). Parizade, an alim who was teaching at one of the newly established military academies, ordered experimental equipment from France for the school (Mardin, 1962, p. 217).

On the other hand, however, Heyd’s study (1993) reports that the response of the above mentioned ulema was not the typical response of their class. A group of ulema including the Şeyhülislam, Mehmed Ataullah, and the qadi of Istanbul, Muradzade Mehmed Murad blamed Nizam-i Cedit reforms of Selim III as the imitations of the infidels. Sultan Mahmud was able control and suppress their dissent and marginalize them. However, the ulema successfully resisted him when he wanted to make the ulema wear the fez like other state officials. Yet, they had to comply with many of the Sultan’s policies.
Being cautious of his conclusions due to the lack of reliable documentation to substantiate the findings, Heyd says that the lower rank ulema, remained much more hostile towards the Westernization reforms in this era. Ralston (1996) maintains - without any substantive evidence- that most of the lower rank ulema were Bektâşis (the Sufi order most Janissaries belonged to) and therefore they staunchly opposed reforms just as the Janissaries did.

Another religious group against reforms were madrasa students (softas) who already fostered resentment towards government officials and higher rank ulema because of corruption in practices of employment. Heyd’s (1993) contention is that softas were categorically against modernization reforms because of their religious beliefs and economic interests.

According to Hanioğlu (1995) and Heyd (1993) non-Muslim clerics and millet (non-Muslim community) leaders did not welcome the reforms either. The Orthodox Greeks enjoyed a relatively superior position in comparison to the other minority millet communities because of their closer ties with the traditional establishment. The new order especially after the Tanzimat threatened their relative superiority and made them equal to other millets. What is more, Mardin (1962, p. 19) argues that when the Empire announced with the declaration of Tanzimat that it will discontinue the system of recognizing minorities by their religious affiliation, non-Muslim clerics lost their power in their communities because lay people outside the clerical circles started to compete for the leadership. This might be another reason why Tanzimat was not welcomed by the millet leaders.
The response of general public to the first wave of modernization reforms and the Tanzimat is not well known. Besides the Ottoman historian Ahmet Cevdet’s (1891) note that the public were utterly distasteful of Westernized character of the reforms (cited in Hanioğlu, 1995), the reaction of the common people is not well documented. Hourani (1993) offers an explanation of why this is the case. For him, common people didn’t really understand what was going on at that time. That is probably why we don’t have detailed accounts of the response of the general public. Given that these reforms did not have considerable impact in the lives of the common people especially those who were living outside Istanbul, Hourani’s description seems to offer a plausible explanation.

**Did Secularization Start During the First Wave of Reforms and the Tanzimat?**

Classical secularization theorists would possibly assert that the first wave of reforms and the Tanzimat planted the seeds of secularization in the Ottoman Empire because these reforms especially the centralization of government through the establishment of an efficient bureaucracy started the processes of rationalization and thus gradually undermined the validity of religion. They could also argue that institutional autonomy of nonreligious institutions started during this era, which would eventually make religion socially insignificant in the future. A third classical narrative of the secularization theory would be that the decline of the two categorically dichotomous realms of the sacred and the secular which might have happened during this time because of religious establishments’ and religious individuals’ exposure to
secular elements which became more widespread and visible in the society as a result of these institutional reforms.

As for the first argument, centralization of government in a bureaucratic sense in the Ottoman Empire did not start with these reforms. Historian Bernard Lewis (2002) observed that the Ottomans had already established a “meticulous, conscientious, and strikingly efficient bureaucratic government” as early as the sixteenth century (p. 23). This has never been considered as a question of secularization. The development of efficiency did not ignite a linear process of social change and this did not transform other societal institutions either. Such an efficient system declined in the next centuries. It was a historical condition with a beginning and an end.

The second core argument of secularization theory which contends that secularization was a result of institutional separation through which other societal institutions became more autonomous and independent from religion. Sociohistorical account provided by Niyazi Berkes (1964) who was one of the prominent pioneers of the documentation of secularization in Turkey resonates with this argument of institutional autonomy.

Berkes agrees with the historical narrative that the state and religion in the pre-modern history of the Muslim World were inseparable twins\(^3\) which were part and parcel of each other (Sariyannis, 2013). These two twins, in the formulation of Berkes, were best represented in the institutions of Sadrazam (the Grand Vizier) and

\(^3\) Berkes doesn’t use the concept of twin establishment but the descriptions he provided resonates with this notion. See Yüksel (2009) and Shaked (1984) for more details about the conception of religion and the state as twin establishments.
Şeyhülislam. The Sultan stood above them as the combination of both of these supreme institutions as the Sultan-Caliph. Mahmud II marginalized Sadrazam with the establishment of ministries and substantially decreased the power of the office of Şeyhülislam by degrading its status to the level of the leaders of other religious communities (millets).

The real separation started when one of the twins (the state) started to disassociate itself from the other (religion). This was when the Sultan (Mahmud II) took part in a negotiation with his subjects during the declaration of the Sened-i İttifak which opened a new chapter in the history of Turkey and of the Muslim World as the Sultan, for the first time, sought legitimization from the people as opposed to relying on an uncontested God-given authority. In so doing, Berkes asserts, Mahmud II put off the religious cloak and thus he triggered the sprout of the seeds of the separation of the state and religion. Therefore, the eminent twins started to be alienated from each other.

Berkes also emphasized the role of the first modern schools in secularization. For him, the establishment of these schools started to emancipate education from the influence of traditional forces such as the madrasas and the religious elite running these institutions, namely the ulema. Teaching of non-religious content (maarif) in and of itself was a sign of secularization in education. Such a formulation of secularization is reminiscent of what Charles Taylor called the subtraction perspective. Secularization in this perspective is defined as the process through which new spaces and meaning systems emerged as the leftover category after the withdrawal of religion. These points are indications that Berkes, who provided perhaps the first systematic and
comprehensive account of secularization in Turkey, understood secularization mostly in terms of institutional transformation.

For such reasons, I think that the institutional separation and institutional autonomy arguments in secularization debates do not have explanatory power in the case of the Muslim World especially including the Ottoman Empire. The modern history begins or at least coincides with the centralization of government comprising military, political, economic, educational and medical institutions in continental Europe and its neighbors including the Ottoman Empire. To say that these institutions were emancipated from religion (the church in Europe) does not necessarily mean that they remained autonomous afterwards. These institutions became more powerful with the centralization of governments (i.e., the rise of nation states). However, when proponents of the secularization and modernization theories observed the emergence of more powerful institutions, they naively attributed this power to the decline of the church. They failed to see that the power of these institutions that they observed was not coming from their autonomy. It was rather coming from their integration into a more powerful and more centralized form of governance; the nation states. This monopolistic system enabled the modern states to penetrate into the lives of their subjects more than ever before. As Levy (1982) observed, Ottoman reforms were not significantly different from their European counterparts in this regard. Reformed and newly established institutions in the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire expended the hand of the state into the areas of the society which had hitherto remained relatively autonomous.
The third classical narrative within the secularization theory is the decline of the two categorically dichotomous realms of the sacred and the secular because of religions movement into the secular realm thus becoming secularized by including material conditions of life in the core aspects of religion as it was described by Weber. In his account, defining salvation through worldly (economic) success in Protestantism gradually turned or moved religion into the secular. As Berkes (1964), who shared most of the secularization theory’s assumptions, contended, such categorical distinctions such as the sacred vs the secular or the sacred vs the temporal in the establishment of institutional authority does not apply to case of the Ottoman Empire because such distinctions never existed in pre-modern history of Muslim societies. The existence of a religious establishment (the Church) in its own rights somewhat independent of the secular authority, as it is also argued by Berkes (1964), is peculiar to Christianity and it doesn’t apply to (the history of) other religions.

Owing to unique historical circumstances, the establishment of a church above, or subordinate to, or parallel with, the state was peculiar to Christianity; it constituted an exception rather than the rule in relations between the state and religion. [...] The basic conflict in [the] secularism [in the Muslim World] is not necessarily between religion and the world, as was the case in Christian experience. The conflict is between the forces of tradition, which tend to promote the domination of religion and sacred law, and the forces of change. (p.6).

Finally, I think that it is hard to decide whether the processes of secularization had started during the first wave of secularization. In the previous chapters, I argued that ontological and moral philosophical aspects of secularization should be investigated alongside its political philosophical dimensions. I have not found any
secondary sources hinting that alternative ontological or moral philosophical
worldviews started to develop in the Ottoman Empire during this period. The only thing
about secularization in these areas that can be traceable back to this period is
reformation of institutions in the direction of Westernization which started in the
military and expanded into education. I have not found any substantial information
about the curriculums of the first modern schools except that they provided technical
(military and vocational) instructions in addition to language education and basic
sciences such as mathematics and algebra.

It is more obvious that the development of a new political structure with a new
institutional arrangement was set in motion in the beginning of the nineteenth century.
At the beginning, the population, even including the educated segments, did not fully
understand the nature of these reforms (Hourani, 1993). However, these first wave of
reforms constituted the beginning of the centralized state’s expansion into the daily
lives of its subjects at unprecedented and ever increasing levels starting with the
establishment of modern4 institutions, schools in particular (Cleveland & Bunton,
2009). In the old system, the periphery maintained more autonomy in their lives
including their educational systems. Madrasas or the schools of other millets5 were

4 I use the term modern here to refer to a new historical condition (e.g., new vs. old) rather than
an analytical one (e.g., modern vs. traditional). Modern schools in this sense refer to the practise
of centralized and state controlled educational system which constituted one of the defining
characteristics of nation states.

5 Each religious community (Muslim, Jewish, Christian, etc.) was recognized as a millet in the
Ottoman Empire, and the whole system is called by modern historians as the millet System.
Millets maintained considerable level of local autonomy in their educational system. (Şahin, 2012)
neither funded nor administered by the central state (Chambers, 1972). Moreover, millets implemented their own laws within their own communities (Şahin, 2012). Reforms during the first wave gradually helped the central state expand its hands into these areas and forced them integrate into a centrally organized sociopolitical system through the establishment of various governmental institutions.

The sponsors of these reforms in the higher echelons of the state machinery, in certain cases including the sultan (e.g., Mahmud II), pursued to phase out traditional intermediaries between the state and the citizenry, such as the ulema and the leaders of minority millet communities, in order to facilitate the expansion of the modernization projects (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). These developments produced opportunity spaces, including the ones opened by marginalization of religious education, for any ideological movement to further their agenda should they control the state apparatus. We will see in the following sections of this chapter that these opportunity spaces will be gradually controlled by a new group of elites who were becoming increasingly secularist.

Similar processes of centralization was emerging in the other parts of the Muslim World around mid-nineteenth century. Muhammad Ali Pasha, a former Ottoman governor who established his autonomous rule in Egypt, pursued institutional modernization similar to -in some cases more intensely than- the Ottomans (Sayyid-Marsot, 1984; Russell, 2013). Iran, too, had its own modernization movement in the form of centralization in the nineteenth century (Lambton, 1993).
Reforms in this era largely remained at the governmental level sponsored and administered by the Sultan with the aim of preventing the decline of the Empire. As such, developments in this part of the Ottoman history were mostly about the restructuring of the institutional framework of the center. Therefore, transformation of the traditional (pre-modern) system started at the institutional (political) level. However, there is a scarcity of documented discourse developed for or against this transformation. The only textual discourse I could find in secondary sources was the excerpt below published by one of the consultative boards of the state in the official newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* in *Dhu’l-Qa’da* 21, 1254 (1839) which outlines the rationale for the reforms in the area of education.

All arts and trades are products of science. Religious knowledge serve salvation in the world to come, but science serves perfection of man in this world. Astronomy, for example, serves the progress of navigation and the development of commerce. The mathematical sciences lead to the orderly conduct of warfare as well as military administration. Innumerable new and useful inventions, like the use of steam, came into existence in this manner. Several new facilities exist in the arts and trades thanks to the growth and spread of the known sciences and the rise of several new sciences. Through science, one man can now do the work of a hundred. Trade and profit have become difficult in countries where the people are ignorant of these sciences. Without science, the people cannot know the meaning of love for the state and the fatherland (*vatan*). It is evident that the acquisition of science and skill comes above all other aims and aspirations of a state. The Ottoman commonwealth had schools and scholars, but they disappeared. Later, military, naval, engineering, and medical schools were opened with great effort, but the students entering these schools lacked even ordinary knowledge for the proper reading of Turkish books. This was because of the defectiveness of the primary schools. In discussing every project for the recovery of agriculture, commerce, and industry, the Board has found that nothing can be done without the acquisition of science and that the means of acquiring science and remedying education lie in giving a new order to the schools. (As cited in Berkes, 1964, p. 105)
The text explicitly discusses the reason why reform is needed in the area of education and why already existing institutions—which in the language of the text already became dysfunctional—are not sufficient for the proposed reforms. It also makes a distinction between religious knowledge and science but not in an explicitly diametrical fashion. According to the author(s) of this text, religious knowledge deals with the necessities of the hereafter while science helps with the affairs of this world. Although it is not openly suggested as such, there is room for seeing religious knowledge and science as complementary rather than substitutive elements of each other from the way the discourse of this excerpt is constructed. We don’t have enough evidence to decide whether the author(s) actually saw religion and science as complementary elements or they used such a sensitive language because they wanted to avoid criticism and backlash.

Another noteworthy point is that the text does not legitimize the need for acquiring sciences as a service to the ummah or to the religion of Islam. It rather proposes that it will help the fatherland (vatan) and it will foster the love for it. The concept of vatan and the love for it in the sense when it refers to the motherland or to the country is very modern and it is reminiscent of political discourse in the context of the development of nation states and nationalism. Such a language signals the birth of a discourse which implicitly deals with the orientation of the self, in this case it is not the individualistic self but the patriotic self. Therefore this excerpt, despite being a rarity of its kind, is a testament to the birth of elementary forms of scientism and nationalism as a political ideology and as a moral philosophical transformation.
The timing of this discourse is critical. This text was produced shortly before the end of Mahmud II’s reign and only months before the declaration of Tanzimat in 1839. That is why I think that it should be considered as part of the Tanzimat Era. I will explore discourses similar to the one presented in this text when I analyze the development of secularism during the Tanzimat. Nevertheless, this text gives many hints in terms of the direction of reforms in the years and perhaps centuries to come and the content of discourse surrounding these issues with regard to the development of secularism in Turkey.

A more plausible argument would be that perhaps secularization in history of the Muslim World particularly in Turkey started as an unintended consequence of the reforms undertaken during the first wave of reforms and in the following periods. It doesn’t seem like sultans Selim III and Mahmud III initiated these reforms with the intention of secularizing the society, and perhaps not even with the genuine purpose of marginalizing the ulema. They faced existential threats amidst the unstoppable advance of European armies especially the Russians into the Ottoman lands by defeating their army resulting in heavy territorial losses with massive numbers of casualties; and in the increasing autonomy of provincial notables (ayans). Then, if the roots of secularization are to be found in these reforms whose purpose was to save the Empire, secularization in the history of Turkey is an unintended consequence.

I partly and cautiously agree with the unintended consequence argument. It does not look like secularization was the intention behind the first wave of reforms in the Ottoman Empire. However, I think that a better formulation of what happened is that
the unintended consequence of Tanzimat reforms was not secularization *per se*, it rather was the birth of a secularist movement which I think was not predicted.

Even if we assume that the beginning of secularization is an unintended consequence and therefore it cannot be attributed to a secularist movement, the survival and continuity of secularization and its expansion into the rest of the society would not be possible without such a movement. In my understanding, there are two main reasons for why this is the case. First, any kind of conscious human activity implicitly or explicitly involves meaning. Because human beings live with other conscious human beings their actions involve legitimization in the eyes of the other. Especially when fundamental changes in the ways in which things work out in the society are concerned, addressing the question of legitimization becomes almost inevitable. Secularization in the Muslim World started with institutional reforms which, too, necessitates legitimization and therefore the establishment of an ideology of change and the existence of individuals and groups who will produce and maintain such an ideology.

Secondly, secularization is a relative concept and it refers to the idea of religion losing its social, cultural, institutional and political significance. Therefore by definition we accept the idea that secularization does not develop in a vacuum. Put differently, there would not be the notion of secularization if religion did not exist. This is also to say that secularization is by definition a dialectical process and it is something which develops at the expense of, or against, religion. If this is the case, it is highly likely that secularization would be contested and tried to be reverted. As the mere existence of revivalist movements and other forms of resistance to such processes attests,
secularization does not go uncontested. We have seen one example of this in the case of the response of the *ulema* and other religious groups to secularizing characteristics of modernization reforms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ottoman society. Accordingly, in order for secularization to survive, it needs to be protected in the face of these contestations which will require conscious mobilization at material and discursive levels. Furthermore, the scope of the notion of secularization is broad as the existence of a marginalized socially insignificant secularized institution would not be considered secularization *per se*. Many such secular, if not secularist, institutions in the East and in the West existed in pre-modern times. As the etymological root of secularization which is a verb (secularize) suggest secularization is about the expansion of the secular. Such an expansion in the face of contestations can only be possible with collective action.

As a result, I argue, secularization cannot be fully understood without reference to human action even if we accept that the beginnings of these processes can be attributed to unintended consequences of other socio-historical transformations. This applies to the secularization processes in the Ottoman Empire, too. It started as an unintended consequence but eventually and inevitably it prepared the conditions for the birth of a secularist ideology and a secularist movement which I describe in further detail below. Therefore, I argue that the birth of a secularist movement was the unintended consequence of the earliest modernization reforms without which social and political institutions would not be able to advance and maintain their secularist characters.
Between the Two Worlds: The Young Ottomans and Westernization

One of the major transformations during the Tanzimat reforms was the shift in the power structure within the Empire. Pre-Tanzimat reforms were largely undertaken with the incentives of the Sultans (e.g., Selim III and Mahmud II) while Tanzimat was mostly designed and implemented by the new bureaucrats who were growing in number and executive power who were educated in the newly established modern technical schools in Europe and schools established in their image in the center of the Empire. The growth of the new bureaucracy was reflected in the emergence of Bab-i Ali (Sublime Porte) an area in the vicinity of the royal Topkapı Palace housing newly established offices filled by the new class of bureaucratic elites (Findley, 1980). Some of these bureaucrats also served as ambassadors in European capitals, London and Paris in particular (Hanioğlu, 1995; Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). Chief among them were Mustafa Reşid Pasha, Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha. All three men served as Foreign Ministers and Grand Viziers and they led the implementation of Tanzimat reforms in successive terms (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). Midhat Pasha was another Grand Vizier who led the Tanzimat Era reforms (Weiker, 1968). Although Midhat Pasha did not serve as an ambassador in European capitals, he stayed albeit briefly in Europe for travelling and studying.

One of the common characteristics of these bureaucrats was their admiration for European culture and their desire for westernizing the Ottoman society. They acquired most of these ideas through their exposure to the Western culture when they were students in Europe (almost exclusively in Paris) and when they were students in
Westernized educational institutions at home. The Ottoman state took measures to minimize the Ottoman students’ exposure to revolutionary ideas during their stay in Paris. For example these students were required to stay only with fellow Ottoman students and to speak only Turkish and Arabic among themselves (Hanioğlu, 1986, p. 12-13). Nonetheless, these students gradually became more interested in cultural and political matters more so than the technical instructions for which they were recruited. Some of these students did not shy away from engaging in sociopolitical debates in the contemporary French society. Turning back to Istanbul, some of these students were more revolutionist than expected by their reformist sponsors in the bureaucracy. These students were increasingly becoming critical of the bureaucracy in addition to the shared criticism of the traditional forces.

One of these students was İbrahim Şinasi (1826-1971), son of an artillery sergeant (Özdalga, 2013, p.4). Following his high school education and serving as an office clerk in the new bureaucracy, Şinasi was sent to Paris in his early twenties by Mustafa Reşit Pasha to study public finance and literature. Before going to Paris, Şinasi had already learned French from a French renegade (Brummet, 2000, p. 78) in addition to Arabic and Persian he had learned previously. In his four-years-long stay in Paris he was able to mix with the post-revolutionary intellectuals, poets, libertarian ideologues such as Alphonse de Lamartine (Ersoy, 2006, Mardin, 1962, p. 252-253) and with orientalists including Ernest Renan (Özdalga, 2013, p.4). Returning to Istanbul in 1853, he had a short tenure in Meclis-i Maarif (Council of Education). Şinasi left his position in the bureaucracy and chose to continue in the area of literature and journalism. With
his friend Agah Efendi, he started the publication of the first civilian newspaper Tercuman-i Ahval (Interpreter of Events) in 1860 (Somel, 2010). One year later, Şinasi started publishing his own newspaper Tasvir-i Efkar (Representation of Opinions) in 1862 leaving Tercuman-i Ahval to Agah Efendi (Zürcher, 2004, p.68). Tasvir-i Efkar proved to be a success for Şinasi as it reached a circulation of about 24,000 copies (Karpat, 1973, p. 47). As a strong proponent of Westernization, Şinasi published his ideas and literary works in his writings. He also published the works of other Ottoman literati and the translations of Post-Enlightenment ideas of European intellectuals in in Tasvir-i Efkar. Thusly he became one of the first civilian prominent intellectuals outside the bureaucracy who supported westernization (Mardin, 1962, p. 254-255; Ersoy, 2006).

His ideas were a mixture of idealization of Western notions and practices and criticism of the problems in the Ottoman society including the bureaucracy. Like many other reformist intellectuals of his time, Şinasi did not criticize the religion of Islam. Indeed, some (Ex: Mardin, 1962, p. 268) consider him to be a religious person. However, his literary works reveals that ideas nourished by the Enlightenment including humanism, rationalism and to a lesser degree materialism were ingrained in his thinking. Below are excerpts from a poem he wrote in 1856 in appraisal of the reformist Mustafa Reşid Pasha.

ODE

[…] 
Good and evil are discerned by the light of reason
As colors are revealed by the sun’s radiance
A fact: Constant struggle reigns among the natural powers of the living
The strong vanquishes the weak by sheer oppression and force

To ward off oppression, human reason has installed the laws
That, in their power, represent truth and justice

Some men of wisdom say truth and justice comprise religion
That they shackle the carnal mind and all its terrible vice

The pen and the sword, safeguards against man
Who, himself, is the chief enemy of truth and justice

The pen and the sword: the scribe and executioner of reason
One marks out, and the other spells riddance

Is it too much to call you the prophet of civilization?
Fanaticism menaced by your astounding presence

O, president of the republic of virtuous people
Tell me, do I deserve to remain enslaved by men of ignorance?


Given that Şinasi was educated in France and interacted with the
contemporary French intelligentsia, it is not difficult to trace the philosophical and
ideological underpinnings of his discourse to the ideas of the French Enlightenment.
That is why I think that Şinasi’s exaltation of reason in this poem as the criterion for
discerning good and evil can better be understood as part and as a consequence of the
intellectual trend of rationalism which emerged in the Enlightenment movement and
prevailed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in European societies.
In the descriptions of Redwood (1976, p. 199), reason was “eulogized, apostrophized, invoked and venerated as the means by which human beings can make sense of the true nature of the world around them and solve their problems. As such, reason was a powerful tool that could lead human beings to truth and light.” The emphasis on reason as the ultimate means for knowing the truth and for the legitimization of individual and social action, according to Himmelfarb (2005, p. 152), was stronger in the French Enlightenment, more so than it was in the Enlightenment of other Western societies including the British and the American. Such an emphasis on reason had dialectical, emancipatory and revolutionary dimensions. Exaltation of reason in the Enlightenment, for Himmelfarb, was related to the Enlightenment movement’s distaste for the authoritarian (Catholic) Church. The use of reason unrestrained by the doctrinal and political forces of the Church represented emancipation from the restraints of this establishment.

The enlightenment's dialectical approach to reason was epitomized in the discourse of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In his article What is Enlightenment, Kant (1954) contended that,

[…] [E]nlightenment requires nothing but freedom--and the most innocent of all that may be called "freedom": freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters. Now I hear the cry from all sides: "Do not argue!" The officer says: "Do not argue--drill!" The tax collector: "Do not argue--pay!" The pastor: "Do not argue--believe!" Only one ruler in the world says: "Argue as much as you please, but obey!" We find restrictions on freedom everywhere. But which restriction is harmful to enlightenment? Which restriction is innocent, and which advances enlightenment? I reply: the public use of one's reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring enlightenment to mankind. (p. 1072)
Şinasi did not explicitly criticize the religion of Islam as a force against the public use of reason. His explicit discourse regarding this matter was that the Western civilization was based on reason (intelligence) and the religion of Islam, too, is based on reason. However, the reasonable side of this religion was curtailed over time by false beliefs, traditions and customs (Aydın, 2005) which, for him, gave rise to ignorance, as he implied in another poem he wrote in 1857 and published in 1862 in praise of Mustafa Reşid Pasha who was one of the major architects of the Tanzimat.

[...]

In the universe, the gift of life has been bequeathed with equity
For humankind, knowledge and reason bestow honor and dignity

Life, honor and property; the candles of our heart undimmed
As your justice is a globe, shielding it against tyranny’s wind

You liberated us, who were enslaved by oppression
Around our necks, ignorance weighed like an iron chain

A declaration of freedom for humanity, your law
It lets the sultan know his place, your law


The verses above are obviously a testament to his dislike of the traditional establishment. Şinasi explicitly directs his criticism to the Sultan and praises Mustafa Reşid Pasha for limiting the Sultan’s authority starting with the declaration of Tanzimat. Şinasi is not that much explicit in terms of criticizing religion but he suffices to say that the reforms of Mustafa Reşit Pasha brought emancipation from the iron chains of ignorance. This sounds to be as a criticism of traditional religious
thinking which I think drives from the Enlightenment movement, albeit in an apologetic way.

Hints of the materialist side of the Enlightenment are also present in these poems, especially when he refers to the idea of constant struggle among the forces of life in nature. In this regards, Şinasi was among the pioneers of Ottoman intellectuals who started using ontological and scientific concepts such as natural laws in the modernist sense. Obviously, the influence of post-French Revolution ideals such as liberty, equality, justice, life, honor and dignity are present in these poems, too. Although not present in the verses quoted above, the concept of “nation” (millet) with its post-French revolution connotations was used for the first time by Şinasi according to Berkes (1964, p. 198). Berkes also considers Şinasi to be the father of the constitutionalist movement in the Ottoman Empire (1964, p. 198).

Another idea presented in these poems which is worthy of consideration is the conception of human civilization. Şinasi, in a poetical way, regards Mustafa Reşid Pasha as the prophet of civilization who, in the way I see in Şinasi’s words, opened the path of perfection in the conditions of life pertaining to this world. Therefore, I see in these poems a glimpse of the idea of progress which had been nourished in the Enlightenment movement. We will see in the following sections that the impact of the Enlightenment and the French revolution was not limited to Şinasi. Most of the intellectuals of the nineteenth century who shared similar backgrounds in modern education in the Ottoman Empire shared similar perspectives.
İbrahim Şinasi was also one of the pioneers of Westernization in literature and arts (Aydın, 2000). The first modern theatrical play Şair Evlenmesi (The Wedding of a Poet) was written by him and published in 1860 (Halman, 2008, p. xviii). Şair Evlenmesi was a satirical criticism of both traditional practices (i.e., marriage) and the arrogance and ostentatiousness of the new elite. Publication of Şair Evlenmesi was one of major milestones in the transition E. J. W. Gibb (1905) observed from Persianism to Westernism which started with the first wave of modernization reforms (cited in Berkes, 1964, p.26). Western ideas and Western social and political materials, according to Demircioğlu (2009, p.137-138) were spread into the society at large with this shift from Persianism to Westernism in both content and style. Translation of European literary and philosophical works which grew significantly during this period also played a similar role parallel to the increase in the number of newspapers, journals and books published (Demircioğlu, 2009, p. 137-139).

In addition to his contributions to the introduction of Western ideas and literary styles into the Ottoman society, Şinasi also played a significant role in the emergence of a new class of literary modernizers and political activists. Some of these activists such as Namık Kemal started publishing their ideas in Şinasi’s newspaper Tasvir-i Efkar. As a response, Grand Vizier Ali Pasha implemented Nizamname-i Ali a code giving him the authority to apply censorship over the press (Mardin, 1962, p. 20). Wary of persecution after publishing articles criticizing government policies and the authoritarian bureaucrats (Somel, 2010, p. 127) and because of his involvement in a
plot against Grand Vizier Ali Pasha, Şinasi escaped to Paris in 1865 (Mardin, 1962, p. 12).

![Figure 1. İbrahim Şinasi](image)

Şinasi left the editorship of the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar* to Namık Kemal (1840-1888) who would later become one of the leading ideologues and reformists in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Namık Kemal was born in 1840 in the city of Tekirdağ, one of the closest cities to Istanbul (Özdoğru, 2002, p. 598). Unlike like Şinasi and many other Ottoman reformists in the nineteenth century, he did not receive education in Europe. Indeed, Namık Kemal received very little formal education as he stayed with his grandfather who served as a government officers in different parts of the Empire. While they were in the Eastern province of Kars, Namık Kemal studied Sufism. In Sofia, he learned Arabic and Persian (Hanioğlu, 2002, p. 145). It is not known how he learned French but he started working at the official Translation Office (Tercume Odası) in 1863 with the influence of Mustafa Reşid Pasha (Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 131).
As Czygan (2008, p. 43) described, well-educated young men who worked at this newly established office (*Tercume Odası*) had the opportunity to observe foreign affairs of the state and, more importantly, they were able to acquaint themselves with the intellectuals of French enlightenment such as Montesquieu, Fenelon and Rousseau. It was Namık Kemal, for example, who, during his work at this office, translated Montesquieu’s *L’Espirit des lois* (The Spirit of Laws) (Czygan, 2008, p. 43), a book of political theory which discusses, among other things, the nature of different political systems (e.g., republican, monarchical and despotic), political liberties and the laws regarding religion (Montesquieu, 2002).

At the same time, Namık Kemal got acquainted with İbrahim Şinasi who was publishing the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar*. He started writing articles in *Tasvir-i Efkar* mostly about social problems including women's education (Hanioğlu, 2002). In this respect, Namık Kemal was the first Ottoman intellectual who wrote an article about education of women (Türesay, 2013, p. 232). When Şinasi fled to Paris in 1865, Namık Kemal assumed the position of the editor for this newspaper through which he criticized corruption, authoritarianism and other arbitrary practices of the administration (Somel, 2003, p. 210). He also publicized his criticisms of the bureaucratic elite for the superficiality of their reforms, their negligence of the real civilization and progress and for their blind imitation of the Western culture (Aydı̇n, 2013, p. 36).

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6 See Berkes (1962, p. 199).
There were intellectuals other than Namık Kemal who publicly criticized the political establishment for similar reasons. Some of these dissidents including Mehmed Bey, Nuri Bey, Reşad Bey, Ayetullah Bey and Refik Bey in addition to Namık Kemal met in a picnic in the summer of 1865. According to Mardin (1962, p. 11), almost all of these men had at some point in their lives worked at The Translation Office (Tercume Odası) and all of them were “nurtured in the ways of the West”. Although Namık Kemal was already famous because of his literary works, the leading figure among them was Mehmet Bey who was educated in Paris. When Mehmet Bey returned to Istanbul, he became a strong proponent of constitutionalism and democratic representation (Mardin, 1962, p. 12). Davison (1963, p. 189) suggest that Mehmet Bey was also the organizer of the picnic as they gathered in his father’s villa.

In this picnic, these six men decided to secretly establish the society of İttifak-ı Hamiyet (the Patriotic Alliance) with the goal of transforming the absolutist rule to a constitutional one (Mardin, 1962, p. 11-24; Berkes, 1964, p. 264; Ergil, 1987, p. 29).
Their criticism of absolutism in the Empire was not directed only towards the rule of the Sultan but also to the higher echelons of the Sublime Porte bureaucracy including the Grand Vizier who at that time was Ali Pasha. In order to study and utilize as a guide for the development and operation of their own organization, one of these six men, Ayetullah Bey, brought with him books about the Italian Carbonari secret revolutionary societies of the early nineteenth century (Mardin, 1962, p. 11-21) which influenced other revolutionary movements in France, Spain and Portugal (Galt, 1994). Not much is known about the rest of the details of how this secret society (İttifak-ı Hamiyet) started its mobilization but we know that it started growing in number and influence the months following its establishment. In about two years, several hundred people including Prince Hamit and the crown prince Murat, the two nephews of the Sultan, had connections with the secret society (Zürcher, 2004, p. 69). For Lewis (1963, p. 190), this might be because Prince Murat’s acquaintance with Namık Kemal.

Despite its growth, İttifak-ı Hamiyet was not the only frontier of opposition. There were influential figures in the oppositional movement who were not directly involved in the İttifak-ı Hamiyet. Ziya Bey⁷ (who later became known as Ziya Pasha) (1825-1880) and Ali Suavi⁸ (1838–1878) were among them. Ali Suavi was the editor of the newspaper Muhbir (Reporter) which started its publication in January 1867. Through this newspaper, Ali Suavi openly criticized the government especially about its response to the rebellion in the Isle of Crete (Reider, 2010, p. 29). Ziya Bey also

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⁷ Lewis (1963, p. 190) suggest that Ziya Pasha may have been part of the İttifak-ı Hamiyet.
⁸ Mardin (1962, p 25) reports that Ali Suavi cooperated with İttifak-ı Hamiyet.
regularly published articles in *Muhbir*. Like Ali Suavi he openly and harshly criticized the government (Göçgün, 1987, p. 6).

Mustafa Fazıl Pasha (1830-1875), one of the brothers of the Egyptian Khedive and a grandson of Muhammad Ali Pasha, was also part of the opposition who allegedly joined the ranks of dissidents because the Ottoman state challenged his right to rule in case his brother died before him (Zürcher, 2004, p. 69). Mustafa Fazıl Pasha left for Paris, where he was educated during his formative years, and wrote an open letter to the Sultan about his analysis of the reasons of the decline of the Empire and his suggestions of how to stop it (Mardin, 1962, p. 276-282; Zürcher, 1984, p. 6)⁹. In this letter, he emphasized the importance of the protection of human rights and liberty adding that it is not religion which will establish these principles. For Mustafa Fazıl Pasha, the function of religion is limited to spiritual matters and salvation in the hereafter.

> Religion rules over the spirit, and promises other worldly benefits. But that which determines and delimits the laws of the nation is not religion. If religion does not remain in the position of eternal truths, in other words, if it descends into interference with worldly affairs, it becomes a destroyer of all as well as its own. (As cited in Berkes, 1964, p. 208-209)

Namık Kemal and his friends translated the letter and printed 50,000 copies at the shop of a French printer and clandestinely distributed them in Istanbul (Mardin, 1962, p. 39). They also published this letter in newspapers *Muhbir* and *Tasvir-i Efkar* (Davison, 1963, p. 207).

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⁹ Ebuzziya Tevfik (1973, p. 21) alleged that the letter was written with the help of a Greek man named Revelaki.
The tension between the political establishment and the opposition including the members of the İttifak-ı Hamiyet further escalated in the aftermath of the publication of the letter. Around the same time, Tasvir-i Efkar was closed together with Muhbir by the order of Ali Pasha after the publication of an article by Namık Kemal criticizing the involvement of foreign powers in Cretan Affair. The leadership in the Sublime Porte decided to exile Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha and Ali Suavi to remote provinces in the Empire. When Mustafa Fazıl Pasha, a man of considerable wealth who at that time was in self-imposed exile in Paris, heard about the ruling, he secretly invited the three men to join him in France to continue their fight against “the dangers threatening the state.”

Below is an excerpt from Mustafa Fazıl’s letter.

It is high time now for working hard with your pens towards the salvation and prosperity of the nation in the broad area of freedom. I am inviting you to Paris to embark upon this duty together with you. I am hopeful because of your patriotic sentiments that this invitation will be accepted.

Because I am sure that it will not be misinterpreted at all, I am confidently informing you that I have enough money ready to support you until we reach our goals and for other writers you would like to bring with you. (Ebuzziya Tevfik, 1973, p. 65. Trans. ZN)

Namık Kemal and his friends escaped with a French steamer soon after receiving the invitation and reached Paris at the end of May 1867 to join Mustafa Fazıl Pasha (Lewis, 2001, p. 154) whose residence in Paris was a meeting point for the critics of the Ottoman Empire starting from 1866 (Davison, 1963, p. 190). The other members of the secret society of İttifak-ı Hamiyet who remained in Istanbul conspired to topple the government of Ali Pasha in June 1867 under the leadership of Mehmet Bey. When
the plot was discovered, Mehmet Bey, Nuri Bey and Reşad Bey, too, fled to Paris (Rieder, 2010, p. 29).

On August 10, 1867, Mustafa Fazıl Pasha, Ziya Bey (Ziya Pasha), Namık Kemal, Nuri Bey, Ali Suavi, Mehmed Bey, Reşad Bey and Rıfat Bey established the society of Yeni Osmanlılar (the Young Ottomans) (Mardin, 1962, p.44). They called themselves La Jeune Turquie in French (Mardin, 2006, p. 165) which later became known as Jeunes Turcs in France (Zürcher, 2004, p. 70). Ziya Bey was chosen as the leader because he was the eldest (Reider, 2010, p.34). The group adopted the principles presented in Mustafa Fazıl Pasha’s famous letter to the Sultan as the program of their newly established society. The group also decided to revive the Newspaper Muhbir (Mardin, 1962, p. 44). Mustafa Fazıl Pasha provided the financial support to the society of the Young Ottomans including the payment of monthly stipends to the group members (Mardin, 1962, p. 47-48; Karpat, 2001, p. 127).

One of the first things the Young Ottomans did was to revive the newspaper Muhbir. Ali Suavi was sent to London for this task because of the stricter regulations and censorships in France (Reider, 2010, p.34). Soon after, members of this society were forced to move to London when Sultan Abdulaziz made an official visit to France (Somel, 2003, p.328). In London, they also started bringing out the broadsheet Hürriyet (Liberty) in addition to Muhbir. Copies of these papers were smuggled or mailed to Istanbul where they (especially Hürriyet) were widely read (Mardin, 1962, p. 51; Çelik, 1994, p. 162-177).
For the most part, *Muhbir* was under the control of Ali Suavi with whom Namık Kemal and Ziya Bey had some disagreements\(^\text{10}\) (Mardin, 1962, p. 362, Karpat, 2001, p. 127). *Hürriyet* remained with Namık Kemal and the other members of the Young Ottomans. In *Hürriyet*, they published their reformist ideas and their criticisms of the political establishment in the Ottoman Empire including the Sultan (Ansari, 2004, p. 30; Andrews, 1996, p. 230). Chief among the writers of *Hürriyet* was Namık Kemal whose writings in exile mainly consisted of contemporary French ideals of constitutionalism and liberty which were supported by references to the tradition of Islam. Below is an excerpt from an article he published in *Hürriyet* in 1868 in London.

[J]ust as all individuals have the natural right to exercise their own power, so too conjoined powers naturally belong to all individuals as a whole, and consequently in every society the right to sovereignty belongs to the public.

A shar' [religious law] proof of this claim is the following legal rule:

If the people of a town gathered and appointed someone as qadi [judge] over themselves to judge cases arising among them, the judicial activity of this person could not be valid; judicial authority would still belong to the qadi appointed by the state because jurisdiction is a right of the government. But if the people of a town gathered and pledged allegiance to someone for the sultanate or caliphate, this person would [indeed] become sultan or caliph, while the previous sultan or caliph would retain no authority whatever, because the imamate is a right of the umma [the Islamic community].

[...] There are two major means to keep the state within the limits of justice. The first is to emancipate the fundamental principles of the administration from the

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\(^{10}\) These three men had good relations in the beginning. Mustafa Fazıl Pasha accepted the peace offer proposed by the Sultan during his visit to France (Mardin, 1962, 45-46), returned to Istanbul and accepted to take a ministerial position in the government. Ali Suavi stopped taking the monthly stipend from Mustafa Fazıl. He also criticized Namık Kemal and Ziya Bey and questioned their political integrity because they didn’t join him in his protest. In return, Namık Kemal and Ziya Bey harshly criticized Ali Suavi for being an unstable troublemaker and for being arrogant (Karpat, 2001, p. 127).
domain of implicit interpretations and to make them public. [...] The second is the method of consultation, which takes the legislative power out of the hands of the members of the government.

 [...] the right of the sultan … is to govern on the basis of the will of the people and the principles of freedom. His title is "one charged with kingship" [sahib al-mulk], not "owner of kingship" [malik al-mulk, a title reserved for God in the Qur'an, [3: 26]. His Imperial Majesty the sultan is heir to the esteemed Ottoman dynasty, which established its state by protecting religion.

It was thanks to this fact that the [Ottoman sultan] became the cynosure of the people and the caliph of Islam. The religion of Muhammad rejects the absolutist claim to outright ownership [of the state] in the incontrovertible verse [Qur'an, 40:16]: "Whose is the kingdom today? God's, the One, the Omnipotent." (Namık Kemal, July 20, 1868, p. 1-4. Trans. Hanioğlu, 2002, p. 144-148).

I think that this text very well demonstrates Namık Kemal’s attempts at bridging the perspectives such as the ideas of sovereignty of the people, constitutionalism, representation, consultation, equality and justice he might have developed from reading French thinkers like Montesquieu and Rousseau with the Islamic tradition he was acquainted with. It seems here as though that he was presenting the latter as a source of legitimization for the realization of the first. The ideas he presents sound very much like the Western ideals of democracy and human rights but the references he makes are to the tradition of Islam including the Quran. However, one might argue that perhaps Namık Kemal was sincere in his religious defense of these principles and that he took an apologetic position here just as he defended Islam in Renan Mudafaanamesi,11 a rebuttal he wrote against orientalist

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11 An introductory note by M. Fuad Köprülü in the 1962 publication of Renan Mudafaanamesi from Millî Kültür Yayınları claims that this rebuttal was not published during Namık Kemal’s life (d. 1888). It appeared in the press for the first time in 1910 and was quickly sold out.
Ernest Renan who in a lecture he gave at La Sorbonne in 1883 argued that the religion of Islam is antithetical to rational thinking, scientific development and progress (See, Renan, 2011).

Namık Kemal is also considered as one of the pioneers of the development of nationalism in the Ottoman Empire (Özkan, 2012, p. 39). In the development and the use of the concept vatan (fatherland) as a territorial entity, he was one of the leading intellectuals, perhaps the most influential one, in the history of Turkey. He abundantly used the concept of vatan adorned with patriotic sentiments in his literary works which earned him the epithet of Vatan Şairi (The Poet of Fatherland). Below is an example from his poem Vatan Türküsü (The Song of the Fatherland).

The honor of the fatherland and the protection of the pious,  
Are strengthening the bayonets in our hands.  
Will you make the nation despair and hopeless?  
March, you the brave ones, to protect the fatherland!.

(Namık Kemal, 2004 [1872], p. 97. Trans. ZN)

Namık Kemal’s use of the concept vatan (fatherland) was not purely nationalistic in the modern secularist sense. He employed the notion of vatan side by side religious notions as we see in the verses quoted above (i.e., “protection of the pious”). In this sense, Namık Kemal can be considered as a pan-Islamist who saw the Ottoman Empire and the Turks as a representative of the religion of Islam. In other words, his Ottomanism was a kind of pan-Islamism. Like other pan-Islamist Ottoman intellectuals who came after him, Namık Kemal sought to contribute to the unity of Muslims under the leadership of the Ottoman Empire (Qureshi, 1999, p.22; Farsoun, 2013, p. 67; Keddie, 1983, p.22; Keddie 2005, p. 11; Karpat, 2001, p.18). Below is an
excerpt from the article “The love of the fatherland is part of faith” Namik Kemal (1868) published in Hürriyet which also attests to the mixture of his Pan-Islamism and Pan-Ottomanism and to a limited degree ethnically defined Turkish nationalism.

Figure 3. The first page of the newspaper Hürriyet (Liberty) including an article titled “The love of fatherland is part of faith” by Namik Kemal, (London, June 29, 1868)

I am thankful to Ercument Asil for sharing his archive of electronic copies of the newspaper Hürriyet including this image.
Let us look once to see how strong a state we were and how great an ummah [the community of Muslims] we were.

[...] Aren’t the Turks the nation (millet) that once had the madrasas in which scholars like Al-Farabi [Alpharabius], Ibn Sina [Avicenna], Al-Ghazali and Zamakhshari\textsuperscript{13} disseminated knowledge? A land which once enjoyed the status of the world capital (payitaht-i alem) is now trembling under the pressure of a few communities of bandits. And an ummah which once gained the status of the teachers of the world (muallim-i alem) are now [ironically] astonished as if they have seen a miracle by seeing the most basic outcomes of education (marifet). This is telling us the degree of the lack of zest and motivation on the side of those who are keeping our leadership under their dictatorships. (Namık Kemal, June 29, 1868, p. 1-2. Trans. ZN)

Karpat (2001, p. 329) contends that the emphasis on territory (i.e., fatherland) in the construction of nationhood as it was exemplified in the poems and other works of Namık Kemal had implications with regard to secularization because such an accentuation is an indication of the worldly character of the nation. Governments, never before in the history of the Muslim World, emphasized attachment to a territorial unity (Karpat, 2001) even though territorial categorizations such as Dar al-Harb (the Abode of War) vs Dar al-Islam (The Abode of Islam) were used in matters pertaining to jurisdiction and politics (Özkan, 2012). Lewis (2004, p. 88) suggests that such a shift towards the promotion of attachment to a territorial unity could be explained by pragmatic purposes. The Empire was facing the threat of falling apart with the rise of nationalism in post-French revolution era, therefore, the Ottomans could only use the territorial reference which was the only common denominator of all living in the

\textsuperscript{13} All of these Muslim scholars were of ethnic origins other than Turkish.
Empire as a source of loyalty. For Lewis, Namık Kemal’s *Vatan Yahut Silistre* can be read from this perspective.

In short, Namık Kemal’s ideology was a combination of religious nationalism (Pan-Islamism), participatory democracy, parliamentarism, constitutionalism, individual liberty and progress (Berkes, 1964, p. 214-215; Ismael & Ismael, 2011, p. 82; Grigoriadis, 2012, p. 53) based on his synthesis of the modern Western and traditional Islamic discourse. Some of these ideas which were perceived as threats to the political establishment. After returning to Istanbul from exile in 1870, Namık Kemal started bringing out the Newspaper İbret (The Moral) (Hanioğlu, 2002b, p. 144) and published romantic, patriotic and historic plays (Halman, 2008, p. xx) which proved successful in mobilizing masses. *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (The Fatherland or Silistre) was a poetical play written by him glorifying patriotism, love of the fatherland and martyrdom. The play was staged for the first time on 1 April 1873 in a theatre in Istanbul after which the audience in applause took to the streets chanting slogans like “Long Live Kemal, Long Live the Nation!” This was repeated in the next two stagings of the play. The play was banned and the newspaper Namık Kemal was publishing (İbret) was closed down apparently because the administration including the Sultan (Abdulaziz - ruled from 1861 to 1876) interpreted these developments as a movement against them. Namık Kemal and his journalist friends were exiled to remote areas in the Empire. The Island of Cyprus was Namık Kemal’s destination. (Halman, 2007, p. 105) He was freed by Sultan Abdulhamid II (ruled 1876-1908) and appointed to the commission preparing the first Constitution in 1876. When Abdulhamit II turned
against constitutionalism in the following year, Namık Kemal was exiled again (Hanioğlu, 2002, p. 144) with an administrative duty to Mytilene, a remote island city in the Aegean Sea. He died in exile in 1888.

One of the greatest achievements of Namık Kemal’s legacy was that he was among the strongest voices in the 1860’s and 1870’s in support of constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy. Just as Sultan’s Selim III and Mahmud II saw institutional reform as the way for preventing the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Namık Kemal defended the establishment of a constitutional system as a necessary step for reversing decline of the Empire.

Although they were not as articulate and influential as him, Ziya Pasha (1825-1880) and Ali Suavi (1838-1878) shared similar ideals with Namık Kemal. Ziya Pasha was born in 1825 in the city of Istanbul to a family of a lower rank customs officer (Kurgan, 1963, p. 3). Having studied at one of the academies (Mekteb-i İrfan) established by reformist Mustafa Reşid Pasha, young Ziya started working at the Translation Office. Until the death of Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha in 1858, Ziya also held high rank bureaucratic posts such as the secretary of the Royal Palace and as a governor which earned him the title Pasha. During his bureaucratic work, Ziya Pasha also learned French and involved in the translation of Viardot’s *History of the Arabs and Moors of Spain* and Lavellee’s *History of the Inquisitions of Italy, Spain, and Portugal* (from their French translation) and Rousseau's *Emile* (Mardin, 1962, p. 338-339) and Moliere’s *Tartuffe*. (Kaplan, 2006, p. 4).
Like İbrahim Şinasi, Ziya Pasha praised modernization efforts of Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha in his poems (Mardin, 1962, p. 338). During his bureaucratic work, he also promoted Westernization in administration, literature and arts. He was also critical of some of the traditional practices in the Ottoman society. He, for example, refused to preside over rain prayers during droughts unlike preceding governors and he suggested building dams and irrigation systems instead (Kaplan, 2006, p. 3).

Ziya Pasha was gradually sidelined by Mustafa Reşit Pasha’s succeeding rival Grand Vizier Ali Pasha. This lead him to join in the ranks of the prominent members of the Young Ottomans (Mardin, 1962, p. 338-339) and he escaped with them to Paris and eventually to London. He regularly published articles and literary works in the Young Ottomans’ newspapers Hürriyet and Muhbir. Like Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha sought to produce a synthesis of Islam and contemporary European ideals such as equality, justice and constitutional government. As Mardin (1962, p. 337-359) observed, he was not as consistent and balanced as Namık Kemal in this endeavor. At times, he exalted Westernization and at times he was against it. For example, at one once he defended Westernization in literary forms but he later criticized it. Yet, he until the end of his life he, like Namık Kemal and the other members of the Young Ottomans movement, remained a supporter of constitutionalism and parliamentary system of legislation and administration even though there were nuances in the ways in which they imagined a constitutional system for the Ottoman Empire.
Ali Suavi (1838-1878) was another prominent member of the Young Ottomans movement who was with Namık Kemal and others in exile. Born to a family of a paper merchant in the year Tanzimat was declared (1839), Ali Suavi studied at a rüşdiye in Istanbul and started working as a civil servant at around the age of 13 or 14. Already well-versed in Arabic, he traveled to Mecca for pilgrimage at the age of 17 just before publishing his first book which was about Hanafi jurisprudence. After serving as a madrasa teacher in the town of Simav, Ali Suavi worked as a teacher at a rüşdiye in the city of Bursa. During his stay in Bursa he was also teaching hadith at the Ulu Cami which was the biggest mosque in Bursa. A few years later, Ali Suavi served as the head of the commercial court in Sofia. Upon his return to Istanbul in 1866, he started preaching at one of the central mosques (Şehzade Camii) of Istanbul. Suavi was not an ordinary preacher as he fervently talked about political issues and attracted an audience from the literati (Çelik, 1994, p. 41-65). He was invited by Filip Efendi, an Armenian living in Istanbul, to write in his newspaper Muhbir. Ali Suavi accepted the offer and soon he became the sole contributor of Muhbir. In his articles, Ali Suavi mostly talked about educational reform and criticized the government by the use of western political terminology. In so doing, Ali Suavi caught the attention of the central administration which banished him to peripheral provinces. As a result, he joined the members of the opposition which would form the society of the Young Ottomans in Paris.

Ali Suavi’s collaboration with the Young Ottomans in exile did not last long. Because of his disagreements with the other members of the Young Ottomans like Namık Kemal, he started publishing his own newspapers (e.g., Ulum Gazetesi / Journal
of Sciences) (Çelik, 1994, p. 200-207). After returning from exile with the pardon of Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1876, he served as the director of the Galatasaray Lyceee (Çelik, 1994, p. 310-334). Still voicing his revolutionary ideas and criticizing the ministry of education, he was dismissed from the lycee. The pressure of the British on the Ottoman Empire because of Ali Suavi’s heavy criticism of them also played a role in Ali Suavi’s dismissal (Çelik, 1994, p. 353).

Scholars have agreed about the lack of a coherent system of thought produced by Ali Suavi (Mardin, 1962, p. 360-384) but he is known to be the first to have directly used the concept of democracy in his discourse of reform. He, like his contemporaries such as Namık Kemal, defended Western political ideals like democracy and constitutionalism with reference to the Islamic tradition and history. However, he also argued that true democratic and constitutionalist ideals can only emerge in the society of the God-fearing, faithful and morally responsible individuals. The first Muslim community in history, for him, was a truly democratic community but contemporary Muslims societies were far from those ideal times.

Below are excerpts from the article *Democracy: Government by the People, Equality (Demokrasi: Hukumet-i Halk, Musavat)* written by Ali Suavi in 1870 while he was in France.

As is known, the forms of government are monarchy (sultanate), aristocracy (government of notables), and democracy (government by the people, equality). During the early days of Islam, the form of government was democracy. That is to say, there was no sultanate, sultan, or king, but rather equality. [...]

They had no fear other than the fear of God, they had no work other than serving God, they had no institutions (tanzimat) other than good morals, in sum
they were men of God. The system of equality that Plato had merely imagined became a reality in their time.

Now a French party, which has been growing day-by-day in the name of freedom and equality, wants to annihilate the monarchy and create equality in a democratic system. But they do not have men of God among them—that is to say, they do not have an overpowering force in their hearts such as fear of God. [...] 

**Question:** Should the administration in Istanbul remain as it is now?

**Answer:** No, it should not. What should be done?

The parliamentary [form of government should be adopted], that is to say government based upon the principle of consultation—the form which France has adopted this method in this very year 1870 A.D. What is the relevance of this method for us? In essence, our High Council [of Reforms] (Meclis-i Ali-i [Tanzimat]) should be enlarged, a chamber of deputies elected by the people should be opened, and the ministers should be held accountable. The accountability of ministers means that their conduct of policy is discussed in the chamber of deputies. The members examine and question it, and the ministers respond. In the end, if the majority of the deputies give their approval with a majority of votes, the ministers keep their offices. And if the majority vote turns out to be against the conduct of policy by the ministers, then they leave office. (Ali Suavi, May 17, 1870, p. 1083-1107. Tans. Harioğlu, 2002, p. 138-143).

Ali Suavi was perhaps the most adamant about bringing parliamentary democracy and constitutionalism to the Ottoman Empire. He strived in his writings to convince the Ottoman elite for such a transition. Nonetheless, he did not shy away from directly attempting to change the political system of the Empire from atop. He organized an uprising with the intention of replacing Sultan Abdulhamid II with his nephew Murad V who seemed Ali Suavi to be more supportive of constitutionalism. With several hundred supporters, mostly immigrants from the Balkans, he invaded the place in May 1878 and reached the inner circle of the Sultan Abdulhamid’s residence.
By that time, police chief Hasan Pasha and his troops reached the palace and circled Ali Suavi and his men. Ali Suavi was killed in the unsuccessful coup attempt (Çelik, 1994, p. 382).

The Young Ottomans was a journalistic movement (Mardin, 1962, p. 80). What united them was their opposition to the heavy handed rule of the Sublime Porte under the grip of grand viziers Ali and Fuad Pashas (Davison, 1963, p. 173) and more importantly their demand for constitutional government and administration (Berkes, 1964, p. 205). In this regard, the Young Ottomans constituted the nucleus of a civil reformist movement in the late Ottoman society supporting the idea of the transition to a constitutional government by blending contemporary Western ideals with traditional Islamic notions. However, they lacked a consistent strategy of mobilization for the realization of their goals. Confession of Nuri Bey, one of the prominent members of the Young Ottomans, attests to the incoherence and disorganization of the movement.

I had fallen into much doubt as to the possibility of realizing the aims for which we were working when I began to ponder the fact that a country would not easily change on the wishes of a few men. Realizing that without education the finding of truth would be impossible, I began to consider myself a student who should take this opportunity of going to Paris to study. Mehmed believed that the true establishment of the liberal regime in our country would only be possible with the support of a national movement. Ziya, on the other hand, believed that the realization of our aims would depend our aims would depend upon gaining power by reconciliation with the Sultan. Agah thought that in order to arrive at key positions in the furtherance of our aims, we should try to reach reconciliation with the government. As for [Namik] Kemal, he was convinced that “the Ottoman nation was loyal to its Ottoman rulers; with us nothing was done unless the Padişah really wanted it … and therefore the ways of the opinion that there was no means other than … bringing to the throne a Padişah determined to enforce the desired reforms. Rifat . . . insisted that any attempt should be carried out according to law: Reşad . . . was conscious of the fact that we were in an insoluble dilemma, and, without making any
recommendation, found the most useful course of action in the enrichment of his knowledge through as much study as possible. [Ali] Suavi’s craziness, his moral faults, and his selfish aims, were known to all of us, and one of our concerns was to treat him tactfully to prevent him from any kind of action that would create bad impressions against all of us. (As quoted in Berkes, 1964, p. 207-208)

Even though they introduced secular notions such as nationalism, the idea of progress and the emphasis on the supremacy of reason into the sociopolitical lexicon of the late Ottoman society, it is not easy to say that the society of the Young Ottomans was a secularist movement. In fact, some among the Young Ottomans like Ali Suavi were explicitly religious. Namık Kemal openly defended Islam against Ernest Renan’s orientalist claims. Therefore, it is not plausible to say that the Young Ottomans formed a secularist movement and that they had an agenda of secularizing the society. It is also not easy to argue that the reformist discourse and efforts of the society of Young Ottomans secularized the late Ottoman society. They did not voice the need for secularization and in many cases they defended the idea of returning to “true Islam.”

However, the Young Ottomans advocated Westernization, albeit not in a wholesale fashion, of major institutions primarily including the government, legislation and education. Therefore, it is safe to say that they, perhaps unintentionally, took part in the expansion of secularist notions and ideas and thusly prepared the conceptual and discursive tools and other necessary conditions for the development of a secularist movement. As I discuss in more detail below, secularist ideas and activists were more prevalent in the subsequent generations of reformists primarily including members of the Young Turks Movement and the Committee of Union and Progress.
The role of the Young Ottomans’ publications in the spread of their ideas and in their mobilization strategies was indispensable. Reformist ideas of the Young Ottomans reached the new bureaucratic elite and the students in modern educational institutions with the help of their publications (Züchrer, 2010; Çelik, p. 1994, 162-177; Kasaba, 2006, p. 210). In so doing, they played a major role in setting the agenda of public debate in the society and aspired other reformists. Perhaps the most influential change inspired largely by the Young Ottomans was the birth of the loosely organized constitutionalist movement which, according to Hanioğlu (2008, p. 112), consisted of “conservatives and liberals, ulema and the secularists, Muslims and Non-Muslims, bureaucrats and their opponents”. The constitutionalist movement succeeded in the promulgation of the first constitution (Kanun-i Esasi - Basic Law) and in the establishment of the constitutional monarchy in 1876. Members of the Young Ottoman society such as Namık Kemal were directly involved in the drafting of the constitution.

Although he was not among the founding its founding fathers, it was Ahmet Şefik Midhat Pasha, commonly known as Midhat Pasha (1822-1884) who brought momentum to the Young Ottomans movement and to their constitutionalist ideas by giving them a strong footing within the ranks of the government. Born into a family of religious scholars in 1822, Ahmet Şefik Midhat received traditional education in private and at a madrasa (Somel, 2010, p. 188). Starting his civil service at an early age as an apprentice at bureaucratic offices (Masters, 2009, p. 378) including the secretariat of the grand vizier (Houtsma, 1993, p. 481), Ahmet Midhat rose to prominence after successfully giving an end to the disruptive activities of robber bands in the Balkans in
his early thirties (Somel, 2010, p. 188; Houtsma, 1993, p. 481). He spent six months in 1858 traveling for study in European capitals such as London, Paris, Brussels and Vienna. Three years later, he was given the title of Vizier and appointed as the governor of Niš. His extraordinary contributions to the development of the newly established Danube province (in today’s Bulgaria) further increased his fame (Master, 2009, p. 378). When his policies attracted the hostility of the Russians, Ahmet Midhat Pasha was recalled to Istanbul where he met the adversity of Grand Vizier Ali Pasha. Consequently he was sent to the peripheral province of Baghdad (Houtsma, 1993, p. 481; Masters, 2009, p. 378).

The fortune of Ahmet Mithat changed especially after the deaths of Grand Viziers Fuad Pasha (1814-1869) and Ali Pasha (1815-1871) who dominated the Sublime Porte and gained ascendancy over Sultan Abdulaziz (Mithat, 1903, p. 62). Ahmet Midhat Pasha became the grand vizier for the first time in 1873. During his gubernatorial work, Mithad Pasha also took initiatives in administrative and legal reforms (Somel, 2010, p. 188) and became strongly interested and involved in the constitutionalist movement. Thus, he emerged as one of the most prominent and politically strongest leaders in the constitutionalist movement and became a champion of constitutionalism (Karpat, 2002, p. 505).

**Declaration of the First Constitution (1876)**

Sultan Abdulaziz was dethroned in 1876 in a coup d’état largely organized by Midhat Pasha, Hüseyin Avni Pasha (War Minister), Şeyhülislam Hayrullah Efendi and Süleyman Pasha (the director of the Military Academy). He was replaced with his
nephew, Sultan Murat V, who promised the establishment of a constitutional parliamentary system (Zürcher, 2004, p. 73) Murat V was closer to the constitutionalist movement including the society of the Young Ottomans and he seemed sympathetic to the establishment of a constitutional regime (Berkes 1964, p. 223). A few days after Murat V’s ascension to the throne, Abdulaziz was found dead in his cell because of the cuts in his ankles which remains as a contested issues as to whether it was a suicide or a murder. Two weeks later, an army captain named Hasan killed Hüseyin Avni Pasha during a cabinet meeting because of his personal grievances with him. He also killed several other members of the cabinet during the incident. All of these turbulences further deteriorated the mental state of Murat V who started showing strong signs of a nervous breakdown (Zürcher, 2004, p. 73). In addition, the slower pace of efforts for drafting the constitution under his rule worried the constitutionalist movement. Eventually, he was dethroned three months after his ascension and replaced by his younger brother Abdulhamid II who promised the establishment of a constitutional system. Thus, the Hamidian Era, the 33 years long period (1876 to 1908) in which Abdulhamid II reigned had started.

Soon after Abdulhamid II’s ascension to the throne, a commission was established for drafting the constitution. The commission consisted of 28 members (16 bureaucrats, 10 ulema and 2 members of the military). Midhat Pasha served as the head of the commission (Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 174) which also included several Young Ottomans (Hanioğlu, 2008, p. 116) such as Namık Kemal (Mardin, 1962, p. 339). Declared in December 1876, Kanun-i Esasi (The Basic Law), the first constitution of
the Ottoman Empire, established a bicameral parliamentary system in which the Sultan remained as the sovereign. The lower house of the parliament, *Meclis-i Mebusan* (The Chamber of Deputies) consisted of elected representatives of Ottoman provinces. The upper house, *Meclis-i Ayan*, included notables directly elected by the Sultan.

The first constitution of the Ottoman Empire which was inimical of the Belgian Constitution of 1831 stated that,

> All subjects of the Empire are called Ottomans, without distinction whatever faith they profess; the status of an Ottoman is acquired and lost according to conditions specified by law. (Article 8)

and that;

> All Ottomans are equal in the eyes of the law. They have the same rights, and owe the same duties towards their country, without prejudice to religion. (Article 17). (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 386)

Non-Muslim minorities also had representatives in the parliamentary system. There were 44 non-Muslim deputies in the parliament who were elected from the majority Christian provinces and 4 Jewish deputies in the lower house of the parliament. A total of 71 deputies were Muslims. Christian minorities were over represented in the lower house when adjusted for the respective size of the Christian population in comparison to the size of the Muslim and Jewish communities. The Sultan appointed 26 members to the upper house and 5 of them were non-Muslims (Shaw & Shaw, 1971, p. 182).

The *ulema* had a mixed reaction to the enactment of the first constitution and the establishment of the parliamentary monarchy. On the one hand, they agreed that consultation in administration was the Qur’anic teachings but on the other hand they
asserted that consultation was limited to Muslims alone. Thus, they showed their disapproval of non-Muslims’ participation in the new parliamentary system (Hanioğlu, 2008, p. 116).

According to the 7th article, the Sultan had the right to summon and dissolve both chambers of the parliament if he so willed. When a group of members of the parliament started openly criticizing the government especially its war efforts against the Russian expansion from the West and the North East during the infamous 1877-1878 war, the Sultan dissolved the parliament in early 1878 which ended what is called the First Constitutional Era in the history of the Ottoman Empire (Shaw & Shaw, 1971, p. 187). This was ensued by a three decades long reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II which is called as the Hamidian Era.

**Secularism on the Rise: The Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress**

Hamidian Era was a continuum (Howard, 2001, p. 69) and, for some, it was the climax and culmination of the legal, administrative and educational reforms of the Tanzimat (Lewis, 1961, p. 174-5; Jung & Piccoli, 2001, p. 47). Centralization of the government was further accelerated in this era with the help of the expansion of the telegraph lines and more importantly with the expansion of the modern school system and into the central and peripheral provinces of the Empire (Davison, 1990, p. 137-138). For the first time in the Ottoman History, teaching Ottoman Turkish was made mandatory in both Muslim and Non-Muslim schools (Evered, 2012, p. 86). More than 1000 kilometers of railroads were also constructed during the Hamidian Era (Bilmez,
All of these developments contributed to growth of the central authority of the state and to the authority of the Sultan. In addition, Sultan Abdulhamid II emphasized his title as the Caliph of Muslims which theretofore remained as a symbolic title in the Ottoman dynasty since the sixteenth century (Howard, 2001, p. 69; Brown, 2013 p. 36).

Hamidian Era was also characterized by the Sultan’s diplomatic maneuvers such as forming strategic alliances in the increasingly hostile international arena and by secretive and authoritarian policies in domestic affairs. Literary censorship, for example, was one the ways in which Sultan Abdulhamid II wanted to maintain his authority especially against the subversive power of the opposition (Ertürk, 2011, p. 36). The growth of the centralizing authority of the Sultan and his attempts at controlling the opposition facilitated the transformation of the nature of reformist discourse in the Ottoman Empire. Criticism of the reformists before the rule of Abdulhamid II were mostly, if not exclusively, directed at the bureaucratic elite of the Sublime Porte. The authority and policies of the Sultan were not strongly criticized and challenged. The growing power of the Sultan in the Hamidian Era partially and gradually marginalized the power of the Sublime Porte bureaucracy (Hanioğlu, 1995, p. 123-129). Concomitant with the rise of the power of the Sultan, a new frontier of opposition in the Ottoman Empire was formed against the rule of Abdulhamid II. This movement is generally known as the Young Turks Movement\textsuperscript{14} (Jön Türkler) most of

\textsuperscript{14} Not to be confused with the Young Ottomans
which was united under the banner of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti).

Their attitudes towards the Sultan was not the only distinct character of the Young Turks Movement and the Committee of Union and Progress, which led the revolution of 1908. Previous proponents of reform the Young Ottomans such as İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha advocated selective borrowing of Western values and institutions which they argued were included in the original teachings of the religion of Islam. Being a broad movement of reform and opposition, the Young Turks, however, included a new group of activists who advocated a full-scale borrowing of Western ideals (e.g., enlightenment, progress, and development), culture, science, technology and social and political institutions. As Hanioğlu (1995b, p. 18) observed, this new elite were not concerned about reconciling Western civilization with Islam at all. They rather propagated the replacement of religion with science. Henceforth, there was a major shift in the discourse of the new generation of reformists, the Young Turks.

It is relatively easier to trace back the origins of the establishment and development of the Young Ottomans Movement. However, drawing a clear picture of the history and social movement dynamics of the Young Turks movement is not an easy task even though the Young Turks movement had a much greater direct impact in the political life of the late Ottoman society as it gave birth to the Committee of Union and Progress which dominated the political life of the ottoman society in the aftermath of the Young Turks revolution of 1908.
This complexity can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, this movement emerged in the Hamidian Era which was characterized by the Sultan’s close surveillance and scrutiny of the oppositional movements and their publications. Being afraid of persecution, many of the Young Turks especially those who established the Committee of Union and Progress acted clandestinely especially in the formative years of the movement. Secondly, the Young Turks movement was a very broad and loosely organized intellectual oppositional movement composed of different, and in some cases conflicting, ideological fractions dispersed around the center and the periphery of the Empire as well as in different parts of Europe in exile. All of these complexities make putting the pieces of the puzzle together a challenging task.

Even though there were variations in the Young Turks’ attitudes towards religion, Islam in particular, some of the prominent figures in the Young Turks movement especially those who established the Committee of Union and Progress were not hesitant to directly or indirectly criticize religion especially the religious establishment.

What united the broad movement of the Young Turks, including the religious and secularists among them was their call for reform in the face of the growth and expansion of the Europeans and the material and immaterial aspects of their culture. Their demand for a constitutional system in the context of the growing power of Sultan Abdulhamid II was also a unifying element within the Young Turks movement. What divided the Young Turks was about (1) their analysis of the reasons of the decline of the Muslim civilization and the Ottoman Empire in particular in the face of the
expansion of Western civilization and issues regarding (2) the structure of political system (centralist vs. decentralist) to be established, (3) the character of the revolution (violent vs. nonviolent), (4) the role and place of religion in their analysis of the problem and in their proposed solutions and (5) the political identity (Pan-Ottomanism vs. Pan-Islamism vs. Pan-Turkism) drew the lines of the axis of separation and in some cases conflicts within the Young Turks movement.

As observed by Hanioglu (1995b, p. 13-16), three groups emerged along the lines of issues pertaining to the role and place of religion. The first of these two groups were those who unapologetically advocated the development and application of Western ideas and institutions in the Ottoman Empire. This group was not concerned about the protection of religious and cultural heritage of the Muslims. As we will see later, some among them saw religion as the reason of the decline of Muslims and as an obstacle to the modernist conceptions of progress and development. The second group was at the opposite end of the spectrum which openly rejected the adoption of Western culture and institutions altogether based on the idea that they were alien to the teachings of the religion of Islam. This second group was perhaps the least influential segment in the Young Turks movement both in terms of its size and socio-political impact. The third group which was in the middle of the spectrum was the politically liberal and religiously conservative group which rejected the idea of wholesale borrowing from the West but favorably looked at borrowing some of the Western societies’ culture especially including democratic institutions such as the parliament, constitutionalism and modern technology. This third group’s ideology was similar to the reformist ideas
of the Young Ottomans. As such, the Young Turks movement can also be considered, at least partially, as a continuum of the Young Ottomans movement. That is probably why some scholars have considered the Young Ottoman and the Young Turks movement as one single movement (e.g., Yavuz, 1972).

The fact that the Young Turks movement included various fractions does not necessarily mean that each side were equally dominant. There is an agreement among the scholars who specialized in the study of the Young Turks movement that the secularist side was the most dominant and the most influential fraction (Ex: Hanioğlu, 1995b, p.13-16). Şerif Mardin, for example, in his famous book “Jön Turklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895-1908” (Political Ideas of the Young Turks, 1895-1908) (1983) focused on secularist figures of the Young Turks Movement such as Beşir Fuat, Ahmet Rıza Bey and Abdullah Cevdet.

Being aware of the complexity of studying the Young Turks Movement, I think that paying greater attention for the exploration of the secularist side, -of course without losing sight of the more conservative sides- of the Young Turks Movement would be more appropriate for the purpose of this dissertation and especially for this chapter which is dedicated to the study of the development of secularist movement in the late Ottoman society and subsequently in the formative years of the Turkish Republic.

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15 This book was translated into English and published with the title “Religion, Society and Modernity in Turkey” (Syracuse University Press, 2006).
The Committee of Union and Progress and Nationalism

In 1887 six students in the Military Medical Academy established a small society called İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (the Committee of Union and Progress) which did not survive long. In May 21st of 1889 which was the centennial year of the French Revolution, another small group of students (less than 15) from the same school including İbrahim Temo (1865-1939), Abdullah Cevdet (1868-1935) and Mehmed Reşid (1872-1919) established the secret society of İttihad-i Osmani (the Ottoman Union) against the repressive policies of Sultan Abdulhamid and with the goal of restoring the constitution (and expanding freedom (Gawrych, 2006, p. 141; Muradoğlu, 2001 p. 93; Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 256; Bleda, 1979, p. 59). The society grew steadily in various types of modern schools in Istanbul. They eventually established connections with the prominent members of the Ottoman opposition in Europe. Chief among them was Ahmet Rıza (Nezir-Akmeşe, 2005, p. 33), the positivist ideologue who had been publishing the journal Meşveret since 1895 (Shissler, 2003, p. 86). These students asked Ahmet Rıza to be the leader of their political movement which he accepted. Ahmet Rıza suggested Nizam ve Terakki (Order and progress) for the name of their society but the young students slightly modified it and made it İttihat ve Terakki which is translated as the Union and Progress (Kuran, 1956, p. 136). Thenceforth, the committee changed its name to İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (The Committee of Union and Progress). Eventually Ahmet Rıza became the leader of the committee which held its first congress in exile in France in 1902.
The name of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) was a reflection of how different ideas and historical developments in Europe affected the Ottoman society. The notion of “unity” as it appeared in the name of the Committee of Union and Progress was an indication of being influenced by the rise of centralized nation states and the rise of nationalism after the French Revolution of 1789. The notion of “progress”, however, is a testament to the influence of ideas (e.g., positivism and materialism) nurtured by the Enlightenment movement among the intelligentsia and reformist circles of the late Ottoman society. As it is described above, Ahmet Rıza initially insisted on keeping the name of the society “The Committee of Order and Progress” instead of making it “The Committee of Unity and Progress” perhaps because he wanted to remain loyal to the positivist principles which he thought was key for the progress of the Ottoman Empire.

I see a sequential difference between the notion of “unity” and the notion of “order” in this context. It seems to me that the first (unity) was about preserving the integrity of the Empire against immediate internal threats such separatism and ethnic nationalism and against the pressure of expanding powers of European nations including Russia. The second notion (order), however, is about the reorganization of the society to prepare it for survival, development and prosperity in the long run. It seems that those who insisted on having “unity” instead of “order” in the name of their organization prioritized immediate threats over long term projects. Another reason might be that they saw a greater potential in the notion of “unity” for mobilizing masses. I also see a difference between these two notions in terms of the formation of a
basis of identity and the constructions of an ideology. The suggestion of including the	onotion of “unity” instead of “order” in the name of this reformist (or revolutionary)
movement is related to prioritization of issues relating to the formation of a basis of
identity over the formation of an ideology regarding the nature of social, economic and
political change. Despite these nuanced differences, the notions of “unity” and “order”
converge at a point where both of them emphasize the significance of the nation and
especially of the centralized state. That is why it is not surprising to see that besides
being one of the pioneers of positivism\(^\text{16}\), Ahmet Rıza was also a pioneering intellectual
in support of centralism and Turkish nationalism.

Another indication of how the formation of the Committee of Union and
Progress was strongly influenced by ideas and ideologies developed in the West was
this organization’s appropriation of “Hürriyet, musavat, uhuvvet, adalet” (Liberty,
equality, brotherhood and justice) as their motto. Apparently, in making this motto, the
founding fathers of the Committee of Union and Progress [hereinafter referred to as the
CUP] added the concept of justice (adalet) to the slogan of the French Revolution
“Liberté, égalité, fraternité” which gave them the inspiration.

As the Young Turks movement grew, so did the number of perspectives
regarding the character of proposed solutions to save the Empire from decline. There
were two major frontlines of competing perspectives within the Young Turks
movement. One of them was the liberalist and decentralist fraction organized around
the ideas of Prince Sabahaddin (1877-1948), a nephew of Sultan Abdulhamid II whose

\(^{16}\) See the next section of this chapter for a detailed description of Ahmet Rıza’s positivism.
father escaped with his family to Paris as a result of personal grievances with the Sultan (Somel, 2003, p. 235). Prince Sabahaddin, who became one of the leading figures in exile, proposed the development of (1) private enterprise including foreign investment and (2) political decentralization which was supported by Ottomanism as an overarching multi-religious and multi-ethnic identity (Ersoy, 2010, p. 333). Such ideas of Prince Sabahaddin were mostly welcomed by minorities such as the Armenians in the political opposition circles. Prince Sabahaddin’s liberalist ideas which were influenced by French sociologist Frederic Le Play’s disciple Edmond Demolins (Berkes, 1964, p. 309-310; Hanioğlu, 2001, p. 82) were confronted with the centralist and nationalist ideas which were proposed by Ahmet Rıza and other “unionists”. Ahmet Rıza’s side denounced foreign investment in support of a nationalist and statist development and modernization project (Howard, 2001, p. 73-74). Prince Sabahaddin, together with the Armenian participants of the congress in 1902, favorably looked at foreign intervention and violent action for the purpose of dethroning Sultan Abdulhamid II. Ahmet Rıza’s side rejected these ideas fearing that they might threaten the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire (Zürcher, 2004, p. 88).

The rift between the two fractions became more apparent in the first congress of the Young Turks in 1902 in Paris (Ramsaur, 1965, p. 65-75). Although neither side came out of the congress triumphantly, it was Ahmet Rıza’s positivist, nationalist and secularist side which dominated the agenda of the Ottoman opposition in the long run and led the 1908 coup d’état (Zürcher, 1984, p. 17-18).
After the congress, Prince Sabahaddin established the society of Teşebbüsü Şahsi ve Ademi Merkeziyet Cemiyeti (The League of Private Enterprise and Decentralization) (Tütengül, 1954, p. 26) and started publishing the newspaper Terakki (Progress) in Paris (Tökin, 1965, p. 34). There were several other similar committees established for the promotion of Prince Sabahaddin’s ideas as well (Aksoy, 2008, p.
82). On the other hand, Ahmet Rıza and his friends slightly modified the name of the CUP and founded Osmanlı Terakki ve İttihat Cemiyeti (The Ottoman Committee of Progress and Unity) in response to Prince Sabahaddin’s side (Kabasakal, 1991, p. 33).

Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti (The Ottoman Society of Liberty), another oppositional organization, which was established in in 1906 in Salonica by the future leaders of the CUP including Talat Bey who at the time was a telegraph officer and army majors Enver Bey and Niyazi Bey (Howard, 2001, p. 74). Having included a large group of officers who were based in the Ottoman Army around the vicinity of Salonica established communications with Ali Riza whom they favored over Prince Sabahaddin. They merged with Ali Riza’s Osmanlı Terakki ve İttihat Cemiyeti and the name was reverted to İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti in the Spring of 1907 (Zürcher, 2004, p. 90; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 90).

In late 1907, the Young Turks held a second congress in Paris in order to establish cooperation between various fractions of the opposition. This congress was presided by the unionist Ahmet Rıza, the liberalist Prince Sabahaddin and K. Maloumian who represented Dashnaks which was an Armenian revolutionary organization. The congress failed to unite all sides under one framework of leadership although the final statement declared that Sultan Abdulhamid II had to be dethroned by any means necessary including the use of force. Thus, the second congress was a step further in the sense that it made it easier for the majority to accept the need for violent forms of action. Even Ahmet Rıza who was against violent action compromised at the
end of the congress but he later reverted back to his original position in this matter (Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 265).

Prince Sabahaddin was not the only rival of Ahmet Rıza in the Young Turks movement. Murat Bey (1854-1917), who had already risen to prominence in the opposition circles while he was still in Istanbul, arrived in Paris in 1896 and was elected to the leadership role of the CUP. However, Murat Bey’s leadership did not last long as the Sultan convinced him to return to Istanbul and help him implement the reforms. For some (e.g., Zürcher, 2004, p. 88-89), this was a tactical move by the Sultan to weaken the opposition.

Born in 1853 in the Dagestan region (in Russia) and having graduated from the gymnasium in Sevastopol where he studied French philosophes’ books such as Montesquieu’s Spirit of Laws, and Rousseau’s Social Contract and the works of historians like Guizot and Draper (Berkes, 1964, p. 307), Murat Bey moved to Istanbul after the invasion of the Dagestan region by the Russians. He started his professional career at ministerial offices in the Sublime Porte. Murat Bey, then, served as a teacher at the Mülkiye (Civil Service Academy) where he was admired by his students for his liberalist analysis of the history of human civilization, a perspective he acquired from reading Guizot (Mardin, 1983, p. 77-82; Zürcher, 1984 p. 15). His students, heavily influenced by him at the Mülkiye, staged scenes of a revolution during the breaks between class sessions (Ayni, 1945, p. 7). This was an indication of politicization of the modern educational system which was not limited to the civilian schools but also included medical and military academies. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), a former soldier
and the founder of the Turkish Republic, was also educated in these increasingly politicized military academies where he, for example, involved in the publication and circulation of a handwritten periodical in support of libertarian ideas (Karpat, 2000, p. 92-94).

Before moving to Paris, Murat Bey was publishing the liberalist newspaper *Mizan* (Balance) because of which he was given the epithet *Mizancı* (the owner of Mizan, or balanced man). Thereafter, he was known as Mizancı Murat. In this newspaper, Mizancı Murat did not openly criticize the Sultan. However, he harshly criticized the Sublime Porte bureaucracy including ministerial offices. At the same time he was more supportive of the idea of preserving the post of the Caliphate and the Islamic character of the Ottoman society. In this regard, he was considerably more religious than Ahmet Rıza (Zürcher, 2004, p.87). Perhaps this was the reason why he was elected for the leadership of the CUP when we went to Paris. His discourse was more likely to appeal to masses in a society where religious sensitivities were still very strong. A large segment of the CUP was still religious as well. However, Ahmet Rıza resumed his leadership role of the CUP following the return of Mizancı Murat to Istanbul after making peace with Sultan Abdulhamid II.

Ahmet Rıza’s nationalism was not purely ethnic nationalism and the depth of his nationalism was surpassed by other intellectuals in the Young Turks movement. Yusuf Akçura, a Tatar who was born in the Russian city of Ulyanovsk in 1876 and migrated to Istanbul with his mother at the age of seven, emerged as one of the staunch defenders of ethnic nationalism. In the article *Üç Tarz-tı Siyaset* (Three Kinds of
Politics) he published in the journal Türk in 1904, Yusuf Akçura compared the potential of Pan-Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism as alternative ways for the benefit of the Ottoman state. In his opinion, Pan-Ottomanism would not produce unity in the long run because minority ethnic communities would seek their own independence even if the Ottoman state tried its best to keep the Empire as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity. Therefore, Pan-Ottomanism was not a viable option.

The non-Muslims, too, did not want it [the establishment of Ottoman Nation], because all of them had their own past, their own independence and their own governments in that past which was now being glorified because of the revival of national consciousness. Muslims and especially the Turks had ended their independence and had destroyed their governments. [...] These invigorated subjects, whose wisdom was now brighter than their masters' and who understood that some of the hands extending towards them were really sincere, did not fail to recognize the role played on the formation of this new policy by the pressure of Western powers, who, for their own interests, sought the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The interests of some of them were probably with the idea of the Ottoman nation, yet they were also prone to exalted emotions rather than cool calculations. Thus, literally none of them wanted to form a new national unity by letting themselves merge with those whom they looked upon as their enemies. (Yusuf Akçura, 1992 [1904], p. 141)

As the second option, Pan-Islamism would make it difficult to form alliances with some of the great powers of Christian Europe which the Empire desperately needed and more importantly Pan-Islamism would alienate non-Muslim minorities such as the Armenians and the Greeks living within the borders of the Empire.

[T]he interests of Islam do not completely coincide with Ottoman and Turkish interests, because the strengthening of Islam would lead in the end to the separation of some non-Muslim peoples from the state. The rise of the conflicts between the Muslims and the non-Muslims would lead to a partition of the present-day Ottoman commonwealth and its weakening. (Yusuf Akçura, 1992 [1904], p. 139)
Therefore, it would be more realistic for the Turks, who shared triple identities as Ottomans, Muslims and Turks, to focus only on Pan-Turkism which would extend the power of a Turkified Ottoman Empire to other places outside the Empire (i.e., Central Asia and Eastern Europe) where ethnically Turkish people live as minorities.

Now, let us survey the benefits of the policy of Pan-Turkism (Tevhid-i Etrak). By such a policy all Turks living in the Ottoman Empire would be perfectly united by both ethnic and religious bonds and the other non-Turkish Muslim groups who have been already Turkified to a certain extent would be further assimilated. Those who have never been assimilated but at the same time have no national feelings would be entirely assimilated under such a program.

But the main service of such a policy would be to unify all the Turks who, being spread over a great portion of Asia and over the Eastern parts of Europe, belong to the same language groups, the same ethnicity and mostly the same religion. Thus there would be created a greater national political unity among the other great nations. In this greater national unity the Ottoman state as the most powerful, the most progressive and civilized of all Turkish societies, would naturally play an important role. There would be a Turkish world in between the world of the Caucasian and the East Asian ethnicities. Recent events suggest that such a division of the world into two great blocs is imminent. In between these two blocks the Ottoman state could play a role similar to that which is played by Japan among the East Asian ethnicities. (Yusuf Akçura, 1992 [1904], p. 145-146)

Figure 6. Yusuf Akçura
Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935), was not the only intellectual of Turkish origin hailing from the Caucasus to have contributed to the development of ethnic nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and other parts of the Turkic world like Azerbaijan. As it was remarked by Zürcher (2003), it was the mostly “the children of borderlands” [sic] within the Young Turks Movement who contributed significantly to the emergence of ethnically defined Turkish nationalism. Yusuf Akçura together with other intellectuals such as Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869-1939), Mehmed Emin Resulzade (1884-1955), Sadri Maksudi Arsal (1878-1957) and İsmail Gasprinsky (1851-1914) who were from the Caucasus region played significant roles in the expansion of ethnically defined Turkish nationalism (Gökçek, 2008, p. 47-48 and p. 113; Özkaya, 2011; Kösebalaban, 2011, p. 41). I agree with Zürcher (2003) when he says that these intellectuals “were sensitized earlier to the problems of identity and political loyalty” (p. 280). Some of these “children of borderlands” lived long enough to continue contributing to the development and application of ethnically defined Turkish nationalism during the formative years of the Turkish Republic which was established in 1923 (Şimşir, 1995; Shissler, 2003).

Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) who is known as one of the “fathers of Turkish nationalism,” was born in the Eastern city of Diyarbekir which was at the crossroads of Turkish and other Near Eastern civilizations and in a place where the Kurds were the majority (Zürcher, 2003; Parla, 1985, p. 10; Heyd, 1981). His nationalism, however, was slightly different than the nationalism of Yusuf Akçura. Ziya Gökalp’s perception
of religion was greatly influenced by sociologist Emile Durkheim who looked at religion from a functionalist perspective.

Ziya Gökalp (2013) saw a potential in the religion of Islam for contributing to the formation of an overarching socio-political identity. For him Islam could be one of the fundamental elements for developing and maintaining the solidarity of the Ottoman society. However, religion could best function as a source of social solidarity if it was blended with Turkish nationalism. That is why he defended the potential of the synthesis of Muslim and Turkish identities against the idea of forming an identity with the synthesis of Ottomanism and Islam (Grigoriadis, 2012, p. 47-48; Üngör, 2011, p. 31). For him, religion bears the potential for establishing a moral basis of the society while nationalism supplies the framework of cultural norms. However, Ziya Gökalp attributed more power to nationalism than he did to religion in terms of their respective potentials for the production of a basis of social solidarity and for maintaining a broad based society. He saw religion as a force which should be subordinate to the supreme ideal of nationalism which is the most powerful form of collective consciousness in modern times (Parla, 1985, p. 36-37 and p. 61). In this regard, the religion of Islam, in Ziya Gökalp’s perspective, provides patriotic and fraternal sentiments to the members of the nation (Heyd, 1950, p. 99) and thus helps produce a “national-patriotic morality” which is based on love and commitment to the nation and to the national culture (Parla, 1985, p. 61). In such a formulation, religion is confined to its spiritual boundaries and does not intervene in the operation of secular institutions (Parla, 1985, p. 40).
Therefore, Ziya Gökalp did not see nationalism only as the overarching political identity, he also saw it as a source of individual level morality based on the sense of duty and commitment towards the nation which is supported by religious sentiments. In this sense, nationalism transforms the individual because it protects the self from individualist commitments and aspirations.

Today, a Turk is aware of [his/her] duty to protect [himself or herself] from behaviors which might harm the nation and to strive towards the elevation of it to the highest levels. That is why, [he or she] abstains from personal aspirations and individualist inclinations and struggles to be exclusively concerned about the sacred duties [towards the nation]. The Turkish youth have very well understood that the most sacred duty today is the unification of the Turks beyond and above all other social ideologies. Ottomanism and Islam can only be secured after this unification. (Ziya Gökalp, 2013 [1918], p. 40-41)

Such a transformation of the self has implications with regard to the secularization of the individual consciousness although it does not fully exclude or reject religious sentiments and commitments. As Juergensmeyer (2008, p. 20) argued,
secular nationalism and religion are alternative ‘ideologies of order’ which ascribe meaning and order to day-to-day life and offer alternative perspectives of how to make sense of the world from their unique coherent perspectives. Besides determining the reason of existence of the social and political order, these two competitive worldviews also provide guidance to individuals about the ideal form of existence in the world and give instructions about the relationships with other persons and the society at large. Because the loyalty of the individuals in it is first and foremost to the nation and not to religion or any other entity, secular nationalism positions individuals within a specific place in the universe and within a particular history.

In his formulation, Ziya Gökalp prioritized nationalism over religion. The supreme ideology in his thought was nationalism which defined the principal character of the social and political order of the Ottoman society with respect to this geographical entity and determined the supreme commitments of the individuals living in this society. Therefore Ziya Gökalp’s nationalism had secularist implications with regard to the political character of the society and moral orientation of the self. As it is described above, the discourse of Yusuf Akçura prioritized secular nationalism over religious identity more so than Ziya Gökalp. These two intellectuals significantly contributed to the development of secularist nationalism both in the late Ottoman society and in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. Furthermore, their impact was not limited only to the secularization of the political ideology of the state and moral orientation of individuals. They also took part in the secularization of knowledge especially including history, linguistics and literature.
Yusuf Akçura who advocated the appropriation of an ethnically defined Turkish nationalism over Pan-Islamism and Pan-Ottomanism was also the first president of the Association of Turkish History (Berktay, 1992, p. 169). The establishment of the Association of Turkish History in early 1930’s was a major sign of the secularization of historical thought. Instead of constructing a historical narrative of the common history of Muslims, the founders of the new Turkish Republic pursued ways of constructing unique historical narratives of the Turks dating back to pre-Islamic times. Kitromilides (2006, p. 50) contended that a similar process of secularization of historical thought was also experienced in the Orthodox Christian nations of the Balkans in modern times. For him this was a reflection of the impact of the Enlightenment historiography which was based on secular aspirations and values. Nationalism was the framework through which these secular values and aspirations were structured. Thusly, a new form of collective nationalist historical identity was constructed.

Ziya Gökalp strongly emphasized the development of Turkish as a language of culture, literature and science in his books *The Principles of Turkism*, (1968, p. 76-77) and *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization* (1959). He argued that the official and literary language of the Ottoman Turkish which borrowed words, expressions, terminology and grammatical rules heavily from Arabic and Persian is far from being the national language because it is unintelligible by common people. In this form, it is not possible to make it the language of all. Therefore, it is necessary to use the simple form of Turkish which is spoken by “the ladies of Istanbul” and which is used in the folk literature. Words borrowed from other languages primarily including Arabic and
Persian which have synonyms in Turkish should be abandoned. Foreign words should be borrowed only in the absence of their equivalents in Turkish.

Perhaps, the Young Ottomans especially Namık Kemal did not anticipate that their religious nationalism (i.e., Pan-Islamism) in which religious sense of belonging was prioritized over forms of identity would be followed by a secularist form of nationalism in which religion could find a place in this new paradigm only if it was subservient to ethnically and culturally defined nationalistic aspirations. Rather than advocating an ethnically defined nationalism the Young Ottomans propagated religious nationalism (i.e., Pan-Islamism). In their nationalism religion was at least to certain degree prioritized over ethnically defined nationalism. However, the nationalism of the Young Turks starting with Ahmet Rıza and continuing with Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp was gradually evolving into a purely secularist sense of belonging.

**The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Counterrevolution of 1909**

Despite disagreements and conflicts within it, the CPU gradually grew into a large underground network of revolutionaries dispersed around the Empire especially in the southern parts of Balkans. Merging with the secret society of Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti (the Ottoman Freedom Society) in 1907 provided the CUP with “the revolutionary manpower” (Hanioğlu, 2001, p. 4; Zürcher, 2004, p. 89) which was critical for the success of the revolution prepared by the committee. In a short period of time following the merger with Ali Rıza’s side, Talat Bey, Enver Bey and Niyazi Bey who had established the Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti steadily grew in power and influence in the CUP in greater part because they united disorganized fractions of the
opposition in Macedonia. They were also successful in mobilizing army officers (Howard, 2001, p. 74) and even villagers in the Balkans (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 108).

Its successful outreach to the officers in the army was gradually changing the character of the CUP as it was increasingly overtaken by the soldiers although it had started as an organization mostly composed of civilian intellectuals (Dündar, 2006, p. 37). Historian Strachan (2001) reports that of the 505 members of the CUP in Salonica alone, 309 were officers in the army by the year 1908. In another account, (Nezir-Akmeşe, 2005, p. 51), there were 2000 soldier members of the CUP only in the Third Army which was based in the Balkans. Strict rules of membership to the CUP was applied at that time. Only those who studied in the modern military schools (Mektepli / Schooled) could be accepted into the organization by invitation. The soldiers who did not go through the military academies (Alaylı / Risen from the ranks) were not accepted (Nezir-Akmeşe 2005, p. 51). In the observation of Feroz Ahmad (2014, p. 75), when they are compared to the Alaylı soldiers, Mektepli officers were much more akin to secularist ideals because of the education they received. These officers spread the ideology of the CUP and regularly recruited new members in the army. Thusly, the CUP had gradually turned into an organization of soldiers.

Even though other factors such as the tax revolt of 1906 and 1907 in different parts of the Empire ripened the conditions for a popular revolution (Kansu, 1997), it was again the soldiers in the CUP who eventually executed the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and forced the Sultan to reinstitute the constitution of 1876 and the Ottoman Parliament. The period following the reinstitution of the constitution is called as the
Second Constitutional Era. In the execution of the revolution, the direct role of the civilian founding fathers of the CUP members especially those who were in exile were limited. That is why most of them were sidelined and marginalized afterwards.

The CUP established a political party after the revolution and won 60 of the 275 seats which was enough to be declared as the winners of the election in 1908 (Kayalı, 1995, p. 271). Even though the margin of the CUP’s success in these elections was narrow, they were still triumphant because they were the ones who brought about the revolution. That is why they also enjoyed a moral authority over other political parties such as the Ahrar Fırkasi (The Liberal Party) which was formed shortly before the 1908 elections by the liberalist such as Prince Sabahaddin. Although they were the strongest opponents of the CUP, Ahrar Fırkasi lost the elections decisively (Özbudun, 1987, p.334). However, Ahrar Fırkasi continued to be the strongest opposition after the elections as they were able mobilize the upper class centralist and liberalist elite against the CUP which consisted of lower-middle class soldiers and bureaucrats (Ardıç, 2012, p. 149; Hanioğlu, 1995).

After the election, the CUP did not form the government because the members of the CUP who carried out the revolution were junior officials and young bureaucrats who lacked experience and seniority status which was critical in the traditional Ottoman Society (Zürcher, 2004, p. 94). The CUP also lacked a dominant presence in the parliament since they only controlled less than a quarter of the seats (Özbudun, 1987, p. 334) even though they won more seats than any other party. Consequently, they left the formation of the government to the existing Grand Vizier Sait Pasha. Yet,
the CUP remained as the guardians and the watchdogs of the newly established constitutional system and as a very influential pressure group. Even though they were not the government, they behaved as the de facto owners of it. They intervened in matters of governance when they deemed necessary (Ahmad, 1969; Zürcher, 2004, p. 94). However, there were several major offices controlled by the CUP. For example, Ahmet Rıza who played a significant role in the establishment of the CUP was the president of the lower house of the Ottoman Parliament.

Several oppositional political parties and organizations were also established after the revolution by groups who were antithetical to the CUP (e.g., Mutedil Hürriyet Perveran Fırkasi / The Party of Moderate Liberals) and by the former members of the CUP who found the party’s position far too liberal or too conservative (e.g., Ahali Fırkasi / People’s Party) (Zürcher, 2004, p. 101). There were also religiously motivated organizations established in this context. Among them was the İttihad-ı Muhammedi Cemiyeti (The Society of Muslim’s Unity) organized around the leadership of Naqshbandi Şeyh Derviş Vahdieti (1869-1909) who was editing the newspaper Volkan (Volcano). It was mostly the lower ranking ulema and a group of Sufi leaders who were mobilized around İttihad-ı Muhammedi Cemiyeti and the newspaper Volkan (Ardıç, 2012, p. 109). With the aim of establishing a government comprising of more religious members of the parliament and reinforcing the institutions of the Caliphate and the Sultanate, Colonel Sadık Bey who was previously a member of the CUP, left the organization and formed the New Party (Hizb-i Cedid) in 1911 with other dissidents such as Abdulaziz Mecdi Efendi (Yigit, 2014, p. 114; Weiker, 1973, p. 39).
Growing dissent in the aftermath of the 1908 revolution resulted in a counterrevolution attempt which unfolded in the form of a mutiny on 13 April 1909 (March 31st in the Ottoman Rumi Calendar, hence it was known as the 31 March Incident). In the words of Hanioğlu (2008, p.154), the counterrevolution was carried out by “an improbable combination of old regime supporters, Islamists, liberals, and non-Turkish nationalists”. Although Zürcher (2010, p. 82) argues that there is more evidence to support the idea that it was the Liberals who instigated the mutiny, the questions of who and what organization initially planned and organized the counterrevolution is still debated (Kayalı, 2012, p. 29). However, there is a consensus that troops which were still loyal to the Sultan Abdulhamid II, madrasa students, some hojas (lower rank ulema) and serving and dismissed alaylı officers were involved in the mutiny (Zürcher, 2010, p. 76; Hale, 2013 p. 39). There are contentions that Derviş Vahdeti, the editor of the newspaper Volkan and the unofficial leader of the İttihad-ı Muhammedi Cemiyeti supported and encouraged the dissidents when the counter-revolution was unfolding (Shaw, 1977, p. 280; Anscombe, 2014, p. 127). Demanding the restoration of Sharia and the removal of the CUP members from the government including Ahmet Rıza from the presidency of the Lower House of the Parliament and Talat Pasha from the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the revolutionaries were able to take over the capital in one day without any significant resistance from the CUP, the Army or the Sultanate. The Sultan complied with the demands of the crowd. As a result they were able to remove the CUP from power for about 11 days (Zürcher, 2010, p. 76).
In response, the CUP helped organize “the Action Army” (Hareket Ordusu) which marched from Macedonia to Istanbul to suppress the mutiny and to restore the order in the Capital. Mahmut Şevket Pasha assumed the command of the Action Army once it reached Yeşilköy in the vicinity of Istanbul. Mustafa Kemal (the future founding father of the Turkish Republic) who came with the army was the chief of staff of the division which was under the command of Hüseyin Hüsnü Pasha (Hale, 2013, p. 39; Erickson, 2013, p. 9). A close friend of Mustafa Kemal, İsmet Bey (İnönü) who would later become the second president of the Turkish Republic, was also an officer in the Action Army (Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 281). Quickly reaching Istanbul, the Action Army easily restored the order and the power of the CUP by the declaration of martial law (Hanioğlu, 2008, p. 154-155).

Sultan Abdulhamid II was deposed with the accusation that he passively watched the uprisings and facilitated the expansion of the insurrection. He was sent to exile in Salonica and was replaced with his younger brother Murad who ascended the throne as Sultan Mehmed (Reşad) V. Two summary court-martials were immediately established. Derviş Vahdeti was captured as the scapegoat of the revolt and executed by the summary court-martial. These courts also tried and executed large number of other individuals for being part of the uprisings. In addition, many alaylı officers were dismissed from the army in the aftermath of the 31 March Incident and the system of rising from the ranks without being educated in modern military academies was abolished. Such a move made the CUP not only the dominant force in the army (Zürcher, 2004, p. 97-98) but also a very strong player in the Ottoman political life. In
order to fund the reinstitution of the government, military officers were sent to different parts of the Empire to collect taxes, which for Shaw and Shaw (1977, p. 281), contributed to the increasingly authoritarian control of the society by the army.

After the 31 March incident, the CUP took up a more aggressive stance against any kind of opposition and against traditional religious groups and organizations. On the other hand, the 31 March Incident left a long lasting image in the memory of secularist reformists and revolutionaries including the young officers in the army such as Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and İsmet (İnönü) Bey. Therefore, the incident illustrated the growing gap and tension between the secularist and religious groups in the Ottoman and Turkish societies even though the higher ranking ulema and other religious leaders had denounced the uprising as it was unfolding.
The incident was utilized in the following decades by the secularists as an ideological and discursive tool to create an opposite image of the secularist ideals and to present an example for the potential danger of religious individuals and groups who were involved or showed the potential for involvement in politics. Thenceforth, the demand for Sharia had been associated with the image of the 31 March Incident. Similarly, religious groups’ involvement in politics have often been equated with the demand for the implementation of Sharia regardless of whether it was pronounced by those who were involved in politics or not. The derogative terms “irtica” (fundamentalist political reaction) and “mürteci” (fundamentalist reactionary) started to be widely used ever since to label publicly visible religious individuals and groups as threats to the secular regime.

The CUP continued to exert its impact on the Ottoman society especially after winning the 1912 election with a landslide, allegedly by force and by rigging the elections (Zürcher, 2004, p. 103). Although the CUP consolidated power in its hands, the CUP was not able to stop the decline of the Empire. The First World War brought the end of not only the six hundred years long rule of the Ottoman dynasty but also the end of the relatively short lived government of the Young Turks and the CUP. Nonetheless, ideas nurtured by these revolutionary groups continued to exert their impact on the social and political life of the Turkish Republic which was formally established five years after the end of the First World War and one year after the end of the Turkish War of Independence against the Greeks in Western Anatolia.
As I argue in further detail below, it is not easy to claim that the new Republic was a direct continuum of the Young Turk ideology and that of the CUP. However, it is not possible to fully understand the transformation of the Turkish society after the establishment of the Republic without understanding how the ideological undercurrents of the Young Turks and the CUP influenced the new secularist elite either. It is equally important to comprehend what roles did the development and transformation of the newly established educational, political, legal and cultural institutions played in the history of secularization of the Turkish society before and after the establishment of the new Republic.

Transformations witnessed in the late Ottoman society were not limited to the nature of political life and political ideologies. That is why it is also equally important to investigate if and how the development of other forms of ideologies such as positivism, scientism and materialism influenced the late Ottoman society and the Turkish nation. The development of these ideologies were part of other social and political transformations, too. In addition, investigating sociological implications of these ideologies would help us better understand the philosophical foundations of the secularist paradigm which is what this dissertation pays a great deal of attention.

**Science and Secularization in the Late Ottoman Society**

The development of modern sciences in the history of the Ottoman Empire started as part of a pragmatic approach to the reformation of the army. It was later expanded into military academies and other schools which were established to provide modern education to the increasingly growing number of civil bureaucrats needed by
the rapidly centralizing state especially during the Tanzimat. Ideological interpretations of science started to be visible with the establishment of scientific societies and the publication of science journals. The earliest form of the ideological interpretation of science was its promotion as a tool for the advancement of (Muslim) civilization and subsequently as a means to socioeconomic development. Such perspectives of science are best reflected in the development of the idea of progress. In the beginning, the idea of progress was not openly used against religion but it gradually turned into or as a discursive tool in the Young Turk Movement to legitimize social and political transformation away from religion and occasionally as an ideological weapon to attack religion for being an obstacle to progress. In this sense, science was used as part of an alternative social and political philosophy.

The second form of the ideological interpretation of science was its use as a tool for the development of an alternative ontology against religious worldviews. Secularist ontological perspectives such as materialism and naturalism were justified on the basis of scientific evidences by European intellectuals such as D’holbach, Lamarck and Ludwig Büchner who strongly influenced some of the prominent figures in the Young Turks Movement such as Beşir Fuad, Baha Tevfik and Abdullah Cevdet. These ideologues introduced and promoted materialist and naturalist interpretations of science in the late Ottoman society. Below are the short history of how these two streams of ideological interpretations of science developed and their implications with regard to secularization.
Science, civilization and the idea of progress: The human effort to improve the human condition. Münif Pasha (1828-1910) who served as the Education Minister became one of the pioneers who took part in the introduction and dissemination of positive sciences in the Ottoman society. His most influential work was the initiative he took in the establishment of Cemiyet-i İlimiye-i Osmaniye (The Ottoman Scientific Society) in 1861 (Budak, 2011, p.57) iminical of the Royal Society of England (Lewis, 2001, p.130) and the publication the journal Mecmua-i Funun (The Journal of Sciences) in 1862. Members of Cemiyet-i İlimiye-i Osmaniye took the responsibility of publishing Mecmua-i Funun which covered areas such as chemistry, physics, medicine, geology, archeology, astronomy, geography, forestry, economics, history, education, history of science and technology, history of Greek philosophy, politics, grammar, languages, philosophy, public health, urban planning, classification of sciences, finance, child education and printing (Davison, 1963, p. 181; Bahadır & Danışman, 2005, p.288-289; Budak, 2011, p. 71-91). Using a simple language, Mecmua-i Funun aimed popularizing science among different segments of the society. Mecmua-i Funun stopped publication after 47 issues.

Similar journals started to be published by others. These journal include Rehber-i Funun (Guide of Sciences - 11 issues in 1882), Medrese-i Funun (College of Sciences, 8 issues in 1884), Hazine-i Funun (Treasures of Sciences, 1 issue in 1885), Kevkeb-ul Ulum (Star of Sciences, 16 issues in 1886), Numune-i Terakki (Example of Progress, 9 issues in 1887 and 1888) and İrtika, (Rising High, 23 issues in 1897) (Bahadır & Danışman, 2005, p.288).
These journals were published prior to the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) and they are listed in the historical order in which they were published. Most of these journals used funun as opposed to ulum in their titles. As I cited from Berkes (1964) above, ulum mostly, if not exclusively, refers to traditional religious sciences whereas funun predominantly refers to Western sciences and technology. In the observation of Ra’isniya (2012), the use of funun instead of ulum in these titles “reflect the significance the publishers of these journal attributed to Western science and technology” (p. 218).
funun, the emphasis on Western science can be seen as an indication of secularization of education.

The titles of the last two (Numune-i Terakki - Example of Progress and İrtika - Rising High) have references to progress which I think is an indication of gradual increase in seeing science (and possibly technology) as a source or tool of progress and thus as an instrument of social change expanding into areas outside science and education. This, I think, is indicative of the influence of the way the Enlightenment movement perceived and presented science. Indeed, Berkes (1964, p. 178), says that Cemiyet-i İlimye-i Osmaniye which published Mecmua-i Funun consisted of readers of Voltaire, Diderot and d’Holbach. All of these thinkers were prominent figures in the Enlightenment movement of France (Porterfield, 2005; Copleston, 2003; Vartanian, 1975). A more direct confirmation of the influence of the Enlightenment on Mecmua-i Funun and its publishers can be seen in a statement in the 6th issue of the journal which stated that the purpose of the journal and Cemiyet-i İlimye-i Osmaniye was “the promotion of interest in the progress of industries and the enlightenment of minds” (translated and cited in Berkes 1964, p. 179). Hanioğlu (1995, p. 94) reports that Mecmua-i Funun persistently focused on the superiority of modern sciences and indirectly attacked religion disguised in the form of criticizing superstition17. Likewise, they published a series of 16 articles about the materialist philosophers of the Western World including the antiquity as opposed to publishing only two articles about Muslim philosophers (Budak, 2011, p. 112-113).

17 For more about Voltaire’s attacks on superstition, see Charles Frankel (1969, p. 107-109).
*Cemiyet-i İlimye* also established a library which offered courses in arithmetic, political economy and five different languages (Davison, 1963, p. 181). Another major project of the *Cemiyet-i İlimye-i Osmaniye* was the promotion of the establishment of *Dar-ul Funun* (House of sciences), the first modern university in the Muslim World. *Dar-ul Funun* was established in 1870. As the head of this new university, Tahsin Efendi (1811-1888) was appointed. Like most other reformers, Tahsin Efendi (aka. Hoca Tahsin) was sent to Paris for education where he stayed for twelve years. There, he served as the Imam of the Ottoman Embassy and as the Chaplain of the Muslim students who were sent to France by the Ottoman state (Keddie, 1972, p. 39). While he was in Paris, he became close friends with the prominent members of the Young Turks who were there in exile (Mardin, 1962, p. 222).

Without presenting convincing evidence of why this was the case, Berkes (1964, p. 181) argues that, during his stay in Paris, Hoca Tahsin was heavily influenced by the contemporary scientific materialist Ludwig Büchner. Regardless, Hoca Tahsin returned to Istanbul as a strong proponent of modern sciences. He wrote the first psychological treatise in Turkish and popularized contemporary theories of Astronomy in the Ottoman society (Mardin, 1962, p. 223). The idea of progress was another perspective Hoca Tahsin promoted. In his vision, the extension of the path of progress of Muslim societies was contingent on the appropriation of modern sciences and the refutation of dogmatic practices of religion. In this regards, he was similar to the members of *Cemiyet-i İlimye-i Osmaniye*, who, too, believed in the necessity of science in the path of progress (Budak, 2011). At the same time, Hoca Tahsin saw the disunity
of Muslims as a major obstacle against their progress as a civilization. For that reason, he worked towards the ideal of the Unity of Muslims (Mardin, 1962, p. 224). The establishment of Memalik-i İslamiye Coğrafya Cemiyeti (The Society for the Geography of Muslims) by Hoca Tahsin when he was the head of Daru-l Funun was part of this effort (Azmi, 1997, p. 37).

Hoca Tahsin did not see science only as a cure to social ills, he also considered it as a strong tool for individuals’ attainment of happiness. In the inauguration speech of Daru-l Funun, he emphasized the role of science in the empowerment of the individual and the nation, and described science as “the spirit of civilization and the guarantor of the advancement of happiness” (Burcak, 2005, p.77). In establishing an association between science and civilization, Tahsin Efendi was implying the necessity of the expansion of positive sciences into the institutional organization of the society and into the arrangement of the lives of individuals. Such a statement indicates that Hoca Tahsin saw a strong relationship between the development of civilization and happiness. It might be that he regarded the improvement of the conditions of social and individual lives of human beings as one of the strongest keys, if not the only one, for the attainment of happiness. Science would serve as the tool through which the conditions of life from the macro level to the micro can be improved. In promoting these ideas Hoca Tahsin emphasized the power of secular forces for the attainment of happiness although he was a devout practicing Muslim. That is why it seems to me that Hoca Tahsin, perhaps unintentionally, was promoting secularist ideas in a similar way it was done by Namık Kemal whose employment of the term vatan (motherland) bore
secularist connotations although Namık Kemal used it as part of his Pan-Islamist discourse.

As Zafirowski (2010, p. 108) put it, the perspective which sees modern science as the core integral component of true human civilization derives from the Enlightenment movement and from the Renaissance. In this paradigm, the development of science and its impact on the society are perceived as a counterforce against the social standing and political authority of religion. The civilizational perspective which sees science as the dynamo of civilization was embraced by a greater proportion the Ottoman intelligentsia since the Tanzimat. However, the first generation of these intellectuals did not see science as an alternative to and as a counterforce against religion. It rather was a complementary component for religion in their eyes. As such, science was seen from a pragmatic perspective which could explain the nature of how things work in the universe and thus facilitate the improvement of the material conditions of life. Therefore, science was seen as a testament to and as a tool for the perfectibility of life. That is probably why the first generation of the exponents of science including the religious ones were not hesitant to borrow evolutionary perspectives. Together with Münif Pasha who published an article titled “Ethnological evolution of the monkey called orang-utang,” Hoca Tahsin is considered by historians (e.g., İhsanoğlu, 2011, p. 163) as one of the leading intellectuals who introduced the evolutionary theory in the Ottoman Empire because he wrote a book titled *Tarih-i Tekvin Yahud Hilkat* (History of the Genesis and Creation) in which he presented the creation of the universe in multiple stages.
Despite their efforts for the introduction of positivist sciences, the pioneers of modern education in the history of Ottoman Empire like Hoca Tahsin were trying to reconcile science and religion in the same way the Young Ottomans such as Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha attempted to reconcile contemporary Western ideals such as democracy, liberty and human rights with traditional Islamic notions such as Meşveret (consultation). Hoca Tahsin and his contemporaries such as Selim Sabit Efendi (1829-1910) wanted to present the new modern sciences as methods compatible with Islamic teachings. Just as the Young Ottoman ideologues criticized contemporary Muslim societies and their rulers for breaking away from the real social and political tradition of Islam, the likes of Hoca Tahsin including Münif Pasha (1828-1910) criticized the intrusion of superstition and dogmatic beliefs and practices of religion in Muslim societies.

However, a new generation of intellectuals who were, to varying degrees, hostile against religion emerged with the transition from the reconciliatory Young Ottoman ideology to the explicitly and unapologetically secularist segment of the Young Turk ideology. The beginning of the Young Turks Era witnessed the emergence of a new class of reformist intellectuals who were neither concerned about the reconciliation of science and religion nor had an ideal of utilizing science for the advancement or unity of the Muslims. They promoted science as a tool for the progress of the Turkish nation which happened to be Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire. Ahmet Rıza Bey, the prominent leader of the CUP, represents one of the major cornerstones of such a transition.
Ahmet Rıza was born in Istanbul in 1859 to a father (‘İngiliz’ Ali Bey) who used to serve as a member of the first chamber of the first Ottoman Parliament (1876-1878) and to a mother (Naile Hanım) from Austria who had converted to Islam (Gündüz & Budak, 2011, p. 13). He studied at the Galatasaray Lycee in Istanbul but he spent some time in Konya where his father was exiled (Howard, 2001, p. 73; Mardin, 2006, p. 165-166; Zürcher, 1984, p. 14). While in Konya, Ahmet Rıza observed the impoverished conditions of the villages in Anatolia and decided to study agriculture in France so that he could contribute to the improvement of agricultural production in the Ottoman lands. Upon finishing his studies at the Agricultural School of Grigon, he returned home from France and started working at the Ministry of Agriculture. However, he couldn’t find opportunities and necessary conditions for putting his knowledge into practice because of widespread systemic problems he saw in the Ottoman society and the state.

Hailing mass education as a means to transform the society, Ahmet Rıza started teaching at an idadi (middle school). He eventually became the director of education in the city of Bursa where his transformation attempts of the educational system were met with resistance. During a visit to Paris in 1889, he resigned from his post and stayed in France (Berkes, 1964, p. 305-306; Mardin, 2006, p.166). There, he participated in the lectures of the positivist Pierre Lafitte. Ahmet Rıza was already familiar with positivism while he was still in Istanbul from reading a book written by Dr. Eugene Robinet (Tekeli & Ilkin, 1993, p. 221) who was a disciple of Auguste Comte (Mill, 1866, p.127). Reading the works of materialist Enlightenment philosopher d’Holbach at
an early age had deeply influenced Ahmet Rıza, too, as admitted by himself (Ahmet Rıza, 1922, p. 15; as cited in Mardin, 1983, p. 181).

In a memorandum he sent to Sultan Abdulhamid II, Ahmet Rıza said that he, in the last six years long stay in Paris, had investigated the reasons of the progress and lack thereof of nations. He also shared his suggestion that the path to be saved from the chains of reprehensible conditions, including that of the Ottoman society, would be paved by acquiring and implementing positive sciences (Berkes, 1964, p. 306). This was a major sign of the growing place of positivism in Ahmet Rıza’s thinking.

Indeed, he published articles in *Le Journal Occidental* which was a French positivist journal (Shissler, 2003, p. 116) and participated in the establishment of the International Positivist Society (Fındıkoğlu, 1962, p. 10; Hanioğlu, 1995, p. 203; Kurzman, 2009, p. 41). The Journal *Meşveret* (Consultation) he published while he was in France were published in two languages: Turkish and French. The motto of the Turkish version was “Wasavirhum fil Amr,” the Quranic verse (3:159) which says “And Seek their counsel in the matter” but the motto of the French version was the Comtian positivist notion of “ordre et progrès” (*Order and Progress* in English, *Nizam ve Terakki* in Turkish) (Emil, 2009, p. 102).

As Hanioğlu (1995, p. 203) puts it, those who were positivists in the Young Turks movement were compelled to conceal their positivism out of the fear that it might attract backlash from the religious elements of the movement and of the Ottoman society. Ahmet Rıza did not openly criticize the religion of Islam although he criticized
traditional religious establishment such as the leaders of Sufi lodges for deceiving and corrupting masses morally and intellectually (Mardin, 1983, p. 182-183).

Ahmet Rıza’s positivism was mostly reflected in his appropriation of the ideal of rational scientific progress which aims at improving the material conditions of life.

Such an improvement and progress could be possible with rational planning and
efficiently centralized administration which, for him, was lacking in the Ottoman society. In order to reverse these conditions, Ahmet Rıza started taking active leadership roles in the development and organization of the Ottoman opposition movement (The Young Turks) after several years of contemplation and intellectual activities in France. As I described in detail above, he took part in the establishment of the CUP which was mobilized around the idea of instituting the constitution of 1876 and the parliamentary system.

Ahmet Rıza and decentralist Prince Sabahaddin had disagreements about the nature of the ideal form of political structure for the Ottoman Empire. Another difference between the two in their scientism. Ahmet Rıza wanted to apply hard (natural) sciences for the reordering of the society especially including administration and economic production whereas Prince Sabahaddin aspired to use the methodology of soft (social) sciences especially including sociology for the analysis of the problems in the Ottoman society and for the solutions to be implemented accordingly. However, Ahmet Rıza and Prince Sabahaddin shared a similar perspective in that they both believed in the power of scientific methods for the development and “progress” of the Ottoman society.

As it is described in the beginning of this chapter, the idea of borrowing positive sciences from the Western world started with the purpose of modernizing the army in the Ottoman history. When the implementation of science and modernization efforts was
expanded into the other areas of the society during the Tanzimat Era (1839-1876), Ottoman intellectuals started debating the scope and the limits of borrowing from the Western civilization. There was a consensus in the Young Ottomans generation that it would only be the science and the technology as well as some of the political ideals and institutions of the West (e.g., constitutionalism, parliamentary system) which could and should be borrowed. Arguing that all of these valuable tools originally belonged to Islamic civilization, they saw the “re-adoption” of these tools and principles as highly efficient and necessary tools for the development of the Muslims around the world, the Ottoman Empire in particular. One step later, adoption of sciences was freed from the concerns of reconciling it with religion or utilizing it for the betterment of Muslims as we saw it in the case of Ahmet Rıza. It was regarded as an efficient tool for national development. Ahmet Rıza also rejected wholesale borrowing as he was concerned about the protection of the Turkish nation and about retaining the unique characteristics of this nation’s culture and language. Because of his nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments, he had antagonistic feelings against the West as well.

In short, proponents of reform and modernization in the Ottoman history were predominantly against the idea of wholesale borrowing from the West. They favored borrowing what they considered was beneficial (science, technology etc.) from the Western civilization and but they were wary of taking what they believed was harmful (e.g., materialistic and individualistic culture) citing religious and nationalistic reasons. However, as the decline of Muslim societies in the face of the challenges coming from
the Western civilization doomed nearer and nearer, some Young Turks started openly promoting the idea of adopting the Western civilization as a whole.

Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869-1939) was one of the strongest defenders of the idea of full scale borrowing of the Western civilization. In his monologues, Üç Medeniyet (Three Civilizations), which he wrote shortly after WWI, Ahmet Ağaoğlu asserted that the idea of selective borrowing from the Western civilization was not a realistic approach. For him, the concept of civilization should be understood as a way of life in the broadest sense. Each civilization develops its own common mind, heart, intelligence and its own feelings, sensibilities and its unique memory. Likewise, each civilization has its commonly shared moral standards, value systems and its criteria of the good. Such components of a given civilization are the products of its entirety and they develop as a whole with their positive and negative sides. Therefore, partitioning a civilization and trying to selectively adopt its particular components is not possible. If a society wants to benefit from the specific components of a civilization, the only feasible way is to fully enter into this civilization.

In Ahmet Ağaoğlu’s categorization, there are three major world civilizations. The first and the most populous one is the Buddha-Brahman civilization which contains India, China, Korea and Japan. The second (largest) is the Western civilization including Europe, America and Australia. The third and the last one according the size and history of it, is the Muslim civilization which comprises most of Africa and some parts of Europe and Asia. The Western civilization, Ağaoğlu said, prevailed and defeated the other two civilizations both physically and ideologically. The decline of
the Ottoman Empire as the last stronghold of the Muslim World is an undeniable
testament to this defeat which, among other things, convinced almost every one for the
superiority of the Western civilization. Nonetheless, he says;

There are people who are attributing the supremacy and the triumph of this
[Western] civilization to its particular components such as its science and
technology; and trying to abstain from its other aspects. In other words, such
people, with the purpose of being secured from the negative and even disgusting
[sic] sides of it, are demanding selective borrowing of the European civilization.
Those who are suggesting these ideas, if they are not sincere, want to follow the
reason of the ignorant. If they are sincere, they don’t fully understand what
civilization is. The ideas we have presented so far prove that the civilization has
a holistic nature and it cannot be divisible. It cannot be filtrated. The aspect of it
which succeeded is its totality, not its particular components. If science and
technology is developing in Europe more than other places, [the reason of] this
should be looked for in the totality of it. The science and technology of today’s
Europe is directly the result of its general conditions and all of its components.
It is not something else. [...] If the European civilization prevailed, it did not do
it only with its science and technology. It did it with all aspects of it all the
positive and negative sides of it. [...] Borrowing bits and pieces from the
European civilization cannot and did not work. [...] Because civilization cannot
be divisible, those who wanted to takes only parts of it collided with it and
collapsed. The reason why we have struggled for hundred years and could not
get any result is because of this. (Ağaoğlu, 2012 [1919], p. 23-24)

As a result, Ahmet Ağaoğlu suggested a full scale adoption of all aspects of
the European civilization for the Ottoman society to benefit from its science and
technology even if it would cost losing some of the characteristics of the nation.

Arguing that nations somehow retain their own unique personalities sui generis
even when they change their religions, moral standards, laws and their music and
architecture. All nations have changed their religions at least once in their history
and moral standards are not static either. Since this is the case, nations, depending
on their level of progress, can take or develop whatever they need. Therefore, the
Ottoman society, too, should not be hesitant to fully enter into the Western civilization in order to enter into the path of progress according to Ahmet Ağaoğlu.

As it can be seen in the reformist ideas of Ahmet Rıza and Ahmet Ağaoğlu, discussions regarding the question of why and how to barrow modern sciences and the role of it in the progress of the Ottoman society were expanded into areas wider than reforming educational institutions. And, the transition from the reconciliatory Young Ottoman approach (e.g., Hoca Tahsin) to the approach of the Young Turks (e.g., Ahmet Ağaoğlu) who prioritized the development of science over religion, as part of their understanding of the progress in the direction of Westernization, indicates the emergence of scientism as a counter force against religion. Indeed, Hanioğlu (2005, p. 32) suggests that science in the Ottoman society “was approaching the status of religion” for a growing number of intellectuals since the second half of the nineteenth century. For Hanioğlu, faith in science was gradually taking the place of religion.

In my opinion, it was not science which was replacing religion, it was the idea of progress which was doing it. Religion, in its conventional meaning, is broader than belief in God; it is a way of life centred on faith in God. The religion of progress is centred on faith in science which, in my observation, was replacing faith in God in different ways. Firstly, those who religiously believed in modern science were taking contemporary scientific perspectives as their ultimate point of reference for explaining how things work in the nature instead of referring to God for making sense of existence and interpreting the natural phenomena. Secondly, they were emphasizing the power of
scientific methods and technology, instead of trusting God, for the organization and security of the conditions of life.

Widespread instrumentalization of science or knowledge for the improvement of life was proposed as early as the 16th century by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who is also considered as one of the pioneers of the philosophy of modern sciences. Criticizing previous generations of philosophers for ignoring the study the real world (nature) and for failing to utilize the knowledge thereof for the benefit of human beings, Bacon presented the aim of knowledge as increasing human beings’ happiness and eliminating their sufferings (Bury, 1955, p. 50-51). In his uncompleted utopian work *New Atlantis* (2014 [1900]), Bacon outlined the framework of a *Collage of Research* which, through the innovations made therein, improved the lives of the community surrounding it and made its members happy. In doing so, Bacon attributed secularly oriented significance to knowledge, education and educational institutions, a trend which continued after him and characterized the Enlightenment’s utilitarian approach to knowledge and science. The idea of progress through scientific discoveries and socio-economic development which became one of the most influential ideology, perhaps the strongest one, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Western World. It increasingly became the governing principle, or in other words the religion, of modern societies. Although the secularist religion which was based on the idea of progress is mostly attributed to the positivist sociologist Auguste Comte, religiously perceived conceptions of the idea of progress gradually dominated the Western world since the Enlightenment and it was expanded into the other parts of the world in varying degrees.
John B. Bury (1955), Karl Löwith (1949, p. 60) and Alain de Benoist (2008, p.7) agree that the idea of progress can be considered as “the religion of Western civilization.” Emerging as early as the mid-seventeenth century, the idea of progress projected historical change as a cumulative process by which conditions of life evolve universally and linearly towards the direction of the better. Such an idea is not only about the description of the nature of socio-historical change, it is also an ideology which adheres to the conviction that this a kind of a change must take place.

The idea that progress is a necessity is an ideological position and depending on the context it motivates and mobilizes human action. In this sense, human beings are implicitly attributed the sovereign mastery over the nature and the society. Thus, the idea of progress has implications with regard to the questions of what the nature is, what the purposes of its existence are, and with respect to the questions of who human beings are and what their purpose of existence is. In this sense, the idea of progress have moral philosophical implications. Therefore, the idea of progress has ontological and moral philosophical implications as well. Because the ideology of progress is mostly, but not exclusively, projected as a macro process of social change, it entails social engineering in terms of the rearrangement of societal institutions. That is why, the idea of progress has political philosophical implications as well.

The idea of progress also attributed meaning to social change and to the unfolding of history. Although, attributing meaning to history did not start with the rise of the idea of progress in the seventeenth century (Löwith, 1949; Nisbet, 1980; de Benoist, 2008), the uniqueness of attributing meaning to history in the theorization of
progress is its secularist character. Religious perspectives (scripture, theologians, clergy etc.) attributed meaning to history, too, but theirs was in the form of reading history as the realization of divine providence. It was with the expansion of the Enlightenment that human beings began collectively attributing meaning to history independent of God’s providence.

For Löwith (1949, p. 60), a doctrine of progress could not arise insofar as the doctrine of God’s providence is unchallenged. In addition, religious conception of life and human flourishing encompasses the life before and after the grave and the ultimate goal is the felicity in the latter. The idea of progress perceives the improvement of the conditions of life exclusively in this world. Such an improvement is projected in the years and the generations to come (Bury, 1921). That is why the modern conception of progress is inherently anti-religious, which in the case of the Enlightenment was substantiated by naturalism, positivism, materialism and rationalism. This, I think, explains why many prominent figures who promoted and in some cases religiously supported the idea of progress were also atheists, anti-clerical and/or anti-religious individuals. Voltaire (1694-1778), for example, presented the Church as the main obstacle to progress in his _Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations_ (1756) in which he chronicled the progress of human reason in history (Topazio, 1959). Condorcet (1743-1794) shared similar perspectives in his _Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind_ (Ex: 1955 [1795]). For him, the advancement of scientific methods and knowledge will enlighten the people who will break the shackles of the unfreedom
of the religious regime. Proudhon (1809-1865) took another aggressive stance against religion in *The Philosophy of Progress* (2009 [1853]).

Let us speak then of religion, of that respectable faith, towards which the unbelieving still know only how to express contempt, the believer to form only wishes, and in order to summarize in a word all that matter, tackle the problem of Divinity. Here again I find myself placed on new terrain, where the idea of Progress comes to reform all that which has been written and taught by the learned, in the name of the Absolute. (p. 24)

The list of the philosophers and ideologues who approached the notion of progress from a perspective antithetical to religion can be expanded. However, the idea of progress was not limited to intellectual circles. It was also popularized and put into practice by political establishments in different ways. The idea of development is one major example. Although these two notions, progress and development, are strongly related and interchangeably used in certain contexts, they have different connotations with regard to the areas and the scope of change. Development is mainly understood in economic terms and it mostly refers to the processes of macro social change in material conditions of life. The notion of progress, however, is broader horizontally and vertically. Its connotations encompass transformations in material (economy, technology etc.) and nonmaterial (philosophy, ideology, culture etc.) conditions as well as changes in individual (micro) and societal (macro) levels. Perhaps one might suggest that developmentalism is the macro level application of the ideology of progress into areas such as economics, technology, education, health, infrastructure, government and other socio-economic and socio-political institutions. Hence, it might be argued, the idea of development drives from the ideology of progress which means that
philosophical connotations of the ideology of progress can be traceable in the idealistic and practical aspects of developmentalism.

Historical sociologist Philip McMichael, in his book *Development and Social Change* (2011) established a link between developmental projects, capitalism in particular, and utilitarian conceptions of the good. For him, capitalism “is based in Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian philosophy of common good”. Besides, McMichael pointed to a connection between “the pursuit of individual self-interest” and the capitalist variant of the developmental project (p. 50). The entire (capitalist) system is organized around the goal of producing utility (good) for the highest possible number of individuals in the society. Socialism stands out as the opposite alternative to capitalism with regard to the question of if and how economic production should be regulated. Capitalism is mostly concerned about the individual whereas socialism prioritizes collective needs of human beings (Ogles, 2007). The socialist system in its idealized form aims to produce utility for the collective. Nevertheless, socialism is, too, based on -its own- ideals of how to better serve the needs of human beings and how to make them happy.

Capitalism and socialism -or any other form of centralized forms of developmental projects emphasizing the role of centralized state and regulated economy- are two alternative interpretations of the idea of progress at the macro (societal) level. They provide alternative secularist perspectives about the perfectibility of social, economic, cultural and political institutions, the society and eventually the entire human civilization. These two developmental projects or a combination of them
at varying degrees have been applied by almost all of the governments in modern times. In the Ottoman Empire, it was the centralist conception of developmentalism, supported by Ahmet Rıza and the Committee of the Union and Progress, which prevailed over the more liberalist and individualist form of developmentalism promoted by Prince Sabahaddin and his organization The League of Private Enterprise and Decentralization. The form of developmentalism which was more centralist and collectivist than it was liberalist and individualist continued to be implemented after the establishment of the Turkish Republic as well.

The idea of progress is not only about the perfectibility of the society and the advancement of the human civilization, it is also, and more importantly, about the perfectibility of human beings at the micro level. In this ideology, the progress of civilization is both a result and a precursor to the perfectibility of human beings. Put differently, the progress of civilization is both an outcome and the precondition to the fulfilment of human beings’ potentials and desires, the strongest of which is the attainment of happiness. As Nispet (2000) explains,

The idea of progress centers upon man’s [sic] moral and spiritual condition on earth, his happiness, his freedom from torments of nature and society and above all his serenity and tranquility. The goal of progress or advancement, on earth, of these spiritual and moral virtues, thus leading toward ever-greater perfection of human nature. (p. 5)

In saying that the idea of progress projects earthly moral and spiritual guidelines for human beings and that the idea of progress formulates and offers an alternative (earthly) definition of human happiness and the ways to be secured from the pressures of the nature, Nisbet contends that the idea of progress has its own secularist moral
philosophy. In such a formulation, the ultimate purpose of human beings is self-realization and the attainment of happiness in this world. Religion, too, offers directions for happiness but it does it so by pointing to happiness in the hereafter. Attainment of happiness is confined to joy, felicity and tranquility in this world in the conception of the idea of progress. Another difference is that, religion, (in Nisbet’s (2000) words, Christianity) prioritizes salvation over happiness (p. 8).

The issue of human perfectibility has been less often emphasized in the idea of progress compared to the emphasis put on the perfectibility of the society. In addition, there have been variations across different societies in terms the relative degrees of emphasis given to the perfectibility of the society and human beings. For example, the French Enlightenment was more collective in its orientation than others. Secularist ideas regarding the perfectibility of the society in the form of national development were abundant there. However, the French Enlightenment was short on ideas regarding the perfectibility of human beings as individuals unlike the British Enlightenment which produced Lockean and Benthamite conceptions of human perfectibility (Passmore, 1970, p. 190). Perhaps because the Ottoman intelligentsia were influenced strongly by the ideologues of the French and to a certain degree by the German Enlightenment, which, too, was more collectivist in its orientation, exponents of the idea of progress in the Turkish history predominantly focused on issues pertaining to the perfectibility of the society.

Nevertheless, micro level implications of the idea of progress can also be found in the justifications presented for the macro (societal) level applications of it. For
example, many in the French Enlightenment movement, including the Encyclopaedists who played an enormous role in the popularization of science, perceived the purpose of existence and the progress of the society and of the government as facilitating “the attainment of terrestrial happiness by its members” (Bury, 1955, p. 173). Therefore, the ultimate goal of societal organization and its progress is the temporal (terrestrial) happiness of individuals. In other words, it is the well-being and desires of the individuals which are at the center. Secondly, the idea of progress sees human beings as the master of not only their own destiny but also of the nature. It is through the will, needs and desires of the human beings that the nature and the society should be controlled and manipulated or else human beings run the risk of “getting into the mercy of an external will” (Bury, 1955, p.5). By the use of their own will and their own reason, human beings can and will continue in the path of progress from savagery to the highest points of civilization and thus they will create, in desirable ways, a society which will increase its members’ happiness (Elliott, 1982, p. 471). In this sense, the development of idea of progress is about "an increased sense of the possibilities of human action, human happiness, human decency, in this life" (Hamilton, 1966, p. 157-159; as cited in Marty, 1982, p. 495). Therefore, the idea of progress, as it is finely described by Keohane (1982) is “the fascination with the human effort to improve the human condition”19 (p. 26).

19 I borrowed the phrase “the human effort to improve the human condition” which is included in the title of this subsection from these words of Keohane.
There are three sides of the human effort to prepare and improve the conditions for the fulfillment of human potentials and for the attainment of happiness. These are freedom, knowledge and power. Especially in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the Enlightenment Movement, including the pioneers of the idea of progress emphasized freedom and liberty as prerequisites for the improvement of the human condition and for the pursuit of happiness (Nisbet, 1980, p. 179-236). In many cases, Enlightenment philosophers presented and defended freedom and liberty as a counterforce against religion. Put it differently, they saw religion as the biggest obstacle against the development and expansion of the freedom to pursue the potentials offered by the secular perfectibility of human nature. For example, Condorcet (1795 [1955]), whose ideas contributed substantially to the development of the idea of progress, said in the introduction of his book *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*:

> [N]ature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now on words independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limits than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us. This progress will doubtless vary in speed, but it will never be reversed as long as the earth occupies its present place in the system of the universe, and as long as the general laws of the system produce neither a general cataclysm nor such changes as will deprive the human race of its present faculties and its present resources. (p. 4-5)

Similar ideas were expressed by humanists in more contemporary societies. For instance, Joseph Leon Blau, who was part of the group which signed the manifesto *A Secular Humanist Declaration* in 1980 in the United States, contended that the greatest goal and obligation of human beings was the fulfillment of his or her potential for
growth and striving towards infinite perfection without relying on revelation or any
other form of supernatural intervention. Thereby, Blau espoused a secularist moral
philosophy in which human beings are positioned at the center of the moral order which
fosters aspirations for “the human effort to improve the human condition”
(Wohlgernter, 1993, p. lxi).

By way of reading French philosophes and through being actively engaged
in the public debates of the French society during their education and exile, the
Ottoman intelligentsia including both the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks
were heavily influenced by the libertarian ideas of the Enlightenment. In the
beginning, their demand of liberty was not from the religious establishment or from
religious dogmas but from the authoritarian bureaucracy and the Sultan. The Young
Turks took a more critical stance against religion in their articulation of the need for
the expansion of freedom but it was after the establishment of the Turkish Republic
that “freedom from religion” became one of the tenets of the new regime. (Yavuz,

Exaltation of secular knowledge was the second component of the human effort
to improve the human condition. Because happiness involves the sense of security from
the pressures of the nature and the society as well as benefitting from the resources they
contain, the knowledge of the nature and the society are critical for human flourishing.
The knowledge of the nature of human beings is equally important in this respect.
Prescriptions for human happiness can best be prepared only when their nature is well
known and when the subsequent question of what makes them happy is correctly
answered. As it was described Koahane (1982, p. 33), the idea of “controlling human behavior even shaping human nature, to ensure that men would pursue their own secular happiness efficiently” was one of the defining characteristics of the idea of progress. Only a fuller understanding of both sides, the nature and human beings, can help human beings fulfill their potentials and be happy.

Emphasizing the superiority scientific knowledge was one of the defining characteristics of the European Enlightenment Movement which was introduced into the other parts of the world and the Muslim World was no exception. Ottoman intellectuals translated and published the works of European thinkers who emphasized these ideas. For example, Münif Pasha, who took part in the establishment of Cemiyet-i İliy-yi Osmaniye (The Ottoman Scientific Society) and in the publication of Mecmua-i Funun (Journal of Sciences) translated the works of French philosophes (Mardin, 1962, p. 285) Voltaire, Fenelon, and Fontenelle and published Muhaverat-i Hikemiye (Philosophical Dialogues) which was an anthology of the selected writings of these thinkers who emphasized “the supremacy of reason over superstition and the importance of enlightenment and education” (Berkes, 1964, p. 199).

The emphasis on the superiority of scientific knowledge grew stronger over time in the late Ottoman society and eventually in the Modern Turkish Republic to a degree that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's words “Hayatta en hakiki murşit ilimdir fendir” (The most truthful guide in life is knowledge and science) became the motto of not only the educational system but also of the state and its secularist cadres.
Figure 11. The emblem of the journal *Funun ve Sanayi* (Science and Industry)

**Headline(s):** Those who do not comprehend the subtleties of fine arts and artisanship come into and depart this world of wonders blindly. (*Fehmetmeyen dekaiki nefise-i sanayii, ibretistan-i aleme ama gelir gider.*)

**Inscriptions on the image:** 1: Science (*Funun*) 2: Culture/Civilization (*Umran*) 3: Perseverance (*Sebat*) 4: Knowledge (*Marifet*) 5: Technology (*Sanat*) 6: Effort/Industry (*Gayret*)

A combination of the secularist emphasis on freedom and knowledge, fostered in the Enlightenment movement, was reflected in the exaltation of the use of one’s own
“reason.” Science has been presented as the result and as an achievement of the free use of reason, which was generally, if not universally, perceived and presented in the Enlightenment movement and in the groups and societies it influenced, including contemporary the world, as the free and independent human capability to know the nature of things. To give an example from the contemporary world, an institution established by the famous atheist Richard Dawkin’s presented its mission in a similar way.

The mission of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science is to support scientific education, critical thinking and evidence-based understanding of the natural world in the quest to overcome religious fundamentalism, superstition, intolerance and suffering.

The other third aspect of the human effort to achieve these goals, is the will and power to control and manipulate the nature and to organize the society in order to prepare the environment for the improvement of the human condition and to dispel elements and forces which might pose threats to the prospects of these ideals. On the one side, the development of science, in the modern secularist conception of the idea of progress, offers the accurate and reliable knowledge of the nature, human beings and the society. On the other hand, technology together with the centralized organization and regulation the society provides the power needed for human flourishing. Centrally governed developmental projects, such as capitalism and socialism, are the mechanism through which knowledge and power are improved and utilized for the benefit of the members of the society. Therefore, knowledge and power or in other words science and

20 http://richarddawkinsfoundation.org/ Accessed, 19 August 2014
technology, and centralized political organization are integral parts of the human endeavor to improve the human condition.

According to Canadian social philosopher Charles Taylor, the idea of the improvement of human condition and the agency attributed to human beings not only transformed the moral orientation of individuals but also secularized a large segment of modern societies. Parallel to the rise of this secularist understanding of the improvement of the human condition, “new conceptions of the good and new locations of moral sources such as the notion of self responsibility and new definitions of freedom and reason as well as a new sense of dignity” came into existence (1989, p. 177). This, for Taylor, is the defining characteristic of modern secular societies.

The idea of progress through the development and application of modern sciences was not promoted, first in Europe and subsequently in the Ottoman Empire, only as a competent and necessary method for the improvement and perfection of the conditions of life and therefore, for the attainment of happiness by human beings. Strongly influenced by Lamarckian, Büchnerian and Darwinian theories of evolution, the idea of progress was also presented and justified by some of the prominent members (e.g., Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet) of the secularist fraction in the Young Turks movement as part of a universal law of evolution which rules over the nature, living beings in particular, and over the society (Doğan, 2012).
Ontological interpretations of science in the late Ottoman society. Beşir Fuad was another figure who represented the transition from the Young Ottoman reformist thought to the secularist fraction of the Young Turk ideology. If Beşir Fuat represented a sharp transformation to an openly secularist Westernization ideology at the intellectual level regarding the construction of reality, Ahmet Rıza Bey represented a similar, albeit a softer one compared to that of Beşir Fuat’s, transition in terms of the application of secularist worldviews (i.e., positivism and materialism) in economic, social and political organization of the society which was formulated in the idea of progress.

Born in 1852 to the family of a man named Hurşit Pasha who served as the mutasarrıf (governor) of Maraş and Adana (Sevgi and Özcan, 2005, p. 264), Beşir Fuad started his education at a rüşdiye in Istanbul. Afterwards, he attended a Jesuit school in Syria and continued his educational career at the Military academy (Askeri İdadi) in Istanbul (Okay, 1969, p.56-58) and received his final degree from the War Academy (Harbiye). After graduation and serving as the aide de camp (yaver) of the Sultan (Abdulaziz), he continued as a soldier who fought in the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War. Having left the army after the war, Beşir Fuad continued his career as a writer (Fuad & İnci, 1999, p. 1). He knew French, German and English well enough to write introductory grammar books in these languages for the Ottoman learners (Mardin, 1983, p. 56). However, Beşir Fuad did not understand Arabic or Persian. He was able to read the Qur’an from the French translation (Berkes, 1964, p. 293).
Although he died at an early age (35), Beşir Fuat was one of the most prominent intellectuals of 1880’s (Mardin, 1983, p. 56; Hanioğlu, 1995b, p. 16). Having written articles about modern science, philosophy and the philosophes of the Enlightenment movement in the newspaper *Tercuman* (Mardin, 1983, p. 56), Beşir Fuat is most famous for being one of the pioneers of naturalism, empiricism and positivism in the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. As M. Orhan Okay, who wrote the most extensive biographical work on Beşir Fuad, reports (2012, p. 49), it was the German materialist Ludwig Büchner (1824–1899), which left the strongest footprint in his intellectual life. Büchner and especially his book *Kraft und Stoff*\(^{21}\) (Matter and Force) are the ones mentioned the most in Beşir Fuad’s publications and in the letters he exchanged with his friends. In a letter he wrote to his close friend Muallim Naci, a faithful Muslim, Beşir Fuad, said:

> Whatever we investigate from the existing beings, two things attract our attention at the first sight: matter and force. In order to fully appreciate the significance of these two concepts, we should remember that a book which appeared with the same title revolutionized the world of philosophy. (In Okay, 1969, p. 184-185).

Although Beşir Fuad is known as one of the pioneers of positivism and materialism in the late Ottoman society, his influence at the popular level was limited perhaps because his positivist and materialist ideas were scattered around in his literary works. However, his biographer Okay (1969, p. 215) claims that Beşir Fuad had a greater influence over other Ottoman intellectuals such as Abdullah Cevdet, Ahmet

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\(^{21}\) *Kraft und Stoff*: Empirisch-naturphilosophische Studien (Force and Matter: Empiroco-Philosophical Studies) 1855.
Nebil and Baha Tevfik. These intellectuals spread the materialist ideas of Büchner more explicitly and systematically.

Abdullah Cevdet was born in 1869 to a strongly religious Kurdish family in the town of Arapgir in the Eastern province of Harput. His father was a battalion clerk (Creel, 1978, p. 10) and his mother was a housewife. His uncle was an ordained imam (Hanioğlu, 1981, p. 6). Having completed his elementary level education in Hozat and Arapgir, he was enrolled in the military rüşdiye (middle school) in the city of Mamurat el-Aziz (Elazığ). Upon successfully finishing his studies at this school, Abdullah Cevdet was enrolled in the Kuleli Military Medical Preparatory School in Istanbul in 1885. By the time he moved to Istanbul for his education, oppositional ideas against the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II were already expanded into civilian and military schools. Although Hanioğlu (1966, p. 5-6) points to the lack of reliable information about Abdullah Cevdet’s relationship with these ideas, Creel (1978, p. 10-11) contends that he started discussing issues regarding “the state of the nation” with his close friends such as Konyalı Hikmet Emin, Kafkasyalı Mehmed Reşid and Diyarbakırlı Ishak Süküti.

After graduating from Kuleli, Abdullah Cevdet and his close friends started studying at the Gümüşhane Military Medical Academy in Istanbul where they became more actively involved in political issues (Creel, 1978, p. 11). As Hanioğlu (1966, p. 6-10) puts it, the Military Medical Academy in Istanbul was one of the centers of oppositional ideologies mostly because of the exposure of the students of this school to
positivist and materials ideas through their access to the books printed in Europe and to foreign, mostly French, instructors who were emphatic to such ideas.

As it is mentioned above, Abdullah Cevdet and his close friends (e.g., Mehmed Reşid and İbrahim Temo) established the secret society of İttihad-ı Osmani (the Ottoman Union) in 1889 with the purpose of restoring the 1876 constitution and Ottoman Parliament which were suspended by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1878. The society of İttihad-ı Osmani was expanded into other schools in Istanbul and eventually it was named as İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (The Committee of Union and Progress). As it is described above the Committee of Union and Progress (the CUP) eventually dominated oppositional movements in the late Ottoman history and executed the Young Turks revolution of 1908. Although Abdullah Cevdet was among its founders, his influence in the CUP had been very limited especially after Ahmet Rıza’s participation in the movement. By the time the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 unfolded, Abdullah Cevdet was already marginalized in the CUP. However, Abdullah Cevdet continued to play influential roles in the development of secularist ideas and ideologies in the late Ottoman society.

As Zürcher (2005, p. 16) observed, Abdullah Cevdet became the most radical and outspoken secularist (materialist) in the Young Turks movement. Although he came from a strongly religious family, it did not take long for Abdullah Cevdet to be attracted to positivist and (biological) materialist ideas he was exposed to during his studies at the Military Medical Academy in Istanbul. One of the turning points in his life in this regards was when his friend İbrahim Temo gave him French biologist Felix
Isnard’s book *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme* (Hanioğlu, 1981, p. 12-13). In this book, Isnard (1879) asserted that the truth and the nature of things could only be understood by way of scientific inquiry and that doubt should be cast on ideas and claims if they are not demonstrated by reasoning or by science. In the same book, Isnard also went on to make moral philosophical claims. As he argued it, religions could not be a true source of morality especially in contemporary societies because they were are not based on empirical and rational foundations. That is why, Isnard contended, scientific materialism would and should replace all other moral systems which were not based on these principles.

Abdullah Cevdet was moved by the ideas of Isnard and motivated to present them to the Ottoman public. However, a greater influence came when Abdullah Cevdet was acquainted with the materialist ideas of German materialist Büchner and his book *Kraft und Stoff* (Matter and Energy). Büchner’s writings and his materialistic arguments were already known among the secularist Young Turk intellectuals such as Beşir Fuad but it was Abdullah Cevdet who to a much greater extent popularized Büchner and his ideas.

The main idea Büchner presented in his *Kraft und Stoff* and in his other materialist writings was the metaphysical materialist argument that all that exist in the universe were either matter or things and processes which arise out of the motions and interactions of material forms of existences at the micro and macro levels. By this axiom, Büchner, like other metaphysical materialists, aimed at disproving the existence of non-material beings and elements. According to this position, for example, what
human beings experience in their consciousness are all outcomes of biological therefore material processes. There is no soul or other forms of consciousness which are not based on matter or on the motions and interactions of it.

Büchner also argued that the sources of all kinds of changes (motions and interactions) observed in material forms of existences were due to the force (energy) which are inseparably included in the material beings because there is no observable force (energy) in the universe which does not come from material forms of existences. As a consequence of these two axioms, Büchner also argued that matter and force were eternal. Thus, Büchner wanted to negate the idea that what is observed in the universe were because of the creation or intervention of another source of power. In other words, Büchner, by presenting these axioms, was not only making ontological and epistemological arguments, he was also attacking religious worldviews including the idea that the universe and all that it contains were the creations of a source (e.g., God) which is outside and above the observed forms of existences.

[T]hose who talk about an independent or supernatural force, which has evolved the universe out of itself or out of nothing, are in antagonism with the first and simple axiom of philosophical view of nature, grounded on experience and reality. Neither can force create matter, nor matter force, for we have seen that a separate existence of these is neither empirically possible nor logically imaginable. But things which cannot be separated can never exist separately. That the universe cannot have risen out of nothing we shall find presently, we treat of the conservation or eternity of matter and force. [...] Never can nothing became something, nor something nothing. [...] The universe or matter with its properties, conditions or movements, which we name forces, must have existed from and will exist to all eternity, or -in other words- the universe cannot have been created. (Büchner, 1884, p. 10)
Similarly, Büchner contended that just as there is no (creative) force outside and disconnected from matter, there is not and there cannot be a source of order which regulates and dictates the interactions and relationships between different forms of matter and material existence. In other words, there is not a law-giver outside and independent from the Nature. What we observe as patterns and laws in Nature, according to Büchner (1864, p. 93-94), are the natural and absolutely necessary expressions, motions and interactions of all physical forces and their properties. As such, the laws of Nature do not exist outside matter or Nature and they are not accessible to outside interference without any exception. Consequently, the laws of Nature are immutable and eternal like force and matter, they are not created. Therefore,

Everything that happens, has happened, and shall happen; happens, has happened and shall happen naturally [...] in a manner that rests exclusively on the regular working together or interactions of materials that have existed from all eternity and of the natural forces united with them. (Büchner, 1864, p. 95)

In this regard, Büchner appropriated a mechanistic worldview based on the deterministic principles of Newtonian physics. Whatever happens in Nature, happens because the nature and properties of matter necessarily and absolutely dictates it so. Put differently, causes in Nature are the ultimate sources of every form of existence and being. Nothing can happen or exist without the dictation of the causes (matter and energy) in Nature. Alternatively, nothing can ultimately reverse or stop the necessary outcomes of the properties and interactions of matter in the universe. On the other hand, however, Büchner contended that biological life could progressively acquire new properties and therefore transform and develop over time from the simplest to most complex form due to what he called “the general law of variation” and “with the help of
natural phenomena.” This, for him, was yet another evidence that everything including living beings existed, exists and will exist in whatever form they might have had because of the forces of Nature not because of outside interference(s). We are fascinated and perplexed with what we observe in Nature because we see the end result of these processes which took millions of years to perfect itself.

Whatever may have been the nature of the process of evolution as regards the details, however much may yet remain obscure and doubtful in regard to the exact manner in which the organic formation has taken place, this much at any rate we can aver with certainty: that it has, and must have, happened without the interference of a super-natural power. If at the present day this creation, while we survey the surrounding Nature, impresses us beyond measure, and if we cannot entirely repel the intellectual impression which points to the existence of a direct creative power, this feeling is in reality to be accounted for by the fact that we see the final results of natural forces that have worked through many millions of years spread out before us in one aggregate picture, and that, while we look only at the present, without remembering the past, it is difficult for us to imagine at first sight that Nature has evolved all this out of herself. (Büchner, 1894, p. 211)

In explaining his materialist, naturalist and evolutionist perspectives, Büchner was not only presenting philosophical arguments, he was also urging his audience to liberate themselves and the society from the “childish nonsense, false convictions and superstitious dogmas of the past”. Just as biological life gets perfected over time, the society, too, can and should be perfected by being liberated from the primitive ideas of the past chiefly including religious dogmas. Education of the masses through scientific methods should be the way to achieve this goal. In this regard, Büchner found a stronger voice and following in the late Ottoman society perhaps more than he did in Germany and other European societies. It was Abdullah Cevdet who vigorously presented the materialist and naturalist ideas of Büchner and the ideas of other
materialist and naturalist philosophers (e.g., Felix Isnard, Gustave Le Bon) in the Ottoman society.

In addition to helping establish the secret of İttihad-ı Osmani which later grew into the CUP, Abdullah Cevdet had already started translating the works of European philosophers while he was still a student at the Military Medical Academy. In 1890, Abdullah Cevdet translated one of the chapters of Kraft und Stoff into Turkish which was the first translation of Büchner’s works in the Ottoman history (Hanioğlu, 1981, p. 12-13; Hanioğlu, 1995, p. 226). The complete translation of Kraft und Stoff was done in 1911 by Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil (Hanioğlu, 1995, p. 226). Abdullah Cevdet translated another chapter from the first volume of Büchner’s Science et nature: essais de philosophie et de science naturelle in 1891 (Hanioğlu, 2009, p. 16-17).

In the same year (1891), he also started compiling the compendium Funun ve Felsefe (Science and Philosophy) which included statements from a long list of non-Muslim and Muslim philosophers, scholars, theologians, politicians and poets mostly about philosophy, science and knowledge. It seems that by bringing together statements from Western secular philosophers and thinkers, and from Muslim sources, Abdullah Cevdet wanted to appeal to his audience in the Ottoman society where religious sensitivities were still very strong and to convince them that the ideas he borrowed from European philosophers were already confirmed and supported by Muslim scholars. One of the first quotations he included in this volume and the interpretations Abdullah Cevdet (2009) provided in that context attests to this approach.

One of the virtuous scholars of Islam, al-Jurjani [d. 1078], defined philosophy in his Kitabu’t Tarifat as follows:
It is striving by humanly possible ways towards becoming like God in order to attain eternal happiness as it was pointed out by the truthful messenger of God when he said: “be molded by the ethics of God,” which [according to al-Jurjani] means, ‘try to be similar to God by obtaining comprehensive knowledge and by becoming liberated from the limitations of corporeal existence.’

This is the best of definitions of philosophy and wisdom and it better describes the approach of the Sufis. This definition also contains the brilliant truth declared by [Friedrich Heinrich] Jacobi: “Human beings descended from animals and they are destined to become gods”.

Similarly, al-Maarri’s verses,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The thing that perplexed [humans is];} \\
\text{The living being which is created from the lifeless}
\end{align*}
\]

expresses the essence of the principles of what is called Darwinism. (In Abdullah Cevdet, 2009 [1912], p. 49-50. Trans. ZN)

Although he occasionally referred to religious sources for supporting his secularist arguments and saw religion as a feasible tool for the unification and mobilization of masses towards secular goals, Abdullah Cevdet did not hesitate to criticize religious dogmas and the backwardness of traditionally religious (Muslim) societies. Besides directly and indirectly challenging the idea of the existence of God, Abdullah Cevdet, departing from the works of materialists such as Ludwig Büchner and Charles Letourneau, rejected the immortality of the soul (Hanioğlu, 2005). Moreover, he translated the works of European orientalists such as Reinhart Dozy who strongly criticized Islam and Muslims for being uncivilized and backward.

At the same time, Abdullah Cevdet remained as an activist who dedicated most of his efforts for the introduction and prevalence of the ideas he synthesized from
European scientific materialists and naturalists. Like many of the prominent members of the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks Movements, he was persecuted and exiled which did not bar him from his activism. While he was in Geneva in 1904, Abdullah Cevdet started publishing his own journal *İçtihad* (Regeneration) in Geneva in which he wrote simplified articles about science and scientific discoveries with the purpose of proving to the educated masses the supremacy of science and scientific methods in all areas of individual and social life. In this journal, he also presented and discussed social, economic and political problems of the Ottoman-and later on Turkish-society.

![Abdullah Cevdet](image)

**Figure 12. Abdullah Cevdet**

Abdullah Cevdet had a long lasting and often controversial legacy. In addition to helping establish one of the most influential political movements (i.e., the CUP), he is remembered as one of the strongest advocates of materialism, naturalism, (social)
Darwinism and scientific revolution in the history of Turkey. In this respect, he is considered with the gratitude of the secularists and with the aversion of the religious individuals and groups as the mastermind and inspiration for the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic.

Abdullah Cevdet lived long enough to see the first decade of the modern Turkish Republic and continued publishing his journal İctihad until his death in 1932. He charmingly praised the achievements of Atatürk and his secularist reforms, in an article he wrote in İctihad.

The last month of March (1924) has been recorded in the annals of history as a rich and most brilliant and unforgettable month in the intellectual history of the Turkish nation because of the significant and courageous transformations it witnessed especially including the dissolution of the Sheri’a (courts), the unification of education [the abolishment of madrasas] and the abolishment of Caliphate. (İctihad, 1924, p. 3344. Trans. ZN)

Atatürk met with Abdullah Cevdet in Ankara in January 1925 (Creel, 1978, p. 26) and told him” “Doctor!, we are putting into practice what you have been advocating”. However, Abdullah Cevdet occasionally criticized the new regime especially after 1927 for their authoritarianism and for the inefficiency of educational policies (Creel, 1978, p. 26).

Abdullah Cevdet was not the only Young Turk intellectual who presented and defended materialist ideas of European philosophers. There were other Young Turks who championed materialism and materialist philosophers perhaps more explicitly than Abdullah Cevdet. For example, at around 1910 and 1911 Subhi Edhem in his book Darwinism said:
The idea that a creative power [God] bringing a particle let alone an object into existence from nonexistence has fully been disproven with the emergence of the idea of “force and matters” because natural sciences perceive matter as eternal and immortal. Therefore, eternal things cannot be created. (As cited in Doğan, 2012, p. 197. Trans. ZN)

In 1909, Dr. Nami wrote an article in the journal Bahçe (Garden) introducing Darwin and his theory of evolution and briefly comparing it to Lamarck’s theory of evolution. In appraisal of the two especially Darwin, Dr. Nami concluded:

[Darwin] succeed [in formulating the evolutionary theory] somewhat similar to Lamarck but stronger than him. This was not a negligible thing for the scientific community. With his new theory of natural selection, Darwin was giving an end to the old dogmas and destroying them from their roots and thus he was preparing a scientific and marvelously rich platform for the naturalists. (As cited in Doğan, 2012, p. 179. Trans. ZN).

The Turkish Republic: Top-down Secularization

The Turkish War of Independence and the Rise of Mustafa Kemal

Following the Armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918) which mandated the dissolution of the Ottoman armed forces and gave the Allied Forces the right to occupy strategic parts of Turkey if and when they deemed necessary (Macfie, 2013, p. 173-181), the vast majority of the remaining Ottoman lands were occupied by Britain, Greece, France and Italy. Mustafa Kemal who rose to prominence because of his contributions in the Ottoman Army’s defense against the Allied Forces in the Gallipoli Campaign (1915-1916), was given extensive military and civil powers and sent in the spring of 1919 by the Ottoman War Ministry to Anatolia with the responsibility of supervising the implementation of the armistice (Shaw & Shaw, p. 342). For some (i.e., Bıyıklioğlu, 2000 [1959], p. 30-34; Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 342; Gawrych, 2013, p. 65-
those who appointed Mustafa Kemal to this duty, including the Grand Vizier and the Sultan, expected that under the disguise of supervising the disarmament of the army, he would organize a resistance movement. Because the Ottoman army was demobilized with the armistice, local resistance organizations were already formed in Anatolia and Rumelia. Mustafa Kemal was expected to unify and organized these local resistance movements which were scattered around Anatolia and Rumelia.

After setting foot on Samsun on 19 May 1919, Mustafa Kemal assumed the leadership role in the organization of several congresses. The first proclamation of resistance was issued in Amasya on June 22, 1919. Two weeks later Mustafa Kemal resigned from the army after exchanging disputing telegrams with the capital (Erickson, 2013, p. 33). Delegations from the resistance movements from several Eastern provinces met in the first congress of the independence movement which was held in Erzurum between July 23 and August 7 under the auspices of Kazım Karabekir Pasha (Mango, 2000, p.7). Mustafa Kemal was elected as the chairmen of the congress by winning 38 of the 56 delegates’ votes (Dural, 2007, p. 55-56).

Around the time the congress was held, Mustafa Kemal and some of the other prominent members of the resistance movement (i.e., Kara Vasıf, Bekir Sami, Esat Pasha and Halide Edip) were considering the acceptance of foreign aid, but not mandate, from the United States against the British encroachment (Kinross, 1964, p. 187; Akgün, 2009, p. 34). Eventually, this idea was rejected by the congress because of the support the United States gave to the Armenian independence movement (Davison, 2013, p. 210). At the end, the congress issued a declaration emphasizing the need and
commitment to the protection of the territorial integrity of the homeland, resistance to foreign occupation and rejection of the mandate or protectorate of any foreign power. It also established the Representative Committee (Heyet-i Temsiliye) which was accorded the authority and responsibility to implement the decisions made at the congress. Mustafa Kemal was elected as the president of the Committee. (Symons, 2012, p. 103; Zürcher, 2004, p. 150).

Sivas was home to the second independence movement congress which convened in the beginning of September 1919. Decisions taken at this congress of the resistance movement reinforced the proclamations made in the declaration of the Erzurum Congress. However, unlike the regional scope of the Erzurum congress, delegates from all parts of Turkey participated in the Sivas Congress (Davison, 1994, p. 176). In addition, one of articles of the declaration of Sivas Congress emphasized the unity and brotherhood of different ethnic groups living in the remaining Ottoman lands.

“All Islamic elements living in the above mentioned domains [the Ottoman lands within the armistice lines] are true brothers, imbued with feelings of mutual respect and sacrifice for each other, and wholly respectful of racial and social rights and local conditions.” (As cited in Mango, 2000, p. 10)

Upon receiving a telegram in support for the independence movement from Hacı Musa Bey, the leader of the Mutki Tribe in the Kurdistan region, Mustafa Kemal praised “the nobility of Kurdish people and applauded their religious attachment to the caliphate and the Sultan as well as their eternal brotherhood with the Turks” (Gawrych, 2013, p. 88; Mango, 2000, p. 11).

Although the declaration of the Sivas Congress emphasized loyalty to the Sultan, it called for the meeting of the Assembly of Deputies from all parts of the
homeland at a place outside the capital which was under the British occupation. Regional resistance movements were also unified under the structure of a single organization, Anadolu ve Rumeli Mudafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti (The Society to Defend the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia). Heyet-i Temsiliye which was established in the Erzurum Congress was given the responsibility of coordinating the operations of this society and the army. The congress also established the position of the General Commander of the National Forces of Anatolia. Ali Fuat (Cebesoy) (1882-1968) was appointed to the position. Ali Fuat would report to the Representative Committee (Heyet-i Temsiliye) and therefore to Mustafa Kemal who was its president (Gawrych, 2013, p. 82-84). Decisions made at the congress was sent by telegrams to a long list of places in Turkey (Akgün, 2013).

In the meantime, the Ottoman Parliament convened in Istanbul for the last time on March 18th, 1920 with the participation of only a fraction of its members. Majority of the participants sympathized with the independence movement. The British who held the city under occupation raided the parliament and arrested some of the participants while others were able escape. Thus the Ottoman Parliament was closed down forever which facilitated the establishment of a new parliament by the independence movement under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal.

The declaration of the Sivas Congress called for a larger gathering of local representatives. Because it was outside the reach of occupying forces and because of its central location in Anatolia, the town of Ankara was chosen as the meeting place of the representatives. Upon his arrival in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal was joined by İsmet Bey
(İnönü) (1884-1973) who would become one of his closest friend and ally during the War of Independence and after the establishment of the new republic.

After several days of preparation which included sessions of recitation of the Qur’an in the mosques of the town, the Grand National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*) was opened with the procession led by three imams held on 23 April 1920. The first meeting of the Assembly took place in the same day with the participation of 369 representatives who were sent to Ankara by the efforts of the local branches of The Society to Defend the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia (Kinross, 1964, p. 217).

As early as the Sivas Congress, Mustafa Kemal was increasingly gaining and emphasizing independence from the Sultan and from the government in Istanbul. However, the establishment of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara with the participation of a large number of delegates from around the homeland marked a turning point in the establishment of an independent government under his control and leadership.

Only ten days before the opening of the Grand National Assembly, the Şeyhülislam issued a fatwa (11 April 1920) declaring the government in Ankara as infidels. In the following days, a group of Muftis and ulema in Ankara and in other parts of the country issued counter-fatwas against the fatwa of the Şeyhülislam contending that his ruling was not legitimate because he and his office was under the control of the enemy (the allied forces). Among the ulema who nullified the fatwa of the Şeyhülislam was Said Nursi who was one of the members of the Darü ’l-Hikmeti ’l-İslamiye (Islamic Academy of Higher Learning).
In the formative stages of the independence movement and the new government in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal did not use a discourse antithetical to religion. He rather sought to utilize religious sentiments in order to unite the people of Anatolia who were composed of different ethnic backgrounds and to gain the support of local religious leaders for the independence movement against the occupying forces. Mustafa Kemal was elected as the president of the Grand National Assembly. One of his main goals as the leader of the independence movement and as the president of the Grand National Assembly was to establish a new structure of coordination and cooperation between the citizenry, the military and civil administrative bodies independent of the Sultan and the
government in Istanbul. In other words, he assumed the leadership of forming a new independent government in Ankara. One of the challenges he faced in this regard was to unite and mobilize various ethnic groups living in Anatolia. In these days of uncertainty, he saw religion (of Islam) as a strong tool he could instrumentalize to overcome this obstacle. In a speech he gave at the Grand National Assembly one month after its formation, Mustafa Kemal said:

> The individuals which constitute our Assembly are not only Turks, or Kurd, or Laz, or Çerkez; but the components of the Nation of Islam composed of all. It is a sincere community. Consequently, the nation that we strive to defend and protect does not consist of single element. It is composed of various Muslim Nations. (As cited in Özcan, 2012, p. 66)

By the time the new government was fully established in Ankara, the Allied Forces (Britain, France and Italy) had mostly withdrawn their occupying forces from the Ottoman lands including Istanbul. However, the Greeks remained with full force in Western Anatolia and advanced further into the mainland following its occupation of the coastal city of İzmir (Smyrna) on 15 May 1919. Therefore, the new government in Ankara which grew out of the independence movement focused largely on the preparations for the expulsion of Greeks from the lands they occupied.

As the full-scale war with the Greeks drew nearer, the new government in Ankara managed to form a regular army with a structure of a chain of command by controlling and in some cases suppressing irregular bands of local resistance such as the militia forces of Çerkes Ethem (1886-1948) (Kinross, 1964, p. 246-252). The Grand National Assembly, in the first week of its foundation, passed the Anti-treason Law (Hıyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu). Four months later, İstiklal Mahkemeleri (Independence
Tribunals) were established and given extraordinary powers accorded by the Anti-treason Law. These developments enabled the new government to suppress any opposition against its policies and operations and to punish army deserters (Zürcher, 1984, p. 146).

The first full scale encounter with the Greek military forces after the formation of the regular army took place in the beginning of 1921 (9 to 11 January). The independence army met the Greek reconnaissance forces in the valley of İnönü in the vicinity of Eskişehir, under the command of İsmet Bey. The Battle resulted in the withdrawal of the two sides but it was the independence army which claimed victory because it gave a setback to the Greek forces which was three times its size. With their sizes doubled, these two forces fought again in the same place in the spring of 1921, which resulted in decisive Turkish victory. However, this did stop the advance of the Greeks in the summer. Mustafa Kemal was appointed as the Army Chief of Staff (Baş Komutan) on 5 August 1921 and commanded the army in the Battle of Sakarya (August 21-September 13, 1921) which halted the advance of the Greeks. After the yearlong stalemate, the independence army launched a counterattack in August 1922 and in two weeks chased out the Greek forces from Western Anatolia. The armistice officially ending the war was signed in the town of Mudanya on October 14, 1922. Shortly after the end of the Turkish War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal abolished the Sultanate and eventually established the new Turkish Republic in 1923 and started implementing top-down secularist reforms.
Ideological Backgrounds of Mustafa Kemal

Mustafa Kemal was born (as Mustafa) in the winter of 1880-1881 (Mango, 1999, p. 26) as the fourth of the six children of a middle class family in the city of Salonica (Macfie, 1994, p. 12). His father, Ali Rıza Efendi (1839-1888), was of Turkish and Albanian origins who started his professional career as a minor officer at the Department of Pious Foundations (Evkaf) (Mango, 1999, p. 27) and continued as a customs officer at the port of Salonica (Froembgen, 1935, p. 36). Resigning from this post, he started a timber business with a friend (Macfie, 1994, p. 11; Lewis, 2002, p. 243). Ali Rıza Efendi died of typhus when his son Mustafa was only 7 years old (Brock, 1954, p. 4). Zübeyde Hanım (1857-1923) was Mustafa’s mother who sent him to a local religious school (mahalle mektebi) at an early age. However, his father Ali Rıza Efendi took him from this school a few days later and enrolled him in a modern secular school which was recently established in Salonica by the modernist schoolmaster Şemsi Efendi (Macfie, 1994, p. 12-13). This school was renown in the region for its discipline and the salutation of students and teachers in military style (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1986, p. 30).

Receiving disciplined education at Şemsi Efendi’s school might have inspired Mustafa to become a soldier because he, at the age of twelve, was enrolled in the Military Secondary School (Askeri Rüşdiye) with his own efforts and against the will of his mother. It is widely accepted that during his studies at this school that his Mathematics teacher whose name was also Mustafa suggested young Mustafa to add Kemal -which means perfection- to his name in order to prevent confusion at the
school. From then on, he became known as Mustafa Kemal. However, Andrew Mango (1999, p. 37) suggested that young Mustafa might have added Kemal to his name out of his admiration for the Young Ottoman reformist Namık Kemal.

After graduating from this elementary military school in 1896 as the fourth best student (Mango, 1999, p. 40), Mustafa Kemal started attending the Military High School in Manastir (Manastır Askeri İdadisi) which provided him the opportunity to learn French and to familiarize himself with the sociopolitical developments in the Ottoman society. At this conjecture of his life, Mustafa became more interested in patriotic ideals of the Ottoman intellectuals. As it is described by Volkan and Itzkowitz (1986, p. 42-43), Mustafa Kemal was especially influenced by the patriotic poetry of Namık Kemal. Upon reading one of his poems describing the desperation of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal awakened to the idea of saving the motherland.

The enemy put his knife at the throat of the country,
There is no one to save the ill-fated mother.

In response, Mustafa Kemal paraphrased the last line of Namık Kemal’s poem and proclaimed his aspirations to save the nation.

The enemy put his knife at the throat of the country,
There is someone to save the ill-fated mother.

(In Volkan & Itzkowitz, 1986, p. 42-43)

Mustafa Kemal graduated from Military High School in Manastir by graduating second in his cohort of 700 students (Gawrych, 2006, p. 5). The next step at the educational career of Mustafa Kemal was his enrollment in the War College (Mekteb-i Harbiye) in Istanbul in 1899. However, Mustafa Kemal was not involved in ideological
and political activism in the first year of his studies at the War College. As he mentioned in an interview he gave to Ahmet Emin Yalman in 1922, “he was drawn into the fantasy of youth” during his freshman year (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (2006 [1919-1938], p. 49). The college was located in the vicinity of Beyoğlu, Pera and Galata which were the hub of entertainment in Istanbul with their cafes, bars and brothels.

Mustafa Kemal, like some other students of the college, frequented these places (Kinross, 1965, p. 15; Volkan and Itzkowitz 1986, p. 48). His habit of heavy drinking, which would eventually cause his death in 1938, started during these years. In Mustafa Kemal’s own account, heavy drinking was, starting from his first year at the War College, a way for him to cope with his overwhelming mental activity and the stress of life. When asked by his doctor Hasan Rıza Soyak to reduce his alcohol consumption, he said:

> I've got to drink: my mind keeps on working hard and fast to the point of suffering. I have to slow it down to rest it at times. When I was at the War College and then at the Staff College, my mates in the dormitory usually had to wake me up in the morning. At night my mind would get fixed on a problem, and, as I thought about it, I was unable to sleep. I would spend the whole night tossing and turning in my bed, until finally I dozed off exhausted just before dawn. Then, naturally, I couldn't hear the sound of reveille. It's the same now. When I don't drink, I can't sleep, and the distress stupefies me. (As cited in Mango, 1999, p. 46)

However, Mustafa Kemal managed to focus on his studies especially in the second year of college and started to be involved revolutionary activism. By this time, secret revolutionary societies started emerging in modern military and civil academies. As it is outlined in detail above, the revolutionary society of the Committee of Union and Progress (the CUP) was established by a group of students in the Military Medical
Academy in Istanbul around the same time Mustafa Kemal started his studies at the Military Academy. The goal of this society was to work towards the reinstitution of the constitution and the parliament which were suspended by the Sultan in 1878. The CUP gained momentum when they reached out to the influential reformist dissidents such as Ahmet Rıza and Mizancı Murat. Revolutionary discourse of such intellectuals and the pioneers of reformist opposition like Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha were circulated in the modern schools.

Another revolutionary influence came from the admiration of the French Revolution and the military success of the Napoleonic armies among the students in modern military schools in the Ottoman Empire (Mango, 1999, p. 49). In addition, students at these academies had access to domestic and foreign newspapers reporting significant developments and covering reformist and revolutionary ideas despite the strong literary censorship imposed during the Hamidian Era (Gawrych, 2006, p. 13). Thus, institutions of higher learning especially including military academies were increasingly becoming politicized.

As he recalled later, the impact of revolutionary ideas were growing when Mustafa Kemal was studying at the War College.

During the years at the War College political ideas emerged. We were still unable to gain real insight into the situation. It was the period of Abdulhamid. We were reading the books of Namık Kemal. Surveillance was tight. Most of the time we found the chance to read only in the barracks after going to bed. There seemed to be something wrong in the state of affairs if those who read such patriotic works were under surveillance. But we could not completely grasp the essence of it. (In Volkan & Itzkowitz, 1986, p. 47).
With the goal of securing entry into the highly prestigious Staff College (*Harp Akademisi*), Mustafa Kemal studied vigorously since his second year at the War College (Turan, 2004, p. 46; Mango, 1999, p. 46-47). Graduating fifth of 459 (Volkan & Itzkowitz, 1986, p. 47), Mustafa Kemal, in 1902, enrolled in the Staff College where his involvement in political issues was taken to another level. On the one side, he was relentlessly studying and on the other side he was becoming more active in political activism at his new school in Istanbul. Together with some of his close friends Mustafa Kemal started producing a handwritten newspaper discussing prevalent problems in the Ottoman state (Mango, 1999, p. 51) and supporting libertarian ideas (Karpat, 2000, p. 92 - 94).

He graduated from the Staff College in 1904 ranking fifth out of 43 and was appointed as a staff captain. Mustafa Kemal described, in the interview he gave to Ahmet Emin in 1922, that he and his friends secretly continued meeting and “carrying out their political activism” at an apartment they rented in the name of a friend in Istanbul. However, the activities of this group were intercepted when one of their friends who was not part of their secretive circle approached and asked if he could stay at the apartment by saying that he could not afford to rent his own place. This person, who was actually a spy, informed the palace about the activities of Mustafa Kemal and his friends who were arrested and jailed for about a month (Mango, 1999, p. 54-55; Atatürk, 2006 [1919-1938], p. 42).

After their release, Mustafa Kemal was exiled to a cavalry unit in Syria where he met another political exile also named Mustafa who had studied at the Military
Medical Academy in Istanbul in which the CUP was established. Because of his involvement in a plot, Mustafa (Cantekin) was arrested and exiled to Syria where he opened a business in the local souk. Before the arrival of Mustafa Kemal, he had established a small revolutionary political society called *Vatan* (Fatherland). Shortly after meeting Mustafa (Cantekin) and learning about *Vatan*, Mustafa Kemal became a member (Zürcher, 1984, p. 32-33). Assuming its leadership shortly thereafter, Mustafa Kemal and opened new branches in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Beirut. Yet, the impact of this revolutionary society was limited in greater part because it was far away from the Balkanian provinces which were the hotbed of revolutionary fervor. Faced with this challenge, Mustafa Kemal applied for and received a sick leave of four months and went to his hometown Salonica where he continued his revolutionary activism. There, he established a branch of the society of *Vatan* by changing its name to *Vatan ve Hürriyet Cemiyeti* (Fatherland and Freedom Society) (Kinross, 1965, p. 32). As Gawry (2006, p. 18-19) observed, the name of reflects the influence of the French Revolution in Mustafa Kemal ideology.

When the capital discovered the presence of Mustafa Kemal and his revolutionary activism in Macedonia, he went back to his post in Syria. However, he was appointed to the General Staff in the Third Army in Salonica in 1907 (Kinross, 1965, p.32-33). Upon his return, Mustafa Kemal realized that his secret society was overtaken by the CUP which by that time had emerged as the most dominant and influential frontier of opposition and revolutionary movements in the Ottoman Empire. He, too, became a member of the CUP but his stature was overshadowed by the
prominent members of the committee primarily including Enver Pasha (Macfie, 1994, p. 36-40). As such, Mustafa Kemal did not play a significant role in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 which was largely led by Enver Pasha, Talat Pasha and Niyazi Bey. When the counterrevolution of 1909 (the 31 March Incident) unfolded, Mustafa Kemal was dispatched to the Action Army as a minor officer under the command of Şevket Pasha to suppress the uprisings.

By this time, Mustafa Kemal’s revolutionary and reformist ideology like most of the Young Turks was becoming increasingly nationalist and secularist. Mustafa Kemal’s nationalism before the establishment of the Turkish Republic was reflected in his favorable perception of dissolution of the Empire as a precondition for the establishment of a pristinely nationalist Turkish state (Hanioğlu, 2013, p.37). In addition, Mustafa Kemal, like many of second generation peers in the Young Turks Movement was heavily influenced by the materialist, positivist and scientist ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers. For example, Mustafa Kemal read Ludwig Büchner’s *Kraft und Stoff* (Matter and Energy) and struck by its emphasis on the materialist basis of human thinking. Other famous materialists and positivists such as Baron d’Holbach, Gustave Le Bon and Voltaire also had profound effect on the development of Mustafa Kemal’s secularist worldviews (Tüfekçi, 1983; Hanioğlu, 2013, p. 52). Evolutionist ideas of Darwin and other materialist ideologues influenced Mustafa Kemal as well. He once declared that human beings were evolved from the fishes of the sea (Hanioğlu, 2013, p. 53).
Establishment of the Turkish Republic: Secularism as a State Ideology

Mustafa Kemal rose to prominence after his success as a colonel in the Ottoman war efforts against the Gallipoli Campaign of Allied Forces during the WWI. His success landed him the opportunity to be sent to Anatolia by the Capital as an inspector who would supervise the disarmament of the army which was mandated by the Armistice of Mudros (1918). After arriving in Samsun in May 1919, Mustafa Kemal assumed the leadership of the independence movement which was scattered around different parts of the Anatolian peninsula. In so doing, he also pioneered the establishment of the Grand National Assembly in 1920 and became its president. As it is described at length above, Mustafa Kemal led the Turkish War of Independence against the Greek Army which was backed by the Allied Forces.

The victorious end of the Turkish War of Independence greatly helped Mustafa Kemal and his government to establish themselves at the national and international levels as the competent authority in Anatolia. The new government signed treaties with the great powers of the world such Britain, France and Russia. This encouraged the new government to explicitly mobilize towards curbing the power of the Sultan and the already incapacitated Ottoman government in Istanbul. It was only two weeks after the War of Independence was officially ended (1 November 1922) that Mustafa Kemal compelled the Grand National Assembly to declare the abolishment of the Sultanate. During the articulation of the matter, he declared:

Gentlemen, sovereignty and Sultanate are not given to anyone by anyone because scholarship proves they should be; or through discussion and debate. Sovereignty and Sultanate are taken by strength, by power and by force. It was by force that the sons of Osman seized the sovereignty and sultanate of the
Turkish nation; they have maintained this usurpation for six centuries. Now the Turkish nation has rebelled and has put a stop to these usurpers, and has effectively taken sovereignty and Sultanate into its own hands. This is an accomplished fact. The question is merely how to give expression to it. *This will happen in any case.* If those gathered here, the Assembly, and everyone else could look at this question in a natural way, I think they would agree. Even if they do not, the truth will soon find expression, but some heads may roll in the process. (Lewis, 2002, p. 258) [Emphasis added]

The Ottoman dynasty had remained in power since 1299. When they, under the command of Sultan Selim I, defeated the Meimuks in 1517 in Egypt, the post of Caliphate was transferred to the Ottoman dynasty. Thereafter, Ottoman rulers assumed the title of Caliph in addition to their title Sultan. However, the institution of the Caliphate was only a symbolic post and it did not have executive power separate from the Sultanate. It was only after the ascension of Abdulhamid II to the throne that the post of Caliphate started to be actively used as a tool to foster unity in the Muslim World against the intrusions of the great powers of the West. After the dethroning of Abdulhamid II, his brother Mehmed (Reşad) V reigned between 1909 and 1918 as the Sultan Caliph. After his death, Mehmed (Vahdettin) VI (1861-1926) was crowned as the new Caliph Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He was in power during the years of Turkish War of Independence.

One of the first things the new government in Ankara did was separating the posts of the Caliphate and the Sultanate and the abolishment of the latter. In November 1, 1922 the Grand National Assembly of Ankara abrogated the post of Sultanate with the mandate of Mustafa Kemal. The Assembly also passed a resolution making Ankara the new capital. The Sultan, Mehmed V, was forced to go to exile. Two weeks later, the
Sultan left Istanbul aboard the British steamer *HMS Malaya* and went to Malta. Abdulmecid II, the cousin of Mehmed V, was appointed as the new Caliph. In April 15, 1923, an article was added to the Anti-Treason Law (*Hiyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu*) making objections to the abolishment of the Sultanate a treason punishable with execution.

The new Turkish Republic was officially established on October 29, 1923. The post of Caliphate was abolished in 4 March 1924 in the same day all of the madrasas, Sufi lodges and religious endowments were closed and outlawed which were ensued by other aggressively secularist policies. Wearing fez, turban or any other religious dress in the public sphere was banned. Wearing the western style felt hat was made mandatory for all males by the implementation of the “şapka Kanunu” (The Hat Law) (Özdalga, 2013b, p. 41) in 1925. The religiously based Ottoman civil code (*mejelle*) was replaced by the adoption of the Swiss civil code in 1926. The Arabic script which had been used in the Ottoman society for centuries was replaced by the Latin script in 1928. The Arabic call to prayer (*ezan*) was forced to be recited in Turkish starting in 1932. Thusly, removing or at least marginalizing all of the religious symbols and elements from the public life in the newly established republic became the pillar of the new regime. Even though Mustafa Kemal abolished the sultanate in 1922 and established the Turkish Republic in 1923 with the declaration that “sovereignty unconditionally belongs only to the people,” (*Hakimiyet kayıtsız şartsız milletindir*), the political system during his lifetime (d. 1938) was far from being democratic in nature. Turkey was governed by the single-party rule system between 1923 and 1950. The
ideology of the *Halk Fırkasi* (People’s Party) which was the party established by Mustafa Kemal was also the ideology of the Turkish state in the formative decades of the Republic. The set of ideas and policies adhered and propagated by Mustafa Kemal and the People’s Party has been referred to as Kemalism.

Nationalism, laicite (secularism), republicanism, etatism, populism and revolutionism were described as the six principles of the Kemalist ideology in the program of the People’s Party. These six pillars of Kemalism were amended to the constitution in 1937 as the defining characteristics of the Turkish Republic. Of these six principles, the strongest in practice have been nationalism and laicite. The cadres of the People’s Party aspired to establish an explicitly and pristinely Turkish state. Mustafa Kemal’s expression of “Happy is the one who says I am a Turk” (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*) became one of the guiding principles of Kemalism. The presence of other ethnicities were tolerated only if they didn’t challenge the Turkishness of the state and the society. Acquiring last names was made mandatory by the implementation of *Soyadi Kanunu* (the Law of Last Names) in 1934. Taking foreign or non-Turkish family names were forbidden as well. Mustafa Kemal chose Atatürk, which means the Father of Turks as his last name. Thereafter, he became known and referred to as Atatürk inside and outside Turkey.

Under the rule of Atatürk (1923-1938) top-down turkification of the society continued in different areas. Turkification of the language and nationalist reading of history was part of this endeavor. The Turkish Historical Association was established in 1931 with the idea of studying and teaching the history of the Turks before and after the
rise of Islam. The Turkish Language Association was instituted in 1932 under the patronage of Atatürk and with the purpose of turkifying the language by the expulsion of foreign words and by suggesting new Turkish words to replace them (Bayyurt, 2009, p. 120; Johanson 2011, p. 732). Turkification of the language was not only related to the rise of nationalism but it was also part and parcel of the secularization policies of the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic. As it is observed by Schlyter (2005),

Turkish language reform was part of Atatürk’s general political plan to make Turkish society less dependent on its Islamic past and to lay the ground for a modern civic state characterized by economic progress and social welfare. (p. 1907)

As Akural (1984, p. 133) suggested, Atatürk and the like-minded People’s Party cadres might be aware of the influence of the language on the worldview of those who speak it. Arabic and Persian, for the Kemalists, represented a particularly religious worldview. Thus, by reforming and turkifying the language, they were not only contributing to their nationalist cause, they were also paving the way for the further secularization of the Turkish society.

The pillar of revolutionism in the Kemalist ideology reflected strong adherence to the idea of civilizational progress. Atatürk and the cadres of the People’s Party, like many of the first and second generation Young Turks, believed in the superiority of the Western civilization. They held the conviction that it was through the disconnection and freedom from religious ideas and practices and through the development of science and scientific methods that the Europeans achieved tremendous accomplishments in the path of civilizational progress. Reliance on science and the application of scientific methods, instead of religious ideas, practices and forces, was the key for the Turkish
society to join in the European Civilization as well. Two approaches were used by Atatürk and the People’s Party in this regard. On the one hand, they implemented top-down reforms in the direction of Westernization and secularization. On the other hand, they systematically and forcefully marginalized religious symbols and forces in the society. In addition to banning the use of religious titles such as hoca, hafiz, şeyh and hazret, the new regime forcefully closed down all of the Sufi lodges (tekke and zaviye) in 1924. Those who resisted change were harshly punished. For example, the Ankara Independence Tribunal issued at least 138 death sentences between March 1925 and March 1926 to those who protested these top-down reforms primarily including the hat law (Mango, 1999, p. 436).

Atatürk justified these policies by contending that such reforms were necessary steps towards becoming a part of the true human civilization as it was developed in Europe. During his visit the city of Kastamonu in which he declared the hat law, Atatürk Said:

In the face of knowledge, science, and of the whole extent of radiant civilization, I cannot accept the presence in Turkey's civilized community of people primitive enough to seek material and spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheiks. The Turkish republic cannot be a country of sheiks, dervishes, and disciples. The best, the truest order is the order of civilization. To be a man it is enough to carry out the requirements of civilization. The leaders of dervish orders will understand the truth of my words, and will themselves close down their lodges [tekke] and admit that their disciplines have grown up. (In Mango, 1999, p. 435)

Anti-clericalism was not the discursive strategy used by Atatürk in support of Westernization. He criticized -albeit implicitly- religious worldviews as part of the same effort. For example, he asserted in 1924 that “age-old rotten mentalities, tradition
worshiping, superstition and nonsense had to be thrown out of the heads the nation” in
order to “survive in the world of modern civilization” (Berkes, 1964, p. 464).

In a speech he gave in the town of Akhisar in October 1925, Atatürk made it
clear that he wanted an unconditional integration into the Western civilization.

The civilized world is far ahead of us. We have no choice but to catch up. It is
time to stop nonsense such as “should we or should we not wear hats?” . We
shall adopt hats along with all other works of Western civilization. Uncivilized
people are doomed to be trodden under the feet of civilized people. (In Mango,

Atatürk also presented his conviction for wholesale borrowing of the Western
civilization as the will of the nation. In a speech he gave at the School of Law in
Ankara University in the same year (1925), he said:

This nation has now accepted the principle that the only means of survival for
nations in the international struggle for existence lies in the acceptance of the
contemporary Western civilization. (In Berkes, 1964, p. 470)

These remarks are indications that Atatürk appropriated the idea of wholesale
borrowing of the Western civilization as it was suggested earlier by Ahmet Ağaoğlu.
That is why, Ahmet Ağaoğlu who had previously advocated wholesale adoption of
Western Civilization a few years before the establishment of the Turkish Republic
championed the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his close friend Ismet Inonu for
achieving this goal in a short period of time. In the foreword of his book “Three
Civilizations” (Üç Medeniyet) which was published in 1927, Ağaoğlu wrote:

This book was initially written in 1919 and 1920 in Malta and it was published
in several pieces in the journal Türk Yurdu (Turkish Homeland) after I returned
home [from exile]. The book had made the case that the Western Civilization,
which is one of the three major civilizations in the world, prevailed over the
other two [Sino-Indian and Muslim civilizations] and that our salvation was
rested solely on the appropriation of this (Western) civilization as a whole. This issue has already lost its previous significance. Our great revolution which sprung from the supreme mastermind of Gazi [Mustafa Kemal Atatürk] and executed by the powerful hands of Ismet (Inonu) Pasha achieved what was seen ten years ago as a mere ideal and as a fantasy to the enlightened Turkish intellectuals. In this short period, we have completely changed from inside and outside. The ideals which we could not even dream of and the thoughts we could not afford to talk about a few years ago have now become principles of our lives. With the determined will of Gazi [Mustafa Kemal Atatürk], we have entered, from head to toe, into the boundaries of the Western civilization. (2012 [1927], p. 1)

Atatürk’s secularist and progressivist reforms were not limited to changes in the areas of politics and culture. He also intensified educational reform in the direction of westernization. As I described in detail above, increasing numbers and types of modern primary, secondary and postsecondary schools were established throughout the Empire in the last two centuries of the Ottoman history. However, the Ottoman reformers such as the Sultans and civilian bureaucrats did not close down religious schools. That is why, modern, traditional and religious schools existed side by side in the late Ottoman society. Shortly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk’s government banned and closed down all religious schools under the banner of the unification of education (tevhid-i tedrisat). Religious instruction was also gradually removed from the modern schools. All of these steps, as observed by Winter (1984, p. 185-186), were part of the broad policy of secularizing the nation.

The secularist character of Atatürk’s educational policies was epitomized in his famous declaration; “The most truthful guide in life is science and knowledge” *(Hayatta en hakiki mürşit ilimdir)*. The word *mürşit* he used in his expression does not only and simply mean *guide*, it also refers to religious (Sufi) masters which is another
indication that Atatürk’s appraisal of science bore antithetical connotations against religion. Just as science refuted religious dogmas, secular scientific education became not only as the most reliable source of knowledge but also as the ultimate “guide” in all areas of life in the ideology of Atatürk. Of course, he was not the only ideologue who adhered to such ideas. As I described above, he was greatly influenced by other European positivists, materialists and secularists such as Ludwig Büchner and their Ottoman disciples like Abdullah Cevdet. As Hanioğlu (2005) reports, Atatürk once told Abdullah Cevdet after the establishment of the Turkish Republic that they (Atatürk and the cadres of the People’s Party) were putting his (Abdullah Cevdet’s) ideas into practice.

Atatürk’s antithetical stance against religion in all areas of life including education did not remain only at the discursive and policy levels. As it is briefly mentioned above, the Kemalist regime crushed any individual or group opposition against their secularist policies. For example, İskilipli Atif Efendi who published an article criticizing the secularist character of Kemalist reforms was executed in 1926 (Mango, 1999, p. 438). After Said Nursi (1878-1960) started writing and circulating treatises in support of Qur’anic teachings in 1925, he and his disciples were subject to persecution for the rest of their lives as well. Thusly, secularization after the establishment of the Turkish Republic became a state publicly which was strictly implemented by force. The secularist movement in the history of Turkey started as an oppositional and revolutionary movement which in its formative decades extensively used discursive mobilization strategies. However, after capturing the halls of power
(government) the secularist movement was transformed into a radically conservative establishment.

**Conclusion**

There were several parallel and in some cases simultaneous processes which were related to the development of secularization in the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Some of these parallel processes were unfolding in the form of institutional transformation of the society, while others were happening at the discursive and ideological levels including issues pertaining to the construction of reality and moral orientation of the self. In my understanding, all of these processes should be studied simultaneously in order to better understand the dynamics of secularization in the late Ottoman society and especially in the first several decades of the modern Turkish Republic.

The first of these parallel processes was the gradual emergence of the centralized nation state and its expansion into the lives of the citizenry in greater part because of the development and the spread of modern administrative and educational institutions. As Turam, (2011, p. 20) argues, one of the defining characteristics of the rise of nation states is “the transformation of subjects into citizens” which is mostly achieved by the centralized educational systems. The last century of the Ottoman Empire witnessed the establishment of various kinds of modern public schools which expanded into the periphery in a considerably short period of time. Alongside the growth of the new educational system, traditional religious schools steadily lost their social significance. Eventually, these schools were abolished by the leadership of the
new Republic in 1924 under banner of “unification of education” in the same day the institution of the Caliphate together with Sufi lodges were abolished. The development of a centralized school systems as part of other centralization reforms produced, for those who control these institutions, opportunity spaces for the education and mobilization of the masses. Centralization and expansion of administrative institutions including the government produced similar opportunity spaces. These transformations started with the first wave of reforms between 1779 and 1839. The Tanzimat Era (1839-1876) was fully characterized by the advancement and expansion of such reforms. Centralization reforms never stopped until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It was in the first two decades of the modern Turkish Republic that the processes of the establishment of a fully centralized Nation State reached its strongest point.

Another similar parallel process was the gradual militarization and therefore dictatorialization of the state. As it is outlined by Uyar and Edward (2009), the army and the soldiers had been considerably influential since the birth of the Ottoman State and they, especially the revolting Janissary corps, also posed threats to the stability of the state. The corruption of the army was also credited with the loss of wars in the eighteenth century and therefore in the decline of the Empire. As a result, modernization efforts in the history of Ottoman Empire started with the reformation and disciplining of the army which was supported by the establishment of military schools during the reigns of Selim III and Mahmut II. By the abolishment of the Janissaries, the Sultanate was able to curb the destabilizing power of the traditional
army corps. In the following decades, opposition in the Ottoman Empire was formed within the ranks of the civil bureaucracy of the Sublime Porte. This oppositional frontier started as a journalistic movement and it proved successful in the declaration of the First Constitution in 1876. However, the abolishment of the constitution and the newly established Ottoman Parliament in 1878 by Sultan Abdulhamid II who resisted the demands of the opposition with tight ruling and tactical moves aimed at pacifying certain elements of the dissent diminished the Young Turks expectations for a peaceful civilian revolution. The failure of the hopes for a smooth transition to the constitutional system under such circumstances convinced many especially the members of the CUP for the feasibility and necessity of a coup d’état style revolution. Such an inclination favored the members of the CUP who were soldiers and officers in the army because it was the military which would supply the manpower for the projected revolution. Eventually, it was the soldiers such as Enver Bey, Niyazi Bey and Talat Bey who executed the revolution of the 1908 and dominated the CUP in the years to follow.

Continuing wars in the first two decades of the twentieth century also legitimized and boosted the status of the soldiers as the protectors of the motherland and of the nation. Therefore, the state in the last several years of the Ottoman Empire and especially during the formative years of the new Turkish Republic turned into a state of soldiers which embraced strictly enforced top down reforms. As I described above, it was almost exclusively the mektepli (educated) officers who dominated the CUP and they were generally more akin to secularist ideals. That is also why most of the reforms undertaken by these military rulers were in the direction of secularization.
The third and perhaps the most important one was the gradual development of the secularist movement. Secular ideals which were initially nourished in the post-Enlightenment environment of European societies were first employed by the Western educated Ottoman intellectuals who were not against religion. These intellectuals wanted to reconcile some of the secular ideals developed in the West such as the idea of progress, democracy, liberty and nationalism with traditional religious notions. In other words, secular ideals and religious principles and commitments existed side by side in the mind and in the discourse of the same person. This was especially true for the Young Ottomans movement. The line of separation between the secular/secularist and the religious became more visible in the Young Turks movement. This time, religious and secularist ideals were propagated by different individuals and factions within the same oppositional movement of the Young Turks. There were those who were openly religious, and there were those who were explicitly against religion (E.g., Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet, Baha Tevfik, Ahmet Ağaoglu, and Yusuf Akçura) in the same movement. One step later, the gap between the secularist and the religious became much wider and much sharper. With the establishment of the new Turkish Republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the secularists were explicitly and aggressively at odds with public and private forms of religiosity and with the religious establishments such as the traditional madrasa schools, religious notables, and Sufi organizations (tariqat).

One part of the development of the secularist movement was the emergence of a frontier of nationalists (e.g., Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp) who advocated a shift
from multiculturalist political ideology of Pan-Ottomanism and from the religiously
classified Pan-Islamism to the ethnically and culturally defined Pan-Turkism. Like
Pan-Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism was a modern political ideology, too, since it was born
in the second half of the nineteenth century as response to the encounters with Western
powers and as an answer to the challenges of maintaining the territorial integrity of the
Empire when minority nations especially the Christians in the Balkans (e.g., Serbs,
Greeks and Bulgarians) were declaring their independence one by one. Besides its
practical socio-political implications, Pan-Islamism had strong religious connotations
as well. At least, it was a political identity which emphasized and prioritized religious
affiliation. The shift to Pan-Turkism marginalized religiosity-based forms of identities
and thus it symbolized a sharp transition to a secular form of identity. Moreover, Pan-
Turkism and Turkish nationalism were embraced and promoted by openly secularist
elite and statesmen in the late Ottoman society and in the first several decades of the
modern Turkish Republic.

The development of the secularist movement and its transformation from the
reconciliatory Young Ottoman ideology to the openly secularist faction of the Young
Turks movement and to the aggressively secularist policies of the founding fathers of
the Turkish Republic was also reflected in the development and transformation of
Westernism. Pioneers of reform in the Ottoman history advocated selective borrowing
from the West while some of the later generation reformist intellectuals such as Ahmet
Ağaoglu advocated the adoption of the material and immaterial aspects of the Western
civilization as a whole. It is important to note that Westernization has already been
equated with secularization in the Turkish history. Some of the secularist defended secularism in the form of Westernization which to them meant reaching to the highest and brightest level of human civilization.

The conflict and rivalry between the positivist, statist, nationalist, liberalist, traditionalist, religious, materialist and even atheist factions in the Young Turks Movement, in the CUP and in the Ottoman and Turkish societies at large are indications that the development of reformist ideas and modernization projects were not simply the result of the unfolding of a linear process of modernization (or secularization) independent of human agency. Most of the revolutionary ideas and mobilization strategies were contested and each side were mobilized to realize their goals. This is indicative of the importance of social movement dynamics of reform and modernization in the Ottoman Empire. Even though reformist intellectuals and activists and in some cases their formal and informal organizations made concessions and negotiations, they were part and parcel of the development and transformation of the nature of the old and new social and political institutions in the society. Mobilization of the Young Turks, however divided it might be, vis-à-vis the Sultan and the Sublime Porte bureaucracy and vis-à-vis other conservative establishments is yet another dimension of the human element of major socio-historical transformations in the late Ottoman society regardless of who and to what extent won the ideological debates and the political battles. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the counterrevolution of 1909 and their results are yet another striking example of how movement-countermovement dynamics played a role in the development of secularism and its
encounters with religion. Such a history revolved around the ideas and mobilization and counter-mobilization strategies of all sides. That is why I have argued throughout this dissertation that the study of the role of human element and social movement dynamics should be an integral part of the studies of secularization and revivalism.

It should also be noted that secularism of the secularist movement in the Ottoman Empire and in the Turkish Republic should be understood, at least partially, in conjunction with the development and the expansion of the secularist movement(s) of the Western European societies. Secularist ideologues among the Young Turks and the CUP borrowed ideas heavily from their European counterparts especially from France and Germany. A great proportion of the leading members of the Young Turks were educated in Europe, mostly in France, in the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, the Young Turks as the leading political oppositional front in the Ottoman Empire were organized in Europe. For example, the first and second congresses of the Ottoman opposition were organized by the Young Turks in France in 1902 and in 1907. A more direct introduction of European secularists and their philosophies were done in the form of translations. The works of Western secularists (materialists, positivists, naturalist etc.) and the works of orientalists (e.g., Ernest Renan and Reinhart Dozy)\textsuperscript{22} were translated in to Turkish. This is also to say that revivalist movements and their mobilization strategies especially at discursive levels in Turkey can be seen as a

\textsuperscript{22} The works and the discourse of Western orientalists are of particular importance perhaps as much as the other Western secularists in terms of understanding external intellectual sources of the secularist movement in the Ottoman Empire and in Turkey. The discourse of the orientalists such as Ernest Renan and Reinhart Dozy were charged directly against the religion of Islam and historical and contemporary Muslim societies.
response to the secularist movement(s) of Western Europe even though the question of how (well) the Young Turks and other secularists interpreted and presented the ideas of Western secularist ideologues remains contested.

One of the main conclusions I drive from studying the development of the secularist ideas in the modern history of Turkey is that the conflict between the modern secularist movement(s) and religious forces and religion, including its socially organized forms, was not first and foremost about the clash of atheism with belief in God. It was the clash of the idea of progress between “the human effort to improve the human” and “a life which is centered on the idea that things including human beings are created”. Therefore, it is not solely about the question of if and who created the universe, it is more about the ways of life organized around answers given to these questions. That is where, I think, the social significance of and the clash between secularism and religious forces come from. Especially when it is looked at from the secularist movement’s side, answers given to the question of if and who created the universe and everything therein seems to be a justification for the secularist perspectives of who the human beings are and what the purpose of their existence is. That is the reason why, I think, naturalism and its various forms of interpretations such as evolutionary perspectives have been an integral part of the secularist formulation of the idea of progress.

The fourth parallel process which is directly related to the third is the gradual progression of the secularist movement from the ranks of opposition to the commanding heights of the increasingly centralized state apparatus. Until the
revolution of 1908, almost all of the intellectuals demanding change regardless of whether they were religious or secular, or somewhere in between, were part of the opposition. The secularist ideologues faced resistance not only from the conservative state but also from the traditional establishments of the society. When the CUP came to power, the secularists had direct access to the ranks of power. However, they had to share this power with and in many cases had to concede to the more religious fractions of the CUP. Nonetheless, the secularist side of the CUP managed to assume the leadership role of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) and established the new secularist Republic. Eventually, the secularist movement which once was on the side of the opposition were now the uncontested owners of the state which had been steadily increasing in power because of centralizing modernization reforms.

As the secularists moved from the ranks of opposition to the halls of power, the nature of their discourse and mobilization strategies had also evolved. In the beginning, the secularist movement was part of the journalistic opposition movement and they, like other members of the opposition, sought to convince the Sultan and the Sublime Porte bureaucracy and to a limited degree the common people for the necessity of reform. Their dialectical discourse was enriched by the intellectual terminology and the libertarian rhetoric they borrowed from the West as well as the terminology they called for help from the religious and cultural tradition. They presented justifications, in some cases from religion, for the reformist ideals and projects they defended. In this regard, secularist ideologues were similar to the “organic intellectuals” in the Gramscian sense. However, their discourse took the form of indoctrination as they apprehended the
commanding heights of the society including educational institutions after the
establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Instead of convincing the masses for
reform, they justified the use and abuse of brute force for the implementation of
secularist policies which they thought would take the Turkish society to the level of
contemporary Western civilization. In this regard, the transition of the secularist
movement from the ranks of opposition to center of the state represented a transition
from being organic intellectuals to traditional intellectual in the Gramscian sense.

Yet another parallel process of change was the transformation of the
philosophical foundations of the discourse of the secularist movement. The notions of
democracy, liberty, constitutionalism and nationalism which were nourished in the
secularist post-Enlightenment environment of European societies were somehow
reconcilable with religious rhetoric as the Young Ottomans tried to achieve. I think that
this is one of the major reasons why the line of separation between the religious and the
secular ideas was not very visible in the Young Ottoman thought. However, the
discourse of reformist intellectuals in the subsequent generations especially among the
Young Turks was not limited to political aspirations. They were also interested in
questions regarding ontological, epistemological and moral philosophical issues in
similar ways they were discussed and presented in contemporary Western societies
especially in France and Germany. These intellectuals were acquainted with and
strongly influenced by positivism, naturalism and materialism. Such perspectives were
not only hard to reconcile with the teachings of religion, they were also dichotomous
alternatives to religious worldviews. There were staunch supporters of these ideals in
the late Ottoman society such as Beşir Fuad, Baha Tevfik, and Abdullah Cevdet who, according to scholars like Hanioğlu (2005), influenced the founding fathers of the new Republic. That is why, I think that it is crucial to understand what roles such ideals played in the development of secularization and how they influenced the late Ottoman society and the newly established Turkish Republic.

There was a shift from the pragmatic approach to science as a means to improve the material conditions of life in the Muslim World towards the perception of science as an alternative weltanschauung which was antithetical to religious worldviews. I observed four different stages in which perception of science was transformed in the late Ottoman society and in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. Firstly, during the first wave of modernization reforms undertaken with the support and sponsorship of Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II, science was, in the eyes of these statesmen, a necessary tool for improving the military technology as a measure to counterbalance the rise and expansion of technologically superior European armies and thus to prevent decline of the Empire. Secondly, civilian pioneers of reform and modernization around the declaration the Tanzimat started seeing and presenting science as a powerful instrument through which societal organization and the material condition of life could be enhanced and developed. In this regard, science was associated with and presented as the essential component of the idea of civilizational progress. Thirdly, Young Turks such as Abdullah Cevdet, who were influenced by the European, mostly German, materialist and naturalist philosophers like Büchner, perceived and presented science as an alternative weltanschauung which was the invalidation of religious worldviews such
as the idea that the universe and everything therein are created by God and that there will be a resurrection after death. Fourth, towards the end of the progression of secularist worldview from ranks of opposition to the ranks of power, science was eventually ascribed the status of an encompassing paradigm providing the most effective assistance, the most reliable source of knowledge and the most truthful guidance in all aspects of life. Such an exaltation of scientific worldview was epitomized in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's declaration that “science is the ultimate source of guidance.”

In the first two of the four stages I outlined here, science was not seen or presented as an antithesis of religion. That is probably why, there was not a significant en masse resistance or counter-mobilization efforts against the development of science in the Ottoman Society. Indeed, reactionary responses to change during these times were mostly directed against the intrusion of the Western culture and morals, not to science and technology and not even to Western originated socio-political ideologies such as constitutionalism and parliamentarianism. As we saw in the generation of the Young Ottomans, there was a broad, if not pervasive, consensus in the Ottoman society even among the ulema that it was permissible and indeed necessary to acquire the science and technology of the Europeans. They also favorably looked at and in many cases wholeheartedly defended constitutionalism and parliamentarianism. The Young Ottomans were inspiration to the subsequent generations of both religious and secularist reformists.
In conclusion, the emergence of an explicitly secularist movement (e.g., the Young Turks) in the late Ottoman society coincides with (1) the presentation of science as an alternative and antithetical worldview providing ontological and epistemological invalidations of the fundamental teachings of religion and (2) with the rise of purely nationalists ideology of identity formation. Those who established the modern Turkish Republic including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his close friends like Ismet Inonu were second generation Young Turks who were fully convinced about the truthfulness and merits of these parallel strand of secularist ideologies to a degree that they were committed to reshape the remnants of the Ottoman society and raise new generations according to these principles. That must be the reason why they showed little or no tolerance for the public presence of religiosity and religious symbols and harshly persecuted individuals and groups which did not comply with their secularist and nationalist policies and laws. Thus, they established a secularist and hegemonic one-party system which did not leave any legitimate space for alternative ideas and ideologies.

As I outlined above, the history of secularization in Turkey indicates that the secularist movement was not fixed in time and space. It was a dynamic movement which consisted of shifting ideas and mobilization strategies from time to time and from one context to the other. In addition, not all of the secularists interpreted the world, the society and religion in the same way. For example, some had a more reconciliatory approach towards religion while others were more hostile against it. Similarly, some of the secularists were mobilized against social and political aspects of
religion while others were more critical about its meaning aspects. However, the history of secularization in Turkey also shows patterns of continuity in the secularist movement vis-à-vis religion and religious forces. Perhaps because of the socio-historical factors such as the development of the centralized nation state that the secularist movement succeeded in monopolizing societal institutions and thusly marginalizing religion. Institutionalization of secularization and marginalization of religion also consolidated the secularist movement at a specific conjecture in the history of Turkey. The establishment of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk was a major turning point in this regard. The cadres of Atatürk’s People’s Party which single handedly ruled Turkey for about three decades (1923-1950) centralized and monopolized secularism in Turkey. Consolidation of the secularist movement and its control over the societal institutions further separated the lines between secularism and religion in Turkey and made the relationship between secularism and religion more diametrical and dialectical. Perhaps because the consolidation of the secularist movement and its control and monopolization of societal institutions that the revivalist movements started to emerge in Turkey. The next two chapters of this dissertation explores revivalist ideas of Said Nursi, the emergence of the Nur Movement and its mobilization strategies with regard to these processes.
CHAPTER IV
THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF SAID NURSI’S
REVIVALIST DISCOURSE

Introduction

This chapter analyzes Said Nursi’s (1878-1960) reformist and revivalist discourse at three subsequent stages vis-à-vis the development and transformation of secularist ideas and movements in the late Ottoman and early Turkish societies. The first stage includes Said Nursi’s reformist discourse until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and its aftermath (until 1910).

I will focus on three central themes in the reformist discourse he developed during this first period. The first is his project of opening a university in the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire where he could teach religious and positive sciences together. As part of discussions regarding his University project, I will also discuss Said Nursi’s perception of science at this conjecture of his life. Secondly, I will explore Said Nursi’s ideas regarding İttihad-ı İslam (Pan-Islamism) with respect to his analyses of the reasons for the decline of the Muslim World and the solutions he proposed. Third, I will investigate Said Nursi’s discourse of political reform (i.e., constitutionalism and parliamentarianism) leading up to the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution. In so doing, I will also compare Said Nursi’s religiously backed reformist discourse to the
discourse of other contemporary reformists (e.g., the Young Ottomans such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, Ali Suavi and Hoca Tahsin) who supported their reformist ideas with religious references.

At the second stage of this chapter, I will explore Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse during the period stretching from the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 to the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic. As I discuss below, Said Nursi was not explicitly mobilized against a particular secularist ideology or movement until around 1910. I also note below that Said Nursi mostly utilized a reformist discourse -more so than ideas directly relating to religious revival- until this time. However, he was going through a transformation around 1910 in his discursive mobilization strategies. For the first time, Said Nursi started presenting responses to the development of secularist ideologies such as materialism, positivism and naturalism. Meanwhile, he was also discussing methodological problems prevalent among the contemporary Muslim communities. I will describe and discuss the transformations Said Nursi was going through in his revivalist discourse during this period (~1910 to ~1923) in conjunction with the development and transformation of the secularist movement and the ideas they advocated.

At the third and the last stage, I will analyze discursive strategies Said Nursi employed in his revivalist writings after the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic and their sociological implications. Because issues regarding ontological and moral philosophical aspects of revivalism which pertain to the construction of reality and the self occupies a more central position in his revivalist writings, I will try to
answer the question of how and why Said Nursi chose such an approach to religious revival. I will also contextualize this analysis with regard to the development and transformations of the secularist movement in the Turkish society. Subsequently, I will analyze social movement dynamics and mobilization strategies of the revivalist movement Said Nursi established vis-à-vis the secularist establishment in the next (fifth) chapter of this dissertation.

**The Reformist Discourse of Said Nursi Until 1910**

Having completed his mostly self-led education at various places in the Kurdistan region and having gone through awakening to the contemporary idea of İttihat-ı İslam (Pan-Islamism), Said Nursi arrived in Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, in 1907. He had the purpose of pursuing financial support from the Sultan for his project of opening a university in the East in which he could teach religious and modern sciences side by side. Shortly after arriving in Istanbul, Said Nursi actively participated in the intellectual debates of his day regarding the reform and renewal of the Muslim World, especially including the Ottoman Empire and its Kurdistan region where he hailed from. Said Nursi started addressing his ideas about educational, social and political reform to the general public by way of publishing articles in some of the Ottoman newspapers. In this respect, he also directly communicated with the Ottoman intelligentsia and the administrative authorities.

One of the first things Said Nursi did after arriving in Istanbul was to submit a petition to the palace explaining the need for establishing a university in the Kurdistan region. The petition was opened with a statement that it was only those who spoke
Turkish who were benefitting from the newly established (modern) schools (*mekteb*) in Kurdistan and that others, mostly Kurds, were left vulnerable to the misfortunes of ignorance, blind imitation and falling into doubts in matters of religion because they couldn’t make sense of the content of modern sciences.

Establishment of a university with several branches in various places in this region was presented in the petition as a remedy for combating these challenges. These schools would carry the name *madrasa* because of its acceptability among the local people but they would teach both religious and modern sciences. The petition was also published in the newspaper *Şark ve Kürdistan* (The East and Kurdistan) on November 9, 1908. The palace rejected the petition and requested Said Nursi to go back to Kurdistan. However, Said Nursi remained in Istanbul and started publishing articles in support of constitutionalism and freedom from political despotism.

As I described in the previous chapter, the constitutionalist movement in the Ottoman society had gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century in greater part because of the efforts of the Young Ottoman intellectuals such as Namık Kemal (1840-1888), Ziya Pasha (1825-1880), and Ali Suavi (1838-1878). The first constitution was declared and the first parliament was established in 1876 by the newly crowned Sultan Abdulhamid II, who ascended to the throne in place of his brother Sultan Murad V with the help of reformists such as Midhat Pasha (Karpat, 2002, p. 505). Sultan Abdulhamid II abolished the constitution and dismantled the parliament in 1878, and sidelined influential bureaucrats including Midhat Pasha by way of
relocating or exiling them to the peripheral provinces. His stance against the opposition demanding change became more authoritarian over time.

As I also described extensively in the previous chapter, members of the CUP (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) who were organized against the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II with a demand that he reinstitute the 1876 constitution and the parliament which he had abolished in 1878. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) which was originally developed by civilians gradually turned into a secretive organization of soldiers who were educated in the modern military schools and academies. In the meantime, the Sultan was closely monitoring the actions and mobilizations of the members of the CUP, other oppositional groups and individuals who had the potential of challenging his rule and producing disturbances. The Sultan also applied strong literary censorship which contributed to the transformation of the opposition into secretive organizations. When their two decades long attempts towards the restoration of the constitution of 1876 by other means failed, some of the prominent soldiers in the CUP took to the mountains in Rumelia which forced Sultan Abdulhamid II to accept the demands of the opposition on the 24th of July in 1908. Thereafter, the CUP steadily grew in power and influence over the government. They deposed Sultan Abdulhamid II after the countercoup (31 Mart Incident) in 1909 and brought his brother Reşad Efendi as Sultan Mehmed V to the throne.

Said Nursi had arrived in Istanbul in the eve of the Young Turks Revolution of 1908 which, I think, made his petition less likely to be accepted and increased doubts about the prospects of his plans. It is also important to remember that nationalism was
on the rise not only among the members of the CUP and the educated segment of Turkish population but also among the minority ethnic communities throughout the Empire. Either the Sultan or the bureaucrats might have perceived Said Nursi’s petition for the establishment of a university in the Kurdistan region and possibly his other activities in the capital with suspicion. The fact that he was asked to go back to Kurdistan indicates that they were not only concerned about Said Nursi’s potential of causing problems among the local tribes of Kurdistan, they might also be concerned, to a greater degree, about his potential of producing troubles in Istanbul. Perhaps, they were worried about his growing influence within the *ulema* and among the community of Kurds living in Istanbul at that time.

Arriving in the capital in the eve of the 1908 Revolution, Said Nursi started publishing articles in support of constitutionalism. His first article appeared in the newspaper *Rehber-i Vatan* (The Guide of the Fatherland) with the title *Wa shawirhum fi’l-amr* (And Seek Their Counsel in the Matter) which is a quotation from the Qur’an (3:159) (Said Nursi, 1908, July 20, p. 4). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this verse was extensively used by the Young Ottomans in their religious legitimization and justification for the demands of the establishment of a constitutional and parliamentary system in the Ottoman Empire. Namık Kemal, who was one of the most prominent members of the Young Ottomans movement, wrote an article (20 July 1898) with the same title in the Young Ottomans’ newspaper *Hürriyet* (Liberty). In this regard, Said Nursi used a discourse which was very similar to the Young Ottomans,’ especially including Namık Kemal. The basic idea, in the discourses of both the Young Ottomans
and Said Nursi, was that the original teachings of the Qur’an and the other sources of Islam emphasized the necessity and significance of consultation in issues relating to administration and governance.

Dereliction of this fundamental principle by despotic rulers in the recent history was, together with several other factors, responsible for the stagnation and decline of the Muslim World according to the Young Ottomans and Said Nursi. Thus, the establishment of a parliamentary constitutional system in Muslim World, the Ottoman Empire in particular, was both legitimate and necessary for reversing its decline.

Said Nursi openly championed the revolution of 1908 although he was not directly involved in its execution. In a speech he gave in the town square of Salonica three days after the revolution, he applauded the coming of “freedom”.

This revolution has broken the heavy chains constraining the mind of humanity and destroyed the obstacles against the potential of progress. Thus, it brought into light and set free the jewel of humanity and directed it towards the point of perfection. (Said Nursi, 2004e [1910], p. 13)

At the same time, Said Nursi cautioned his audience that the protection of this freedom was contingent on the protection of religious sensitivities and morals.

O the children of the fatherland! Do not misinterpret this freedom so that it does not escape us and so that it doesn’t drown us by making us drink the corrupt slavery of the past in a different cup again. Freedom flourishes through following the [religious] guidelines, the teachings of the Sharia and through good morals. The liberty, justice and equality (Hürriyet adalet ve musavat) which were established among the companions of the Prophet despite the prevalence of savagery and forceful oppression in their times is an undeniable testament to this claim. Otherwise, interpreting liberty and freedom as indulgence in illicit pleasures, wastefulness, transgression and subservience to the desires of the selfish soul will be like being freed from the oppression of a ruler and then willfully entering into the enslavement of the selfish soul. This
will be a sign of deserving the oppression of the past and unworthiness of the real freedom. (Said Nursi, 2004e [1910], p. 15)

In an article written as an open letter to members of the reinstated parliament following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, Said Nursi maintained that it was imperative for the constitutional system to keep the teachings of the religion of Islam in its hands at all times.

Otherwise, he contended, “atheism, as the greatest error in human civilization, would find a fertile ground for its expansion if religion was confined to the conscious of individuals”. In this process, “religion would become subservient to other things which would result in its marginalization and decline” (Said Nursi, 19 December 1908, p. 20-22). This is clearly an indication that Said Nursi was genuinely concerned about the rise of secularization in the Ottoman society if religion was not going to be part and parcel of the new constitutional system. Apparently, his main concern until this time was that the vacuum left by the marginalization of religion could provide opportunity structures for the development and expansion of atheism.

In addition, his open letter to the members of the parliament reveals that Said Nursi saw internal threats to the religion of Islam as well in case Islam would not be the determining characteristics of this new system. Firstly, under these circumstances, people would look at religion from superficial perspectives. This, for him, would facilitate the development and expansion of dogmatic understanding and practices of religion which he considered detrimental to the flourishing of the true teachings of Islam.
What is more, he was concerned that marginalization of religion in the new social system would compartmentalize Muslims and give rise to disunity and conflicts between the various element of the community of Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Arabs, etc.). Perhaps, he was thinking that it was the religion of Islam and its social standing in the society which would bind these different groups under one framework.

These are clear indications that Said Nursi wanted to see the teachings of religion as the defining characteristic of the new system. In other words, he did not only provide religious justifications for constitutionalist reforms, he also wanted to give a religious direction to the revolution. In this respect, he saw freedom (hürriyet) and constitutionalism (meşrutiyet) as necessary conditions and efficient tools for the flourishing of the teachings of the Qur’an and the religion of Islam.

After the declaration of the constitution in 1908, Said Nursi also started publishing articles about the social problems facing contemporary Muslims with a special focus on the Kurds and the Kurdistan region. Said Nursi’s strategy of addressing the problems of this region was twofold. On the one hand, he was trying to convince the capital and the Ottoman intelligentsia, through his speeches and writings, that they should pay attention to and use the resources in their disposal to help solve the problems of the Kurds and the Kurdistan region. Offering education in the Kurdish language in addition to Turkish in this region was one of the solutions Nursi suggested. On the other hand, Said Nursi was addressing the Kurds through the articles he published in newspapers and through the telegrams he sent to local notable tribesmen for urging them to take active part in the establishment and development of the new
constitutional system (Said Nursi, 2004a [1910], p.158-159).

In the first article he wrote for the newspaper *Kürd Teavun ve Teali Gazetesi* (Kurdish Solidarity and Progress) in 1908, Said Nursi contended that the Kurds had three treasures that they needed to protect and preserve. These are (1) Islam, (2) the jewel of humanity and (3) nationhood (Milliyet). However, he asserted (1), poverty (*fakr*), (2) ignorance (*cehl*), and (3) conflict (*ihtilaf*) were three major obstacles to protecting these treasures. In order to eliminate these hurdles, he argued, the Kurds needed to work in the areas of education (*maarif*), unity and the love of nation (*ittifak ve muhabbet-i milli*) and individual entrepreneurship and self-struggle (*teşebbüsü şahsi ve sa’y-i nefsi*) (Said Nursi, 12 December 1908, p. 13). Said Nursi would slightly revise this formulation three months later when he talked about the reasons for the stagnation and decline of the Muslims and the solutions he proposed in an article he published in the newspaper *Volkan* (Volcano), (Said Nursi, 24 March 1909, p. 2-3) which was the voice of pan-Islamism in the contemporary Ottoman society.

Arguing that material progress was key to the spread of the message of Islam because of the fact that Europeans took Muslims hostage with their science and industry he listed the same three obstacles (i.e., disunity, ignorance, poverty) to this progress. The solutions he suggested were very similar, too. The only difference was that instead of presenting individual entrepreneurship and self struggle as a way to eliminate poverty, he proposed industry/industriousness and technology (*sanat*) (Said Nursi, 24 March 1909, p. 2-3).
There are several points which are noteworthy in remembering Said Nursi’s analysis of the challenges faced by the Kurds and the Muslims in general. The first is that Said Nursi did not present the issue of solidarity among the Kurds in exclusive terms. In other words, he didn’t advocate the idea of Kurdish independence. As a strong supporter of the idea of Unity of Muslims (İttihad-ı Islam), he believed that reversing the decline of contemporary Muslims, especially the Ottomans, was contingent on the involvement and engagement of the various (ethnic) elements (anasır). He advised the Kurds that “strength comes through cooperation (with Turks and other Muslims)” (ittiňa kuvvet var), “life flourishes with unity (ittihadda hayat var)” and that “happiness comes with fraternity (uhuvvette saadet var)” (Said Nursi, 12 December 1908, p. 13).

After publishing ten articles in the newspapers Kürd Teavun ve Teali Gazetesi (Kurdish Solidarity and Progress) between December 2, 1908 and January 9, 1909, Said Nursi, in early March 1909, started writing for the newspaper Volkan (Volcano) which was edited by Derviş Vahdeti who was the leader of the society of İttihad-ı Muhammedi (The Society of Muslims Unity). According to Mardin (1989, p. 84) Said Nursi was among the founders of this organization. However, Said Nursi said that far from being a founder of the organization, he initially looked at the organization with skepticism because he was afraid that this blessed name which theoretically belongs to each and every one of the Muslims could be exploited and hurt by the errors of those who appropriated it. But, Said Nursi says, he joined the organization after learning that
trustable pious persons like Süheyl Pasha and Sadik Bey who were more concerned about their religion than politics also joined it (Said Nursi, 2004c [1910]).

There was an observable shift in Said Nursi’s discourse when he started writing for Volkan in March 1909 in the sense that issues pertaining specifically to Kurdistan occupied less space in his articles. He focused more on ideas regarding constitutionalism, İttihad-ı İslam, educational reform and the methodology of responding to the challenges coming from Europe. One of his core arguments in the articles he published in Volkan was that contemporary Muslims were living at a new conjecture in history and that they should understand the unique challenges of this time which require new methods of action. Spreading the message of Islam, which is a responsibility for all Muslims, was contingent on material development because the Europeans were able to keep Muslims under their pressure by utilizing science and industry. And because “poverty, ignorance and conflict” are the major obstacles to material development, he asserted, Muslims, too, should excel in science (fen) and industry (sanat).

With regard to the method of confronting external adversities against Islam, Said Nursi maintained that prevailing over the civilized could only be achieved by convincing them with truthful arguments, not by defeating them with force. For him, using the force of weapons and swords in the past could be excused for the advancement of the message of Islam when confronting the attacks and resistance of the adversaries who were not civilized. Now that the adversaries of Islam are civilized, he said, there is no such excuse anymore (Said Nursi, 24 March 1909, p. 2-3).
Succession over the civilized in matters of religion can only be achieved through presenting convincing arguments, not through coercion. (Said Nursi, 10 March 1909, p. 3)

Yet, he was concerned that educational institutions were far from being able to facilitate material progress and producing persuasive arguments in response to the ideological challenges against the religion of Islam. Disconnectedness of three different educational institutions; madrasas, modern schools (mekteb) and Sufi lodges (tekke) and their adversity against each other, for Nursi, were among the main reasons for the inefficiency of the Ottoman educational system. He did not advocate the unification of these three systems of education because each of these institutions, specializing in their area of expertise, could be part of a well-integrated system of division of labor.

Instead, he suggested that “teaching the truths of Islam with their evidences and proofs in modern schools (mekteb), offering courses on the necessary sciences of civilization in madrasas instead of teaching them pseudo-science of the medieval scholars, and the presence of specialized scholars (ulema) in Sufi lodges (tekke)” (Said Nursi, 24 March 1909, p. 2-3).

Said Nursi’s mobilization strategies thus far can be considered as a form of reformist activism which sought to bring about structural changes at the institutional level in Kurdistan, in the Ottoman society and the Muslim World at large. The discourse Said Nursi used as part of this activism was not uniquely different from the contemporary intellectuals of the Ottoman society. As it is described previously, reforming the madrasa education, emphasizing the significance of science, supporting the idea of İttihad-ı Islam, selective borrowing from the West and advocating
constitutionalism were ideas supported at least fragmentarily by other intellectuals (e.g., the Young Ottomans) and by other prominent Muslims reformists like Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). The significance of science as a necessary tool for reversing the decline of the Muslim World was also previously emphasized by religious intellectuals such as Hoca Tahsin Efendi (1811-1888) and Selim Sabit Efendi (1829-1910).

One of the differences between other prominent Muslim reformists such as the Young Ottomans and Said Nursi was that the first mostly, if not exclusively, brought in religious references into their discourse as a form of legitimization in support of their call for reform. They didn’t strongly emphasize the role of religion in terms of characterizing the new constitutional system. However, the latter, Said Nursi, resolutely presented religion as an essential component of the new system to be established. In an open letter to the members of the newly established parliament (Said Nursi, 19 December 1908, p. 20-22), he maintained that it is imperative for the constitutional system to keep the teachings of the religion of Islam in its hands at all times.

Another difference lies in his pursuit of establishing a university in the East where religious and modern sciences would be taught together with the purpose of eliminating the disconnectedness of classical madrasa education and the education provided in modern schools which were established since the Tanzimat Era. The disconnectedness of these two educational systems had two negative implications with regard to secularization. Learning modern sciences (füünun-u medeniye) without reference to religious sciences (ulum-u diniye) would foster doubt (about the teachings
of religion) and madrasa education without knowing modern sciences would lead to
dogmatism (Said Nursi, 2004b [1911], p. 142). Both of these processes would further
marginalize religion and provide a platform for secular ideas to grow. In order to
respond to this challenge, Said Nursi proposed reconciliation of the findings of modern
sciences with the teaching of religion. With this purpose he sought to establish a
university in the East.

However, it seems that Said Nursi’s activism until 1910s was not directed
against a particular secularist group or a specific secularist ideology such as naturalism,
positivism, determinism and utilitarianism. Perhaps, he saw the greatest challenge in
the modern orientalist assertions that the religion of Islam was an obstacle to
civilizational progress. In response, he wanted to achieve two things. On the one hand,
he, similar to the Young Ottomans, was trying to awaken contemporary Muslims to the
dire need for implementing institutional reforms and to the necessity of hard work
which would facilitate the development and flourishing of the Muslim World. In this
regard, he was also open to selective borrowing (science, industry etc.) from the
Western civilization. On the other hand, he was trying to make sure that these reforms
do not go in the direction of marginalizing the religion of Islam in the public life of the
contemporary Muslim societies.

These are indications that Said Nursi, until this time, was not deeply concerned
about the philosophical underpinnings and secularist implications of the concepts of
science, civilization and the idea of progress. As it is described below Said Nursi
changed his position regarding these issues especially after 1910s.
Back in the East: Conversations with the Kurdish Tribesmen and the Sermon in Damascus

Almost one year after the trial at the court martial, Said Nursi made a trip back to Kurdistan region in the Spring of 1910 (Şahiner, 2013, p. 114). He spent the summer traveling among the local tribes and tried to convince them about the merits of constitutionalism. As he described it later, Said Nursi found the local tribesmen extremely confused about constitutionalism (meşrütiyet) and other contemporary issues. In order to eliminate their confusion, he suggested them to ask their questions so that he could directly address issues confusing them (Vahide, 2005, p.84-92). He complied a summary of these dialogues in Turkish and in Arabic. The title of the Turkish version was Munazarat (The Debates) while the Arabic version’s title was Rachatat al-Awamm (The Prescription for the Common People).

After traveling among the local Kurdish tribes during the summer of 1910, Said Nursi headed south, where the majority of the population were Arabs. In the spring of 1911, he arrived at Damascus. Upon the request of local scholars, he gave a sermon at the Umayyad Mosque to a crowd of about ten thousand people which included around one hundred religious scholars (Şahiner, 2013, p. 117-118). In this sermon¹, he presented solutions to the six major problems he identified as factors hindering the progress of contemporary Muslims. These problems were: (1) the growth of hopelessness among Muslims, (2) the death of truthfulness in the socio-political life, (3)

¹ This sermon was published with the title “the Damascus Sermon” by Nursi in 1911.
love of hatred, (4) not knowing the luminous spiritual ties bonding Muslims, (5) the spread of despotism like contagious infections, and (6) dedication only to selfish goals (HS:40-44).

Transition from Reformist Discourse to Religious Renewal: Publication of Muhakemat

Said Nursi authored his first major work Muhakemat (Reasonings) and published it both in Arabic and Turkish in Istanbul in 1910. Unlike Munazarat (The Debates) which addressed the common people, Muhakemat’s audience was the ulama as title of its Arabic version (Reçetet-ül Havass - The Prescription for the Learned) testifies. In this book, Said Nursi discussed epistemological and rhetorical problems which were widespread among the scholarly circles in Muslim communities, regarding the methodology of deciphering the message of the Qur’an and its application in the contemporary world.

My aim in this book is as follows: I seek to show the straight path in Islam, proving false the doubts that its enemies have tried to spread about it, and to show how baseless are the whims and worries of those Muslims who have imprisoned themselves in the faulty understanding of some of the outer aspects of Islam. I also hope to be able to lend a helping hand to those loyal friends of Islam and the truth-seeking scholars who try to lead people to the truth, who strive for the [future] of the Muslim world, and who exert themselves with the hope of victory on the straight path. (RES:4-5) [The bracket in the body of the text is my correction of the translation]

In so doing, Nursi claimed, he would help brush away the dust which has been accumulating on the surface of Islam, because of the methodological mistakes of the Muslims in the last seven hundred years. Methodological fallacies covered throughout the book Muhakemat include literalism (zahiriyyun, zahirperest and ehli zahiri),
superficiality (sathiyet, satlı nazır, nazır-ı sathı²), dogmatism (taassub), blind imitation (taklid), intellectual despotism (tahakkum), partisanship (iltizam and tarafarlık), self-aggrandizement (meyl-ü tefevvuk and gurur-u nefs³), intellectual extremism (ifrat and tefrit), emotionalism (hissiyat), sensationalism (mubalağa and hayal), and descriptionalism (tasvir ve tezyin-i müdde). 

In the beginning of the history of Islam, he argued, reason, evidence and consultation prevailed over emotional dispositions, unsubstantiated descriptions and forceful imposition of ideas which later became commonplace in Muslim societies.

What generally prevailed in the [last several centuries] and gave rise to spite, enmity, and the complex of being superior was emotions, inclinations, and force. A powerful, [persuasive] speech was enough to guide people. At that time, the ability to embellish a thesis in such a way that it would affect the feelings and inclinations or make it attractive with the power of rhetoric or gestures served for evidence. But comparing ourselves to them means returning to the corners of that time. Every age has a character peculiar to itself. We demand evidence, and are not deceived through the mere statement or embellishment of a thesis. (RES:32-33) [The bracket is my correction of the translation]

Said Nursi’s emphasis on “helping polish Islam by way of brushing away the dust accumulated on its surface because of the methodological mistakes of Muslims in the past” can be perceived as a sign of transformation from his reformist activism to a revivalist discourse. Through his reformist activism, Said Nursi sought to bring about change in the outer world and in the society at large with the purpose of improving material conditions of Muslim societies and thusly reversing the decline of the Muslim World through educational, economic and political reform.

² MUH:33-34, 49-50, 77, 87, 94, 121, 124, 153.
³ MUH:33.
Methodological obstacles inherited from the last several centuries, for Nursi, prevented contemporary Muslims from benefiting from the universal message of the Qur’an. In order to adequately address contemporary issues and questions and to guide the common opinion, Nursi suggested the composition of a new exegesis of the Qur’an by a consultative team of religious scholars who are specialized in different (positive) sciences. These scholars need to understand the peculiar challenges, demands and questions of their times. Because natural sciences were emerging as the dominant paradigm of modern societies, he contended, it is imperative for religious scholars to understand the language of science especially if they had the purpose of relating the message of the Qur’an to contemporary challenges and questions.

However, Said Nursi did not suggest writing a “scientific exegesis.” He perceived familiarity and expertise in scientific disciplines as a necessary auxiliary tool for understanding the language of modern times. In his perspective, discoveries of science could be seen as testimonies to the order and purposefulness in the creation and thus to the power, will and wisdom of the Creator. However, scientific information, for him, was not the definitive source of knowledge. Therefore, he didn’t consider scientific information to be a genuine component of the exegesis he suggested to be written.

It is not enough for a non-Muslim, in order to become a Muslim, merely to enter a mosque. Likewise, merely by being included in books of Shari‘a or interpretations of the Qur’an, matters pertaining to the natural sciences or to philosophy, geography, history, and so on, cannot be regarded as being included in matters of the Shari‘a or the Qur’an. [...] Their opinions on the matters parenthetically included in the books of these sciences are not to be regarded as definitive evidence or rulings. (RES:27)
Such a perspective indicates a major shift in Said Nursi’s approach to science. Until the publication of *Muhakemat*, Nursi promoted the appropriation of science and scientific education as a tool for material development (*maddeten terakki*) which he thought was critical for the regeneration and flourishing of the Muslim civilization and thus for “spreading the message of the Qur’an” (*ilayi kelimetullah*). We see in the book *Muhakemat* that Said Nursi was becoming more interested in the epistemological aspects of modern sciences around 1910-1911.

It is important to note that the reformist discourse of Said Nursi until this time did not have an explicitly dialectic intonation. He was not expressly mobilized against a particular group or ideology. However, we see in *Muhakemat* that Said Nursi started emphasizing the necessity of the realignment of contemporary Muslim’s perception and presentation of religious teachings to the methodology and the universal message of the Qur’an which was obscured and concealed because the aforementioned fallacies and mistakes of Muslims.

Thenceforth, we see an increasing presence of ideas pertaining to religious renewal in Said Nursi’s discourse more so than his emphasis on societal reform. We also see in *Muhakemat* that Said Nursi started addressing ontological and epistemological challenges to religious worldviews coming from the ideological interpretations of science such as naturalism, positivism and materialism which signifies a transition to a dialectic discourse in Said Nursi’s understanding of religious revival.
Departing from the idea that the four central messages of the Qur’an are (1) the existence and the unity of God (tevhid), (2) resurrection (haşir), (3) prophethood (nübüvvvet) and (4) justice (adalet), Nursi dedicated the third and the last chapter of Muhakemat to the discussions regarding the evidences for the truthfulness of these core teachings and to the refutation of doubts and denials cast against them. In presenting evidences for the existence and unity of God, he presented arguments against the naturalist and the materialist idea of “the eternity of the matter” and the assertion that what is observable in the universe are the mere results of the constant motion and interaction of atoms.

Force and forms [matter] which are claimed to be brought into existence by the motions of atoms (harekat-ı zerrat) are only attributes (a’raz) and therefore they cannot be the source and the essence (cevher) of the various forms and kinds of existence for the fact that attributes (a’raz) cannot be the essence (cevher). That is to say, all of the stages and fragments of the various kinds of existences and all of the distinguishing characteristics of (their) attributes (a’raz) must have been constantly, at all conditions and at all times brought into existence ex nihilo. […]

What they call “matter” is something which is constantly changing form and it cannot escape the spatio-temporal conditions and movements of appearance and disappearance (existence and nonexistence). Therefore, it (matter) being brought into existence from non-existence is certain (MUH:121. Trans. ZN).

The materialist idea of “the eternality of matter” and attributing powers to the motions of atoms and the naturalist conviction that it is the laws in the nature -not an external power, will and knowledge (i.e., God)- which are the sources of order and perfection in the universe, are as old as the ancient Greek philosophy. However, these ideas were adopted and reformulated in European societies since the Enlightenment and supported by philosophers such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751), Baron
d'Holbach (1723-1789) and Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899).

Young Turks including Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet, Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil introduced similar ideas through translations and quotations from the works of these materialist philosophers to the Ottoman society. It was Ludwig Büchner’s *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and Matter) which profoundly influenced the secularist Young Turks. Three central arguments in this book were that (1) matter and force are inseparable (there is no force at work in the universe which is independent and separate from matter), (2) matter is eternal (nothing comes into existence from non-existence) and (3) the order in the universe is a result of the motion of atoms which are obeying the laws of Nature without any outside intervention.

The excerpts I quoted above from Said Nursi’s *Muhakemat* clearly indicates that he was responding to these materialist ideas which were introduced to the Ottoman society by some of the secularist Young Turks around the same time *Muhakemat* was written. Materialist ideas of philosophers such as Ludwig Büchner, Felix Isnard, Baron d'Holbach and Gustave le Bon were fragmentarily presented in the Ottoman society before 1910, too, but it was in 1911 that Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil fully translated and published the *Kraft und Stoff* of Büchner (Hanioğlu, 2005, p. 67). In addition, Abdullah Cevdet, especially after the revolution of 1908, parted ways with the CUP which he had laid its foundations with his friends in the Imperial Medical Academy. After the revolution, Abdullah Cevdet continued to independently publish his increasingly secularist and atheistic ideas in his journal *İçtihad*. 
Secularist Young Turks did not introduce materialist and naturalist ideas only as a new scientific paradigm, they also used them as evidences nullifying and disproving religious teachings such as the existence of God, immortality of soul and resurrection. It seems that by 1910 Said Nursi was informed about the expansion of the materialist and naturalist ideas of European philosophers chiefly including Ludwig Büchner in the Ottoman society. Perhaps, seeing that the revolution of 1908 did not go in the direction he aspired also contributed to his concerns that the impact of secularist ideas would be more detrimental for the preservation and revival of religion.

**Qur’an as the Absolute Source of Guidance: Publication of İşarât-ul icaz**

When WWI broke out, Said Nursi joined the war efforts in the vicinity of his homeland and fought with his students against the invading Russian forces. As he was fighting in the frontlines, Said Nursi continued writing an exegesis of the Qur’an he started shortly before the war. According to an account provided by Mustafa Yalçın (b. 1895), one of the militias in the regiment under Said Nursi’s command, whenever he found time from fighting, Said Nursi was dictating his book and his students were writing. At nights, he was teaching religious matters and the content of the book (exegesis) he was writing to his students and to the other militias (Şahiner, 2011, p. 83-84). Upon his return to Istanbul from captivity, one of the first things he did was the publication of the exegesis İşarât-ul icaz (Signs of Miraculousness), he started writing before the war.
The exegesis which was published in 1918 in Istanbul following his return from the prisoners’ camp in Russia included Said Nursi’s interpretation of all of the seven verses of the opening chapter (al-Fatiha) and the first 33 verses of the second chapter (al-Baqarah) of the Qur’an. In addition to illustrating the presence of the four core teachings (unity of God, prophethood, resurrection and justice) at all places in the Qur’an, this volume was written to demonstrate the extraordinary interconnectedness, coherence and eloquence of the text of the Quran by only using the conceptual tools of logic, grammar, syntax, semantics and rhetoric. Hence, he wanted to prove that the Qur’an was the divine speech of God and that it is the absolute source of guidance for human beings at all times.

Following his escape from the prisoners’ camp and arrival in Istanbul, Enver Pasha (1881-1922), the deputy commander in chief and the minister of war who knew Said Nursi from the Eastern Front (WWI) and helped the publication of İşarat-ul icaz by supplying its paper, endorsed him as a candidate for a membership as a scholarly expert at Darü'l-Hikmet l-İslamiye (Islamic Academy of Higher Learning). The Şeyhülislam approved the appointment of Said Nursi after receiving conferral from the Sultan (Mehmed V) in August 1918 (Şahiner, 2013, p. 158-171). Darü’l-Hikmet l-İslamiye was a newly established institution which consisted of the sub-commissions of theology (kelam), jurisprudence (fiqh) and ethics (ahlak). This institution was also responsible for responding to criticisms and challenges against the religion of Islam.

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4 Şükran Vahide (2005, p. 132) thinks that the drafts of Nursi’s book could have been brought to Istanbul by his nephew Abdurrahman who came from the Kurdistan region and joined his uncle after his return from the prisoners’ camp.
contributing to the religious education of the Muslims and offering consultation and fatwas in matters of confusion and dispute (Albayrak, 1993, p. 506-507).

During his tenure at Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye (1918-1922) Said Nursi published around a dozen treatises including Nokta (1918), Şua’at (1918-1919), Lemaat (1920), Tuluat (1920-1921), Sunuhat (1920), Rumuz (1920-1921), İşarat (1921), Hutuvvat-ı Sitte (1920), Hakikat Çekirdekleri I (1920), and Hakikat Çekirdekleri II (1921). These treatises covered a wide range of issues pertaining to social, political, philosophical and theological issues. Among the social issues discussed in these works are social inequality (İşarat), conflict (İşarat, Tuluat), social justice (İşarat, Lemaat) and religion and social life (Lemaat).

Political issues such as the occupation of Istanbul by the British (Tuluat), nullification of the fatwa issued by the office of Şeyhülislam under the pressure of the occupying forces against the Turkish Independence Movement (Tuluat), the nature of sultanate and caliphate (Sunuhat), nationalism (Sunuhat), İttihad-ı İslam (Rumuz) and conflicts among Muslim scholars (Tuluat) are also covered in Said Nursi’s publications during this period. Philosophical questions regarding the cause and effect relations (Lemaat, Hakikat Çekirdekleri), naturalism (Lemaat), materialism (Lemaat, Hakikat Çekirdekleri), epistemology (Lemaat, Hakikat Çekirdekleri), comparison of the concepts of the pure and relative justice (Sunuhat), principles of moral action (Lemaat) and theological inquiries concerning the evidences of the existence and unity of God and bodily resurrection after death (Nokta), the nature of good deeds (Sunuhat), the eloquence of the Qur’an (Rumuz), the methodology of its interpretation (Sunuhat) and
the meaning and evidences of prophethood (Şuaat) also take up a large proportion of these treatises.

Although Said Nursi had been a proactively involved in reformist and revivalist activism through his publications in the last two decades of the Ottoman Empire, his impact at the grassroots level was limited. However, he was renowned in the political and intellectual circles. When the newly established Turkish government was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal in Ankara, Said Nursi was invited to the new capital to be recognized for his contributions to the war efforts against the Russians in the Eastern front and for his support of the independence movement. The new parliament welcomed him with an official ceremony on November 9, 1922. With the request of several deputies, he also gave a brief address in the chamber and prayed for the success of the parliament (Şahiner, 2013, p. 210-213).

After arriving in Ankara Said Nursi also distributed a letter in the parliament urging the leaders of the independence movement including Mustafa Kemal and the other deputies for the preservation Islamic faith. Just as he did in the case the revolution of 1908, Said Nursi wanted to give a religious direction to the newly established government in Ankara.

Those who support and admire your victory in the War of Independence and your invaluable service are this broad community of believers especially including common people who are strongly [religious] Muslims. They seriously love you, support you and they are grateful to you. They present and offer you a very strongly awakened power. For the benefit of Islam, you, too, should join them by upholding the principles of the Qur’an. (T:141, Trans. ZN)
In the same letter, Said Nursi also emphasized the significance of obligatory prayers (salat). After reading Said Nursi’s memorandum letter, Mustafa Kemal scolded him by saying: “We have invited you here so that you can enlighten us with your high opinions, but you started talking about salat!” Said Nursi, too, responded back sharply by saying “Pasha! the greatest matter in Islam after faith (iman) is obligatory prayers (salat). Who denies this is a traitor and the hükm [opinion or case] of the traitors are rejected!” (T:143). Some of the then-members of the parliament (e.g., Ali Sururi, Abdulgani Ensari, Tevfik Demiroğlu, and Hüseyin Aksu) confirmed the altercations and disputes between the two (Akgündüz, 2014, p. 402-407).

While he was in Ankara, Said Nursi wrote a treatise refuting atheistic arguments of naturalism and materialism. He said that he wrote this treatise because he saw “a despicable current of atheism which was dangerously and secretly poisoning the minds of the deputies” and because “he was deeply alarmed that this monster [sic] would attack the pillars of faith” (L:177). However, Nursi regretted later (L:177), that the impact of this treatise was limited because it was published in Arabic which was not understood by most of the deputies.”

These are indications that during the six months he stayed in Ankara in the aftermath of the War of Independence and in the eve of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Said Nursi saw once again that the impact of the development and expansion of secularist ideas including naturalism and materialism were prevailing among the new political leaders of the society. Moreover, these ideas were becoming the ruling ideas of the society with the movement of secularism into the halls of power.
Said Nursi was disappointed with what he saw in Ankara and according to his own account, he was convinced that “it would be impossible to oppose and confront this person [Mustafa Kemal] by legitimate means” (§:359). That is why, Said Nursi said, he “decided to withdraw from sociopolitical life and to dedicate his time and energy for saving the faith [in God, hereafter etc.]” (§:359). Apparently, what Said Nursi observed in the aftermaths of both the revolution of 1908 and the War of Independence convinced Said Nursi about the impracticality of seeking change at the societal and political levels. As it is investigated in further detailed below, Said Nursi developed a new micro level approach to revivalism after the establishment of the Turkish Republic and formed the Nur Movement which has been one of the largest and most influential revivalist movements in the Muslim World.

Said Nursi went back to the province of Van after his disappointment in Ankara. He later wrote that his trip back to Van started a new chapter in his life as he went through an intellectual transformation about the methodology of religious thinking and about the methodology of religious revival. He called the first part of his life before this intellectual transformation as “the Old Said” and the period after that as “the New Said.” When he went back to Van during the emergence of the New Said, he secluded himself from the society except for teaching religious sciences to a small group of students in the outskirts of the city.

When he was exiled to the Western provinces by the new government following the Şeyh Said Incident, he started writing treatises in his exile with the aim of providing evidences to Qur’anic teachings such as existence of God and bodily resurrection and
for refuting the ontological and moral philosophical bases of what he broadly called philosophy including positivist science’s portrayals of nature and causality. When a group of his followers started to circulate his writings, the state banned the publication of his works. Consequently, his followers started reproducing Said Nursi’s treatises writing out them by hand. Wary of the spread of his writings and influence, a series of arrests and trials of Said Nursi and his students was initiated by the secularist establishment in 1935 which would last until his death in 1960 (Vahide, 2005).

Said Nursi’s Revivalist Discourse after the Establishment of the Turkish Republic

Shortly after he was sent to exile in the western provinces which was inhabited predominantly by Turks, Said Nursi started writing revivalist treatises in Turkish. He gave copies of these writings to the local people who visited him. As the number of people, mostly local villagers, who started reading and distributing his treatises increased, a revivalist movement started to emerge around the ideas of Said Nursi. The vast majority of the treatises he wrote in the first five years of his exile (1925-1930) were compiled into the book Sözler (The Words) which became his magnum opus. The Words includes 33 chapters (words). With some exceptions, chapters of The Words are compiled in the chronological order in which they were written.

Said Nursi’s other writings and the letters he exchanged with his followers and students after the establishment of the Turkish Republic were compiled into some of the other volumes of the Risale-i Nur Collection.

The first eight chapters of the book The Words were written in the format of allegorical stories. After outlining these allegorical stories, Said Nursi discussed
symbolic meaning of their content in a popularly accessible stylistic format. As I describe and discuss below, Said Nursi used these allegorical stories as a way of reorienting his readers’ pursuit of happiness and sense of fulfilment towards a God-Conscious direction as part of the revivalist approach he developed especially after the establishment of the secularist Turkish Republic.

Taking the first chapters of *The Words* as a departure point, I explore and investigate Said Nursi’s understanding of secularism and the discursive and rhetorical approach he used in his response to secularization. In discussing the implications of contents of these chapters, I will refer to other relevant passages from *the Risale-i Nur* as well. As the analysis I present below illustrate, moral philosophical themes in the introductory chapters outweigh ontological and political philosophical issues. Another characteristics of these chapters is that responses to secularization and modernization are implicitly and indirectly addressed.

However, some of the subsequent chapters in *The Words* and in the other books of *the Risale-i Nur* more directly and explicitly address issues regarding secularism (e.g., atheism, materialism, naturalism, secular humanism and nationalism). I will explore the content of these chapters in my analyses of Said Nursi’s discursive response to secularization after the exploration of the introductory chapters.

**The Elementary Dialectics of Religious vs. Secularist Moral Philosophy and Ontology in Said Nursi’s Revivalist Writings**

The opening chapter of *The Words*, which is the core book of *the Risale-i Nur*, starts with an interpretation of *Bismillah* (In the name of God) which is the shortened
version of *Bismillah er-Rahman er-Raheem* [In the name of God, the Most-Merciful, the Most-Compassionate], the recurring phrase at the beginnings of all but one of the 114 chapters of the Qur’an. *Bismillah* is also an expression recited by Muslims at the beginning of their deeds and actions. Said Nursi provides different explanations of *Bismillah* in other places but the interpretation he presented in the first chapter of *The Words* is as follows.

*Bismillah*, (In the Name of God), is the start of all things good. We, too, shall start to it.

Know, O my soul! Just as this blessed phrase is a mark of Islam, so too it is constantly recited by all beings through their tongues of disposition.

If you want to know what an inexhaustible strength, what an unending source of bounty is *Bismillah*, listen to the following story which is in the form of a comparison. It goes like this:

Someone who makes a journey through the deserts of Arabia has to travel in the name of a tribal chief and enter under his protection, for in this way he may be saved from the assaults of bandits and secure his needs. On his own he will perish in the face of innumerable enemies and needs. And so, two men went on such a journey and entered the desert. One of them was modest and humble, the other proud and conceited. The humble man assumed the name of a tribal chief, while the proud man did not. The first travelled safely wherever he went. If he encountered bandits, he said: "I am travelling in the name of such-and-such tribal leader," and they would not molest him. If he came to some tents, he would be treated respectfully due to the name. But the proud man suffered such calamities throughout his journey that they cannot be described. He both trembled before everything and begged from everything. He was abased and became an object of scorn.

And so, my proud soul! You are the traveler, and this world is a desert. Your impotence [acz] and poverty [fakr] have no limit, and your enemies and needs are endless.

Since it is thus, take the name of the Pre-Eternal Ruler and Post-Eternal Lord of the desert and be saved from begging before the whole universe and trembling before every event. (W:15-16)
In this introduction, Nursi starts with a brief statement that *Bismillah* is “recited by all beings through their tongues of disposition⁵” which apparently is about cosmological ontology because it has implications with regard to the questions of “what is the source and purpose of existence?” Nursi leaves this statement unexplained, but to be touch on later and he continues with a simple and yet metaphorically rich account of the human ontology that he further extrapolates in the rest of *The Words* and in the other parts of *the Risale-i Nur*.

Before he narrates an allegorical story which he uses to interpret the meaning of it, Said Nursi mentions that *Bismillah* is the start of all things good”. He does not explicitly declare that he will establish a connection between *Bismillah* and the concept of *the good* in this chapter but the story he tells and the explanations he provides reveal that he does. There are two ways in which he establishes such a connection in *the First Word*. The first is about the relationship between *Bismillah* and *the good* in moral philosophical sense which regards human action, and the second is about *the good* in ontological sense which is about the existence and state of affairs of all things in the cosmos.

In the first part where he disposes the bases of his moral philosophy, he also establishes an ontological account of human beings. As I have noted earlier, I treat this ontology (of human beings) as part of moral philosophy. Such an ontology deals with

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⁵ “Tongue of disposition” (*Lisan-i hal*) is a phrase which refers to non-verbal signification. When Nursi says that all-beings recite Bismillah, he contends that everything (conscious and unconscious) are testament to the perfect attributes of God which they dispose through the state of their being.
the nature of human beings which lays the foundations of the nature of human action. Therefore, the ontology of human beings -at least for the purpose of this dissertation- is considered to be part of the moral philosophy. In this vein, the ontology of human beings is different from the ontology of the cosmos. The first relates to the moral philosophical good whereas the second concerns the ontological good.

In the text I quoted above, Nursi first expounds a brief ontology of human beings and consequently he lays the foundations for an understanding of the bases of moral philosophical good. The journey and desert metaphors he uses in this text are indications of seeing human beings in a challenging journey in time and space. In such a journey, human beings are in destitute for (1) meeting their needs and (2) being secured from harm.

Elsewhere in the Risale-i Nur (F3), Nursi contends that human beings are given a comprehensive nature which connects them with almost all beings and a limitless capacity to love. Nevertheless, they constantly suffer the pain of separation as they depart the things they love with the passage of time. Due to the same comprehensive nature, they are also tormented by the fears of calamities bearing the potential of harming their bodies, their lives and the world they live in. These calamities include things as small and as near as infinitesimal microbes and as big and as far as an explosion in the sun (F1). Such love and such fears are the sources of (1) limitless poverty and (2) limitless impotence on the side of human beings, which are related to their destitute for (1) meeting their needs and (2) being secured from harm respectively. In other words, human beings are stricken with limitless poverty because they have
boundless needs. They are also afflicted with limitless impotence because they have endless fears. All of these are related to the journey of human beings in time and space and their comprehensive nature.

The concepts of limitless poverty (acz) and limitless impotence (fakr) occupy a central place in the Risale-i Nur (Vahide, 2006) especially in its moral philosophy including the human ontology. In many places in the Risale-i Nur (Ex: W13, W17, R4) Nursi suggests that only by finding a point of support (trust) against all their enemies (fears, death, separation, destruction, sickness etc.) and a source of help for all their needs human beings can be happy. Throughout the Risale, Nursi maintains that there is none but one such trust: God, the pre-eternal and post-eternal creator of the cosmos in its entirety and particularity at all times.

It seems that by alluding to limitless poverty (acz) and limitless impotence (fakr) Nursi aims at fostering a form self reflexivity and individual consciousness of the need for something similar to what sociologist Giddens (1991) calls “trust” for attaining ontological security. For Gidden, “trust” is a core component of personality development starting from early ages. In circumstances of uncertainty, “trust” is established between the one in need (e.g., infant) and the caretaker which screens out potential dangers and harm and thus provides a sense of ontological security to the self (p. 38-39).

Pannenberg (1970) makes a distinction between “trust” and “security.” For the most part, human actions, including culture and language, strive to culminate ways of securing conditions for life. Throughout history, human civilizations produced different
means as tools for establishing this kind of security. Magic of ancient societies and the
technology of modern times are part of this endeavor. Nonetheless, Pannenberg asserts,
such means will never end and will never provide a fuller sense of security because of
the variability and unpredictability of human experience. Human beings, unlike
animals, are open to the world in the sense that they are cognizant of the whole reality
that encounter them (p. 30-44).

Totality and individuality of the world are beyond the perception and control of
human beings. As a consequence, they need to have some sort of “trust” in and for each
moment. The object of “trust,” Pannenberg implies, might change but the need for it
does not. He also postulates, similar to Giddens that trust establishes a relationship
between individuals and the object of trust, a process which bears the potential of
transforming the self. For example, trusting self acknowledges that he or she does not
have power over himself or herself.

What Nursi does in *the Risale-i Nur* starting with *the First Word* is to situate the
pursuit of happiness in a cosmic frame of reference stretching the boundaries of time
and space. Out of this arise uncertainties of great magnitude for which the self needs
finding and establishing connections with a source of “trust” possessing “inexhaustible
strength” (power) and “unending bounties” (mercy) which can provide a sense of
ontological security. In this way, Nursi aims at laying the foundations of transforming
the self towards a God-conscious direction.

Having started the chapter with reference to *the good* and continuing with
discussions regarding the unlimited impotence and poverty of human beings in their
pursuit of happiness, Nursi indicates that he considers happiness (i.e., meeting the
needs and being secured from the fears) as a great good sought by human beings.

In opening the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle provides a concise definition of
*the good* as a moral philosophical concept.

Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision
seems to seek some good: that is why some people were right to describe the
good as what everything seeks. (Aristotle, 1999, p. 1)

In Aristotle’s account, there is a hierarchy of (moral philosophical) *goods*. Some
of them are *good* in and of themselves while some are means for another greater *good*.
*The good* which is not chosen for another *good* is the highest *good*; it is *the good, per
se*. Almost two centuries after Aristotle, Roman orator and philosopher Cicero
formulated the term *summum bonum* to refer to the concept of the highest *good* and he
contended that every ethical and moral theory should be studied with regard to the
central role of its *summum bonum* (Devettere, 2002, p. 36). The concept of *ultimate
concern* which bears similar connotations with more emphasis on existential issues was
offered by theologian Paul Tillich (1957) more recently.

According to Aristotle, the highest *good* for human action is happiness
(*eudaimonia*) as there is no greater *good* sought by happiness other than being happy.

Every other things are means to achieve happiness. Thus, happiness is the complete of
all *goods*, therefore it is the highest *good*.

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6 Eudaimonia is generally translated as ‘happiness’. An alternative translation is “human
flourishing” which involves performing our function well (Luper, 1999). For Aristotle that
function is reasoning.
I will discuss later in this chapter whether Said Nursi sees happiness (or human flourishing) as the greatest good but it seems thus far that he considers happiness as a great good. However, he suggests that human beings cannot achieve this good without finding an “inexhaustible strength an unending source of bounty” [partial quotation from the text above] for their unlimited impotence and poverty. For the question of how to find this strength and bounty, Nursi, in continuum of the First Word, suggest that the acknowledgement of unlimited weakness makes the self establish connections to (the names of) God:

Since it is thus, take the name of the Pre-Eternal Ruler and Post-Eternal Lord of the desert and be saved from begging before the whole universe and trembling before every event.

Indeed, this phrase [Bismillah] is a treasury so blessed that your infinite impotence and want bind you to an infinite power and mercy; it makes that impotence and want a most acceptable intercessor at the Court of One All-Powerful and Compassionate. The person who acts saying, "In the Name of God," resembles someone who enrolls in the army. He acts in the name of the government; he has fear of no one; he speaks, performs every matter, and withstands everything in the name of the law and the name of the government. (W:16)

One of the characteristics of Nursi’s writing style is that he chooses different attributes to refer to God depending on the context. In so doing, I think, he aims to relate God closely to the particular instances of his readers’ experiences in their lives. Indeed, in the addendum to the First Word, which is an additional alternative interpretation of Bismillah’s full length version (In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate), Nursi, as a reflection of this approach, discusses the distinction between Divine Unity (Vahidiyet) and Divine Oneness (Ehadiyyet).
The first (Divine Unity) refers to God as the only creator of the entire universe in its totality at a macro level. The latter (Divine Oneness), however sees God as the creator and sustainer of each and every individual micro level instances and experiences. He interprets the three components of Bismillah (1- In the name of God, 2- The Merciful, 3 – the Compassionate) to draw attention to micro (Ehadiyet) perspective within the Macro (Vahidiyet) contending that this is the methodology of the Qur’an. 

[Just as divine oneness and eternal besoughtedness have a manifestation together with all the divine names in everything, in animate creatures in particular, and especially in man’s mirror-like essence; so too through divine unity each of the divine names connected to beings encompasses all things. Thus, lest minds become overwhelmed by divine unity and hearts forget the Most Pure and Holy Essence, the Qur’an constantly draws attention to the stamp of divine oneness within divine unity. And that stamp, with its three salient points, is “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. (W:19-20)

I see a similar pattern in the first part of the First Word. Because he related the pursuit of happiness as a great good to human beings’ journey in time and space, he uses the title ‘the Pre-Eternal Ruler and Post-Eternal Lord’ (of the universe) so as to relate the personal experiences of his readers. Obviously, pre-eternity and post-eternity are terms related to time, and universe is related to space. Likewise, in the next paragraph, he refers to God as the All-Powerful and Compassionate relating to the impotence (as a source of strength) and poverty (as a source of abundance) in their search for happiness.

This introduction and other similar passages in the Risale-i Nur (e.g., W2, W3, W5, W6, W7, W8, W12, W30, L20, and R4) are indications that the moral philosophical concept of good and therefore the transformation of the self plays a central role in Nursi’s discourse. I will revisit this subject with a broader approach for
further exploration of the dynamics of the construction of the self in Risale and its connotations with regard to secularization. For now, I will turn to the First Word for a brief analysis of Nursi’s understanding of ontology and ontological *good* and their sociological implications.

As Pannenberg (1970) described it, “the object of trust must be known by experience and must shown itself to be trustworthy. Trust is not possible otherwise.” The following passage signals that at this point Nursi intended to address this issue and wanted to briefly answer the question of whether it is really God (the Pre-Eternal Ruler and Post-Eternal Lord) who creates everything in the universe. Apparently, his suggestion for trusting God in the quest for happiness as a human *good*, which involves infinite love and limitless fear about all things in the universe, is based on the idea that everything is the creation of God. Moreover, Nursi had stated in the very beginning of *the First Word* that *Bismillah* is “recited by all beings through their tongues of disposition.” Now, he comes back to this point to substantiate it.

At the beginning we said that all beings say “In the Name of God” through the tongue of disposition. Is that so?

Indeed, it is so. If you were to see that a single person had come and had driven all the inhabitants of a town to a place by force and compelled them to work, you would be certain that he had not acted in his own name and through his own power, but was a soldier, acting in the name of the government and relying on the power of the king.

In the same way, all things act in the name of Almighty God, for minute things like seeds and grains bear huge trees on their heads; they raise loads like mountains. That means all trees say: "In the Name of God," fill their hands from the treasury of Mercy, and offer them to us. All gardens say: "In the Name of God," and become cauldrons from the kitchens of Divine Power in which are cooked numerous varieties of different foods. All blessed animals like cows, camels, sheep, and goats, say: "In the Name of God," and become fountains of
milk from the abundance of Mercy, offering us a most delicate and pure food like the water of life in the name of the Provider. The roots and rootlets, soft as silk, of all plants, trees, and grasses, say: "In the Name of God," and pierce and pass through hard rock and earth. Mentioning the name of God, the name of the Most Merciful, everything becomes subjected to them.

Indeed, the roots spreading through hard rock and earth and producing fruits as easily as the branches spread through the air and produce fruits, and the delicate green leaves retaining their moisture for months in the face of extreme heat, deal a slap in the mouths of Naturalists and jab a finger in their blind eyes, saying: "Even heat and hardness, in which you most trust, are under a command. For, like the Staff of Moses, each of those silken rootlets conform to the command of, And We said, O Moses, strike the rock with your staff, [Qur’an 2:60] and split the rock. And the delicate leaves fine as cigarette paper recite the verse, ‘O fire be coolness and peace’ [Qur’an 21:69] against the heat of the fire, each like the members of Abraham (UWP)." (W:17-18)

Similar to his introduction to the issues pertaining to moral philosophy in the beginning of this first chapter, Nursi, in this section, starts with a brief and simple introduction to ontological issues (regarding the cosmos) which he discusses in further detail and complexity in other places of the Risale-i Nur (W30).

There are two points which I think are noteworthy here. First, Nursi makes the case for the idea of God creating everything by way of negating causality. Suffice it to say now that one of the ways Nursi makes inferences about the existence and unity of God is to make a comparison of causes and effects. On the one hand are incapable, blind, powerless and mindless causes and on the other are more complex, orderly, perfect, beautiful and meaningful effects. It would be impossible to attribute these complex and meaningful effects (such as the fruitful trees) to senseless, mindless and powerless causes (the earth, the seeds, the sun, water, oxygen etc.) and to the abstract laws through which these elements interact, hence the necessity for the existence of God (F23).
Secondly and more importantly, there is an explicit connection in this excerpt above which deals primarily with ontology and with the two aspects of moral philosophical *good* that Nursi dealt with earlier. He first brings the issues of unlimited impotence and poverty of human beings when he touches on issues regarding the moral philosophical *good*, contending that these two sides of the human *good* is the source of unlimited impotence and poverty which could only be satisfied by finding an “inexhaustible strength” and an “unending source of bounty.”

Now, Nursi opens up an ontological approach where he evokes the idea that God is the “inexhaustible strength” and the “unending source of bounty.” In saying “Even heat and hardness, in which you most trust, are under a command” and “The roots and rootlets, soft as silk, of all plants, trees, and grasses, say: ‘In the Name of God,’ and pierce and pass through hard rock and earth,” Nursi points to the (inexhaustible) power of God. It is his power, Nursi suggests, which is making these impossible things happen. Thus, Nursi aims to appeal to the impotent side of human beings. When he says that it is God’s mercy which is giving human beings the great variety of fruits and food from the trees and domestic animals, he is appealing to the other (boundless poverty) side.

Thence, Nursi brings together the moral philosophical *good* and the ontological *good*. Things, such as trees and animals, depend on God for coming into existence and in their journey towards reaching perfection, order, beauty and meaning. Human beings, too, should recognize this and turn to Him for their needs in their spatiotemporal journey. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between moral
philosophy and ontology in Nursi’s thinking.

Thirdly, in the beginning of the First Word where Nursi deals with the moral philosophical good, being “proud” and “selfish” is the source of deviation from the good as it is portrayed in the story of the two men travelling in the desert. Those who live exclusively for themselves and trust their imagined but de facto non-existent limited power (W30) are the source of their own despair and misery (W7). For ontology, it is the naturalist who falsely speculates the truth about the good (order, perfection, meaning etc.) in the cosmos by attributing the qualities they observe to the causes and to the laws in nature in denial of their true source (i.e., God).

In Aristotle's hierarchy of goods, happiness, since it is the ultimate goal, is the greatest good. The assumption behind such a conviction is that we live for attaining happiness and we do not instrumentalize it to reach something greater than that. At the outset, it is not very clear whether the pursuit of happiness is presented as the greatest good in the First Word because most of this chapter revolves around issues regarding happiness and the way through which it can be attained. Three things convince me that happiness in and of itself is not the greatest good neither in the First Word nor in the rest of the Risale-i Nur.

First, the very beginning of this (first) chapter proclaims (in the original language): “Bismillâh her hayrın başıdır.” Şükran Vahide translated this phrase as: “In the Name of God, is the start of all things good.” In the original (Turkish) language, the word used in place of “start” in the English translation is “baş” (as in başıdır) which has multiple meanings in Turkish, the most literal of which is the “head” as the upper
part of the body. Online dictionary of Türk Dil Kurumu (Turkish Language Association) lists this as the first meaning. Other meanings listed in the same dictionary include “beginning/start,” “top” "head [leader]" and “main.” The translator chose to use the word “start” for the translation of baş and hence translation: “In the Name of God is the start of all things good.”

The following sentence in the original language is “Biz dahi başta ona başlarız” which can be literally translated as “We, too, shall start to it.” However, the translator choose to translate it as “We, too, shall start with it.” I think that the translator chose to translate it this way because she interpreted the preceding sentence (Bismillâh her hayrîn başdır) to be only understood as “In the Name of God is the start of everything” by only focusing on the meaning of the word (baş) as “start/beginning.”

Another reason might be that because Bismillah (In the name of God) is customarily recited at the beginning of good deeds among Muslims. She probably thought that Said Nursi meant to do the same and wanted to start with Bismillah to an important task but perhaps he mistakenly used the preposition “to” instead of the preposition “with.”

However, if and when other meanings of baş primarily including main and top were also included, if not exclusively used, it would be much easier to understand why Nursi mentions “starting to Bismillah” rather than saying “starting with Bismillah.”

This might seem to be a subtle nuance but it answers an important question which is whether Nursi sees human happiness as an end in and of itself or in other

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words as the greatest good. This nuance [using the adjective to instead of with] is one important indication that Nursi does not see “Bismillah – In the name of God” as a means to an end but an end in and of itself. Put differently, Bismillah is not something that is employed to get something else. It is an ideal way of life, indeed a paradigm of making sense of the world and living accordingly. As such Bismillah is not exclusively something with which another thing is achieved, it is something to be started to.

Secondly, the rest of the First Word especially the last part attests to the idea that Bismillah in and of itself is the greatest good and not human happiness even though happiness is tied exclusively to Bismillah.

Since all things say: “In the Name of God,” and bearing God’s bounties in God’s name, give them to us, we, too, should say: “In the Name of God.” We should give in the name of God, and take in the name of God. And we should not take from heedless people who neglect to give in God’s name.

**Question:** We give a price to people, who are like tray-bearers. So what price does God want? Who is the true owner?

**The Answer:** Yes, the price the True Bestower of Bounties wants in return for those valuable bounties and goods is three things: one is remembrance, another is thanks, and the other is reflection. Saying, “In the Name of God” at the start is remembrance, and, “All praise be to God” at the end is thanks. And perceiving and thinking of those bounties, which are priceless wonders of art, being miracles of power of the Unique and Eternally Besought One and gifts of His mercy, is reflection. However foolish it is to kiss the foot of a lowly man who conveys to you the precious gift of a king and not to recognize the gift’s owner, it is a thousand times more foolish to praise and love the apparent source of bounties and forget the True Bestower of Bounties. (W:17)

Here, Nursi summarizes and more explicitly states what he implicitly hinted before. Read the cosmos “In the name of God” for “all things say Bismillah” (alludes to ontology). Such a conviction necessitates that human beings should conduct their lives including their interactions with others based on the greatest good “In the name of
God” and hence they should ‘Give and take in the name of God”. As such, *Bismillah* brings together the ontological and moral philosophical *good* in the form of God-consciousness. Therefore, *Bismillah*, for Nursi, is the greatest *good*.

In answering the hypothetical question in *the First Word* about the price God wants for his bounties, Nursi further emphasizes that it is the recognition of God as the source of all that is *good*. Having started the chapter with issues pertaining to the ontological and moral philosophical *good*, he closes it with a call for the acknowledgement of God, seeing him at the center of one’s own life and acting accordingly.

O my soul! If you do not wish to be foolish in that way, give in God’s name, take in God’s name, begin in God’s name, and act in God’s name. And that’s the matter in a nutshell! (W:18)

Another reason why I think that the pursuit of happiness is not at the foci of Nursi’s understanding of *the good* is the way he compiled the remaining chapter of his book *The Words* is the main book of *the Risale-i Nur*. In the following chapters of *The Words*, Nursi continues to use metaphorical stories after *the First Word*. One of the common characteristics of all of these chapters is that by way of placing the pursuit of human *good* in a cosmic frame of reference and by projecting this pursuit in a broader spectrum in time and space, Nursi aims to the shift the ultimate concern of his readers from a temporal one to an everlasting one.

In the process of doing so, he tells his readers that their happiness is contingent on the (co)operation of the entire cosmos and the stretch of time from pre-eternity to post-eternity, which are outside their power and control. Securing their (eternal) needs
and being saved from their enemies, primarily including non-existence, depend on establishing a strong connection to God - the One who reigns over time and space. Hence, he aims at convincing the readers that they have to recognize God in their journey in time and space, or else their short-sighted selfish side will lead to suffering under the pressure of limitless needs and fears.

Such descriptions alongside the general narrative of *the Risale-i Nur* indicate that Nursi sees a duality in the nature of human beings. On the one side is the selfish soul (*nefs*) which is always tempted towards immediate pleasures even at the expense of suffering in the long run. On the other are the heart, mind and spirit connecting human beings to the past and future which elongate to eternity. The heart (*kalb*) loves things eternally, but the passing of time takes away the beloved ones and, therefore, even pleasureable things turns into pain, for the fact that the departure of the desirable is also affliction. The mind (*akl*) brings forth the uncertainties of the future while the spirit (*ruh*) wants to be at peace with the past, present and future all at once (W:518-519, W:611-612, R4).

Pursuing the interests of the shortsighted soul (*nefs*) is at odds with the interests of the heart, mind and spirit. Awakening to the needs of these faculties instead of the selfish temptations of the soul (*nefs*) accentuate the unlimited impotence (*acz*) and poverty (*fakr*) on the side of the self and thereupon paves the way for the connection to God.

Nursi thinks that worldviews and philosophies antithetical to Revelation orient individuals towards transient goals and blinds them to their real necessities by
appealing to the desires of the soul (nefs) with amusement and entertainment. This is not only an anomaly in the sense of a divergent aberration from the real greatest good (In the name of God), it is also a path based on an unrealistic and impractical approach to the nature of human beings. It can only work (make people think they are happy) by canceling out human sensitivities (iptal-i his) which is something Nursi occasionally likens to drunkenness (W:39, W:48, W:70, W:85).

In order to reorient the self towards the greatest good (Bismillah), he appeals to the other side with a broader scope of the pursuit of the good. All of the first eight chapters of The Words, which are also published independently as The Short Words (Küçük Sözler), revolve around these issues. Even when he writes about the importance of the 5-times daily prayers in the Fourth Word, Said Nursi brings up the journey in time and space. He first tells a short story where a mighty ruler sends two of his servants to a royal domain of his, two months distance away and give the two servants twenty-four pieces of gold each.

The ruler instructs them to buy the necessities along the way for their stay there. The first carefully uses his capital in preparation for his final destination whereas the second heedlessly wastes all but one of the twenty-four golds on gambling and amusement. The first warns the second that he should spend this last piece of gold for a ticket to the final destination. Otherwise, he will walk the desert alone in starvation.

The interpretation Nursi provides at the end of the story if as follows.

Oh you who do not perform the prescribed prayers! And O my own soul, which does not like to pray! The ruler in the comparison is our Sustainer, our Creator. Of the two travelling servants, one represents the devout who perform their prayers with fervor, and the other, the heedless who neglect their prayers. The
twenty-four pieces of gold are life in every twenty-four-hour day. And the royal
domain is Paradise. As for the station, it is the grave. And the journey is man’s
passage to the grave, and on to the resurrection and the hereafter. Men cover
that long journey to different degrees according to their actions and the strength
of their fear of God. Some of the truly devout have crossed a thousand-year
distance in a day like lightning. And some have traversed a fifty-thousand-year
distance in a day with the speed of imagination. The Qur’an of Mighty Stature
alludes to this truth with two of its verses.

The ticket in the comparison represents the prescribed prayers. A single hour a
day is sufficient for the five prayers together with taking the ablutions. So what
a loss a person makes who spends twenty-three hours on this fleeting worldly
life, and fails to spend one hour on the long life of the hereafter; how he wrongs
his own self; how unreasonably he behaves. For would not anyone who
considers himself to be reasonable understand how contrary to reason and
wisdom such a person’s conduct is, and how far from reason he has become, if,
thinking it reasonable, he gives half of his property to a lottery in which one
thousand people are participating and the possibility of winning is one in a
thousand, and does not give one twenty-fourth of it to an eternal treasury where
the possibility of winning has been verified at ninety-nine out of a hundred?
(W:33)

Towards the end of the Third Word which also involves a road story, is this
conclusion.

O rebellious soul, know that one of those two travelers represents those who
submit to the Divine Law, while the other represents the rebellious and those
who follow their own desires. The road is the road of life, which comes from the
Spirit World, passes through the grave, and carries on to the hereafter. As for
the kit-bag and rifle, they are worship and fear of God.

There is an apparent burden in worship, but there is an ease and lightness in its
meaning that defies description. For in the prescribed prayers the worshipper
declares, “I bear witness that there is no god but God.” That is to say, he finds
the door of a treasury of mercy in everything because he is believing and saying,
“There is no Creator and Provider other than Him. Harm and benefit are in His
hand. He is both All-Wise; He does nothing in vain, and He is All-
Compassionate; His bounty and mercy are abundant.” And he knocks on the
door with his supplication. Moreover, he sees that everything is subjugated to
the command of his own Sustainer, so he takes refuge in Him. He places his
trust in Him and relies on Him, and is fortified against every disaster; his belief
gives him complete confidence.
Three more chapters down the road, *the Sixth Word* directly presents “taking the name of God” from the perspective of a profitable trade in reference to the Quranic verse (9: 111): “Verily God has purchased from the believers their persons [selves - *ansus* in Arabic] and their property that Paradise might be theirs.”

In the story narrated in *the Sixth Word*, a king entrusts two of his subjects with estates full of equipment, delicate machinery and workshops at a time of war and instability. The king sends a messenger to the two men to convey a decree and to instruct them to sell the property to the king in return for a great profit after the war is over, for the reason that they “are indigent and resourceless, and unable to provide the cost of these great tasks.” The messenger also says that they would keep the property with them but the king assumes the responsibility of maintaining and protecting the estate and the provision of all the expenses. They will continue working in the estate albeit under the King’s name. If they do not sell, the machinery, delicate tools and scales will lose their value all together.

One of the two subjects, who was “selfish, arrogant, and proud” denies the existence of such a king in the first place, ignores the dangers of the wartime, the earthquakes and tumults of the world and declines the offer. The other reasonable one responds positively, agreeing to happily sell the property back to the king.

O soul full of caprices! Look at the face of truth through the telescope of this parable. As for the king, he is the Monarch of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity, your Sustainer and Creator. The estates, machinery, tools and scales are your possessions while in life’s fold; your body, spirit and heart within those possessions, and your outward and inward senses such as the eye and the tongue, intelligence and imagination. As for the noblest lieutenant, it is the Noble Messenger of God; and the wisest decree is the Wise Qur’an, which describes the trade we are discussing in this verse: “Verily God has purchased
from the believers their persons and property that Paradise might be theirs”.

The surging field of battle is the tempestuous surface of the world, which ceaselessly changes, dissolves and reforms and causes every man to think:

“Since everything will leave our hands, will perish and be lost, is there no way in which we can transform it into something eternal and preserve it?” (W:38-39)

In response to the question at the end of this excerpt, Nursi maintains, revelation (the Qur’an) says that “there is, a beautiful and easy way which contains five profits within itself.” He goes on to describe what it means to sell “the self” (nefs) and properties to God and what the five degrees of profits are in doing so (being God-conscious) and what the five degrees of losses are in refusal.

The Short Words are not the only places where Nursi aims at engaging in a dialogue involving cost (loss) and benefit (profit) calculations with the self to channel the orientation of its pursuit of the good towards a God-conscious direction. Acting in the name of God, Nursi asserts, might seem to be burdensome, but the good it brings to the self outweighs its difficulties a thousand times (e.g., W2, W3, W5, W6). Pursuit of the desires of the selfish shortsighted soul might seem to bring some immediate relief (from duty) but it torments the heart, mind and the spirit.

Although the Ninth Word is not included in The Short Words, it, too, takes a similar approach. In this chapter, Nursi answers a question about the reasons of praying (salat) five times a day. He again approaches the issue from a broader cosmological perspective and relates it to the everlasting journey in time and space and thus to the pursuit of the good. Having presented some of the core meanings of prayers (salat) as the servant’s acknowledgement of his/her faults, impotence and poverty through which
one fully appreciates and prostrates in love and wonderment before the perfect qualities of God reflected in His creation, Nursi goes on to say that each of the 5 prayers are reminiscent of and corresponds to major transformations and bounties in the life of the universe, in the history of human beings in this world, in the life-span of individuals, in the alternation of the seasons in a year and in the progression of the day. All of these transformations resemble each other. The early morning (fajr) prayer, for example, calls into mind the transformations and bounties in the beginning of the creation of the universe, the appearance of humankind on earth, the moment of conception in the mother’s womb, and the early spring. Likewise, the last prayer (Nightfall/Isha) is reminiscent of,

[T]he world of darkness veiling all the objects of the daytime world with a black shroud, and winter hiding the face of the dead earth with its white cerement, and even the remaining works of departed men dying and passing beneath the veil of oblivion, and this world, the arena of examination, being shut up and closed down for ever, it proclaims the awesome and mighty disposals of the All-Glorious and Compelling Subduer.

[…] It is a time that calls to mind the disposals of The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth’s awesomeness and the manifestations of His beauty in the utter destruction of this narrow, fleeting, and lowly world, the terrible death-agonies of its decease, and in the unfolding of the broad, eternal, and majestic world of the hereafter. And the universe’s Owner, its True Disposer, its True Beloved and Object of Worship can only be the One Who with ease turns night into day, winter into spring, and this world into the hereafter like the pages of a book; who writes and erases them, and changes them.

Thus, at nightfall, man’s spirit, which is infinitely impotent and weak, and infinitely poor and needy, and plunged into the infinite darkness of the future, and tossed around amid innumerable events, performs the ‘Isha prayer, which has this meaning: like Abraham man says: “I love not those that set,” [Qur’an, 6:76] and through the prayers seeks refuge at the Court of an Undying Object of Worship, an Eternal Beloved One, and in this transient world and fleeting life and dark world and black future he supplicates an Enduring, Everlasting One, and for a moment of unending conversation, a few seconds of immortal life, he
asks to receive the favours of the All-Merciful and Compassionate One’s mercy and the light of His guidance, which will strew light on his world and illuminate his future and bind up the wounds resulting from the departure and decline of all creatures and friends. (W:55-58)

A legitimate question might be asked about the relevance of the introductory chapters of *The Words* and similar passages in *the Risale-i Nur* to Nursi’s understanding of religious revival and secularization. An answer to this question can be found in the introduction of the volume “Comparisons of Faith and Unbelief” which is a compilation of a list of Nursi’s writings from his other books. The first eight chapters of the book *The Words* were included at the beginning of this compiled volume in the original order in which they are listed in *The Words*. Therefore, *the First Word* is also the first chapter of this compiled volume. Included before *the First Word* as an introduction to the “Comparisons of Faith and Unbelief” is a letter Nursi wrote to his students explaining his method of religious revival as a response to a lengthy question:

“Why is it that the Risale-i Nur is not defeated in the face of so much opposition and so many obdurate philosophers and people of misguidance? By preventing to an extent the dissemination of numerous valuable, true books on belief and Islam, and by means of their worldly pleasures and vices, they have deprived many youths and others of the truths of belief. But their most violent attacks, vicious treatment, lies and propaganda have been directed at the Risale-i Nur, to destroy it and to scare people away from it and make them give it up. Despite this, the Risale-i Nur has spread in a way never seen in any other work, six hundred thousand copies of its treatises being written out by hand with unflagging zeal and published secretly. How is it that it causes itself to be read with such enthusiasm, both within the country and abroad? What is the reason for it? (R:639).

The question itself reveals that Nursi and those who were asking such questions (it is not clear from the text who asked these question and if it was his students/followers) see *the Risale-i Nur* as a movement against another oppositional
movement trying to “deprive many of the truths of belief.”

There are several clues in the presentation of these questions about how Nursi perceives this oppositional movement. First, the opposition has something to do with (secularist) Philosophy. As it is already mentioned, Nursi’s use of the concept of Philosophy is very broad and it also includes scientism and positivism. Second, this opposition includes, or utilizes, political power in order to put an end to the expansion of the Risale-i Nur with brute force, fear factor and negative propaganda. Third, this rival movement uses tactics to reorient individuals (the self) and their pursuit of the good towards worldly pleasures and vices.

Therefore, the oppositional movement, as it is presented in this question, has ontological (philosophy and science), moral (turning towards worldly desires), and political (use of physical force and propaganda) dimensions. Fourthly, and most importantly, Nursi does not see misguided moral philosophy and political oppression as the ultimate threats. He implies that by means of (1) philosophy (scientism), (2) misguided and deceptive morals and (3) political oppression the antagonist movement was trying to “deprive many of the truths of faith (iman.). Thus, the real challenge is about faith. Philosophy (and scientism), misguided deceptive morals and politics are used to attack belief which is what matters the most according to Nursi.

In his response to the question above, Nursi does not deal with the issue of political oppression and how to respond to it in order to prevent the decline of belief. Issues pertaining to moral philosophy and discussions of how the Risale-i Nur responds to such challenges are at the core of his answer. For Nursi, the Risale, as a commentary
of the Qur’an, saves (the faith of) many by demonstrating that “in misguidance (vices and forbidden pleasures) is a sort of Hell” and by indicating that “in belief in God and good deeds is a sort of Paradise” (§:753). *The Short Words* and other similar places in *the Risale*, Nursi affirms, use this strategy.

In all of these stories, the two individuals representing the selfish and the pious go through the same experiences but the position they take towards themselves and towards the cosmos greatly changes the way in which they react to the events they experience. The scenario is the same but not the reactions. The same world becomes a paradise or a hell depending on the perspective and orientation of the self.

Such an approach is reminiscent of the Kantian distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. The noumenal world is the real world out there and the phenomenal world is the world we perceive. The first is a fixed reality and the second changes from individual to individual because not everyone sees the (noumenal) world in the same way (§:753). In Nursi’s descriptions, God-consciousness fosters a pleasant (phenomenal) world while selfishness, arrogance and unbelief leads to an unhappy burdensome one. The believer and the denier lives in the same noumenal world but the difference between the natures of their phenomenal worlds is like the difference between the heaven and the hell (W7, W8, L20).

As I discuss below, presenting evidences for the existence of the hereafter including the heaven and the hell occupies a central place in Nursi’s understanding of religious revival but most of Nursi’s discourse aimed at turning the face of the self towards a God-conscious direction involves phenomenological differences in the
perspectives of the God-conscious and the misguided in this life. Indeed, Nursi says that he consciously embraces an approach which aims to make the self see the seeds of paradise in God-consciousness (iman/hidayet) and the seeds of the hell in disbelief (küfr/dalalet) in this world (§:675) here and now. Because the selfish soul does not care much about what will happen in the long run, it is more practical to bring the pain and pleasure of the past and future and the agony of the heart, mind and spirit in front of the shortsighted soul so that it might be convinced to change its course of action for the better (i.e., God-conscious direction).

Nursi also contended that many, in the contemporary world, know the truths of belief and they are aware of the rewards of the paradise but the shortsighted soul deceives them with temptations for selfish immediate pleasure and with the love of this world, at the cost of losing the greatest happiness in the long run (§:675). Consequently, the soul prevails over the mind and reason. It would not be easy to convince such people and reorient them towards a God-conscious life by talking about the rewards and punishment in the hereafter. Because such people are under the pressure of the soul which is primarily concerned about immediate pain and pleasure, the only way to save them is to show immediate pain in their indulgence of the worldly, which are like pieces of glass soon to be broken into pieces, and to show the immediate happiness in God-consciousness which establishes connection to eternity.

Related to Nursi’s understanding of the nature of turning towards immediate pleasures are his descriptions of the three faces the world. The first “is mirror to Almighty God’s Names, reflecting their meanings.” This face of the world is like a
collection of innumerable letters, meaningful texts bearing messages, which are
describing their Eternal maker. The second one “looks to the hereafter and is its arable
field.” These two sides are worthy of love as they connect the self to Eternity through
finding the Eternally Besought One (God). There is a third aspect of the world which
looks to human beings’ base appetites and to the desires of the worldly. This side is a
veil of neglect and it is the aim of the people of misguidance. Turning towards it leads
to forgetfulness of not only the reality (real source) of the world but also of the real
needs of human beings (e.g., eternal existence in happiness). This face of the world is
ugly and painful because it looks to transience and non-existence, therefore it cannot
and should not be the good sought by the self.

I observed that, in the preceding chapters of The Words, Nursi is trying to
convince the self that pursuing the good within the limits of the third face of this world
will turn into its opposite. Rather than bringing happiness, it loads burdens on the
shoulders of the self that it cannot bear. By suggesting that turning towards the first two
sides can bring true happiness (as a great human good) he intends to channel the pursuit
of the good towards a God-conscious direction.

As the discussions above indicate, there is a strong connection between
selfishness, arrogance, self-reliance and turning to the third (transient) face of the
world, in Nursi’s thinking. Although he does not think that it started in modern times,
Nursi presents this as one of the greatest challenges (problems) of contemporary
societies.
As is the case for the preceding chapters of *The Words*, the discourse of Nursi in trying to orient individuals towards God-consciousness in the entire Risale is more of a persuasion and reflexivity based approach rather than an obligation based one. An indication of such an approach in Nursi’s writings is the lack of authoritarian language. In other words, ‘God commands therefore you should do it’ type of language is almost nonexistent in *the Risale-i Nur*. Instead, he uses the language that the nature given to human beings and the nature of their journey in time and space necessitate that they turn to God.

In the first nine chapters of *The Words* which is the main book of *the Risale*, the primary emphasis is to convince the self to take the long run, including life after death, into consideration and thus to convince it turn away from the third transient face of the world in favor of the other two faces which look to the perfect qualities of God (Esma-ul Husna) and hereafter (ahiret). This approach is an example of Nursi’s individual based approach to religious revival. The main issue is not about transforming the world around the self but changing his or her worldview and to a greater degree reorienting their ultimate concern by way of presenting a schema of “rational choice”-in the sense of the term used by the Rational Choice Theory. He presents two scenarios in which one side’s calculation of costs and benefits are distorted by their selfishness, arrogance and greediness for immediate pleasures while the other side has a more realistic, reasonable and truthful attitude.

The content of *the Tenth Word* (chapter) indicates that at this point Nursi feels the need to provide evidences to convince the self that (1) the world is indeed a
reflection of the Esma (the perfect attributes of God) and (2) that there really is an everlasting life after death. Obviously, the suggestion that the self should be oriented towards these two faces entails some sort of substantiation that the first two faces of the world are real. *The Tenth Word* and other similar passages in *the Risale-i Nur* (W 29) are indications that Nursi takes this issue very seriously.

Indeed, these issues are central to his understanding of revival. If one aspect of his discourse of religious revival involves the orientation of the self’s pursuit of the good from the third -transient and therefore ugly- face self-centered towards a God-consciousness direction and therefore to the first two (beautiful) sides of the world (Esma and Hereafter), the other aspect is about substantiating the ideas that these two faces are real.

The reason why Nursi takes these issues seriously is not only about feeling the need that the self might want to see evidences to be convinced but also about his analysis that these two ideas (Existence of God and bodily resurrection) were attacked in modern times. Nursi does not think that such attacks started in modern times (W30) but he asserts that they were intensified in contemporary societies in the form of scientism, naturalism and materialism.

Formerly, the fundamentals of belief were protected, submission was strong. Even if the intuitive knowledge of those with knowledge of God lacked proof, their expositions were acceptable and sufficient. But at this time… the misguidance of science has stretched out its hand to the fundamentals and pillars. (L:443)

Providing evidences for the idea of resurrection after death was one of the central components of Said Nursi’s response to secularization which was supported by
the Islamic traditions’ emphasis on such issues. In fact, the categorical opposite of ‘secular’ (dünyevi) in the Muslim World is mostly understood as ‘the otherworldly’ (uhrevi). Etymologically, the word secular derives from the Latin word saeculum which means ‘belonging to the age’ or ‘belonging to the world’. Religio-historical meaning of the same word (secular) is generally understood as ‘belonging to the temporal or to the state authority’ in the context of Western Christian World (Casanova, 1994).

Etymologically closest concept to secular in Muslim context is ‘dünyevî’ which, too, literally means ‘belonging to the world’. The word ‘dünyevî’ is an adjective like the word secular and it basically has two meanings. The first refers to temporal affairs of human existence as in “dünyevî ihtiyaçlar” meaning “worldly needs” (e.g., food and shelter). The second bears a more dialectical meaning and refers to things other than God-conscious purposes and/or ignoring the necessities of the afterlife. As an example, “dünyevî emeller” means “desires and purposes limited to the temporal existence in this world.”

The categorical opposite of “secular” in the Western Christian context is “sacred” “holy” “sacramental” or “religious” but the opposite of the term ‘dünyevî’ (secular) in Islamic terminology is “uhrevî” which literally means “belonging/pertaining to the other world/afterlife.” There is no categorical representation or spatial separation of “uhrevî” in the social or political life in Muslim context. In the Christian world, the concepts of secular and sacred are historically understood as horizontally and spatially separated spheres of life. There is no
equivalent of such categorical distinctions of the sacred and the secular in the history of the (Sunni) Muslim World, nor were there any categorical distinctions between the sacred and temporal authorities.

That is why the oppositional relationship between secular(ist) forces and the religious have been framed along the lines of the dialectical relationships between the dünyevi and uhrevi. That is why, I think, the emphasis on ‘taking into the long run into consideration in the pursuit of the good’ and ‘providing evidences for bodily resurrection’ occupied a very central place in Said Nursi’s revivalist writings. In addition, he knew that the secularist Young Turks such as Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik, by borrowing ideas from European materialists, were presenting arguments against the immortality of the soul. This must be the reason why one of the first things he addressed in his revivalist writings was the issue of bodily resurrection. (See Appendix B for an example how Said Nursi tried to provide evidences for bodily resurrection).

**Religious Responses to the Secularist Conception of Human Perfectibility**

The first ten chapters of the book Sözler (The Words) which were also among the first writings of Said Nursi after the establishment of the Turkish Republic aimed at reorienting the self’s pursuit of happiness towards a God-conscious direction by contending that true happiness can only be attained by acknowledging that God is the creator of all things and by relying on him in the spatiotemporal journey in time and space towards eternity. In this regard, Said Nursi was responding to the modern secularist conception of securing the conditions of life as part of the human effort to
improve the human condition through secular means (science, technology) methods. This perspective was best exemplified in the idea of developmentalism.

As I described in the previous chapter, another component of the human effort to improve the human condition (i.e., the idea of progress) was the secularist conception of human perfectibility. In their materialist reading of Nature, some of the secularist ideologues interpreted the history of the cosmos and the living species on Earth from an evolutionary perspective. As it is formulated by materialist Büchner and other theorists of evolution (e.g., de La Mettrie, Lamarck and Darwin) who were inspirations for most of the materialists in the modern history of Turkey, a general law of evolution reigned in Nature chiefly including biological mechanisms.

Human beings and their social life are part of this evolutionary process as well. In addition to being a result of biological evolution, human beings are also destined to be perfected in their psychological, intellectual and social traits. Therefore, an infinite perfection through self-realization was open for human beings in secular terms. As I described in the previous chapter, similar ideas were presented by Abdullah Cevdet in the late Ottoman Society.

It seems that after responding to the secularist conception of securing the conditions for life for the attainment of happiness in the first ten chapters of his book, The Words, Said Nursi started presenting his religious response to the secularist conception of human perfectibility starting from the Eleventh Word.

First of all, it is important to remember in this regard that most of Nursi’s theological positions in matters of dispute are closer to the Asharite school of thought
which holds that God creates things and their qualities not because conditions and wisdom requires it so but because God wills it so. The Asharite School also holds, God, with His unlimited will, chooses to create with wisdom. Similarly, the real cause for following the teachings and instructions of revelation and messengers is because they are God’s commands but those instructions have wisdom and purpose in them.

Likewise, God creates delight and contentment as immediate rewards for the fulfillment of certain duties. These pleasures are for persuasion (da‘i), they are not the actual cause/reason (muktazi). The pleasure of taste, for example, is a strong persuasive for eating but the real reason we eat is not the pleasure of taste but the fact that we have to feed our bodies. Taste makes it easier and desirable for human beings to eat. Food is mostly delicious but we need to and we can eat even when it is not tasty. In some cases we might need to eat even when the food is sour as long as it maintains our bodies. Nevertheless, we cannot eat everything tasty for the fact that certain tasty things can harm our bodies.

Nursi is with the Asharite School in that he, too, thinks the real cause of following the instructions of the Qur’an and the Prophet is because it is God’s word (emir). He also thinks that those instructions include wisdom (hikmet) and persuasive elements (da‘i). However, many, if not all, of his writings calling for God-consciousness, including but not limited to The Short Words, contain a great deal of descriptions of how desirable and wise it is to “take the name of God”, or in other words, to read the universe as reflections of his beautiful names and to adhere to the purposes He ascribed for human beings.
If we group muktazi (real cause) and emir (command of God) into one category as the primary motives for God-consciousness in Nursi’s thinking, and wisdom (hikmet) and persuasive elements (dai) into another as the secondary, I saw a mixture of primary and secondary motives in the discourse of the introductory chapters of The Words (The 1st thru the 9th) in which the secondary side takes up a greater proportion, not in terms of primacy but of the length of descriptions. In addition to the revelations of the textual analysis provided above, the beginnings of all of the eight Short Words attest to this. With the exception of the Fifth, introductions of all of the (eight) Short Words expresses, in different ways, that these comparative stories indicate, “what great happiness and pleasure, bounty, profit, ease, and an honorable-rank are to be found in belief and reliance in God, taking refuge in him, performing the prescribed prayers and not committing serious sins” and “what difficulties, great loss, ruin and harm lie in disbelief, neglecting prayers and committing great sins.” Although it is not explicitly stated in its introduction, The Fifth Word deals directly with these issues as well.

However, I observed a gradual progression from an emphasis on the secondary motives to the primary in the order in which chapters of The Words is compiled. The first nine chapters, which include The Short Words and the Ninth Word, are aimed at convincing and encouraging the shortsighted soul to take “the name of God” in its pursuit of the good and to rely on Him by extending the scope of this journey in time and space and calling into attention the long-run effects of the position the self takes towards itself and towards the cosmos. This is a way of appealing to the self that, it is imperative that it takes into consideration what is yet to come in the long run not only
because of being prepared for the needs and of being secured from existential enemies in the future but also for the happiness the self seeks here and now.

Only when the faculties of heart, mind and the soul are assured of the self’s well-being in the future and of the remedies for the grief of the past, human beings can be happy. What is more, the self’s journey is not limited to the life in this world, it will continue after death as well, for which the self should be prepared. Such preparedness primarily involves the knowledge of God in the form of studying His perfect qualities (Esma ul Husna) in creation. Human beings’ lives in hereafter will be shaped by the degree of their knowledge of the perfect qualities of God (Esma) and their application of this knowledge to their lives in this world.

There is an observable shift in the Eleventh Word and the Twelfth Word (chapters) in the *magnum opus* of Said Nursi, *The Words*, in terms of the degree of emphasis he places on primary and secondary motives “for taking the name of God”. After trying to convince his readers in the preceding chapters that if they want to be truly happy they should take “the name of God” and trying to reorient them towards a God-conscious direction, Nursi tells his audience that the ultimate reason for the creation of human beings is not for them to pursue happiness; it is to excel in knowing the perfect attributes of God (Esma-ul Husna) and reflecting this knowledge in their lives and in their worship.

Therefore, the path of perfection for human beings lies in acknowledging their weakness and vulnerabilities and -by the necessitation of this condition- in excelling the contemplation of God’s perfect attributes. Human beings, unlike animals, are adorned
with very delicate and sensitive capabilities for pondering over the wonders of creation. Therefore, they should use these capabilities for increasing their knowledge and appreciation of God not for self-fulfillment.

Similar perspectives are presented in the other subsequent chapters of *Sözler* (e.g., 12th, 23th and 30th) and in Said Nursi’s other works (e.g., R4, L20) but a summary of this approach is provided in the eleventh chapter of *The Words*.

O my carnal self and my friend! You are not sent here to spend the capital of your life and your vital potentials on material pleasures and this transient life. If you do, you will fall to the lowest ranks, although you are far superior with regard to “capital” than the most developed animal.

[...] [Y]our life’s aim and nature, its apparent form and meaning, and the perfect happiness in your life, weigh on the scales of your body’s senses the bounties stored in Divine Mercy’s treasuries and offer thanks on your body’s behalf. Through the feelings, tendencies, and faculties embedded in your nature, discover the hidden treasuries—the works and manifestations—of the Divine Sacred Names and then recognize the Most Holy One through those Names. [...] Other living beings worship and glorify their Creator by consciously or unconsciously obeying the laws He established for their lives. This is the main purpose for their creation and life. Thus you should consciously observe their obedience to Him, their worship and glorification of Him, and reflect on and testify to their worship and glorification. (S11. Trans. Hüseyin Akarsu, p. 139-140)

Said Nursi addressed the issue of human perfectibility more directly and dialectically towards the end of *Sözler*. In *The Thirtieth Word* (chapter⁸), he contended that what separated the (secularist) philosophy and the message of revelation throughout the human history lies in their opposing perspectives of the self (ene). For him, the partial and limited capabilities such as limited knowledge, will and power are

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⁸ The book has 33 chapters.
given to human beings as measures and tools for being able to understand the unlimited and absolute qualities of their Creator. For example, with their limited knowledge, will and power human beings build houses and thus start to understand what it means to be able to create and sustain the entire cosmos with all of its complexities and perfections. Therefore, they to acquire a level of understanding of the perfect qualities and attributes. Because the absolute and the unlimited cannot be understood by contingent (limited) beings, it needs to be partialized. For example, the existence and quality of an infinite light or brightness cannot be comprehended unless a limit is drawn around it by a level darkness. Only then human beings can develop a sense of what light is and what qualities it has. Put differently, only when human beings have a sense of limited amount of light, they can start making sense of an infinite and unlimited light. Similarly, partial and limited qualities are given to human beings so that they can start understanding absolute and infinite qualities and attributes of God. Therefore, partial qualities are entrusted to human beings so that by using these qualities they can contemplate about God’s perfect qualities, not for self-realization and self-aggrandizement in exclusive terms.

Said Nursi argued that atheistic (secularist) philosophy throughout the human history misinterpreted the purpose of these partial qualities and instead of trying to understand the perfect qualities of God, they promoted and legitimized the use of these trusted partial qualities for the development of a false sense of self-fulfillment by trying to become like God. Revelation, on the other hand, taught human beings the true nature of their selfhood and helped them understand that they are finite and contingent beings
who are entrusted with limited but very delicate and sensitive quantities so that they perfect themselves by knowing and appreciating the true sources of all of the qualities which are continuously reflected in the cosmos and in the inner (immaterial) and outer (material) aspects of human beings.

That is why, Said Nursi contended, the true student of Revelation (the Qur’an) is humble and virtuous while the true student of the secular philosophy is an arrogant transgressor. Nationalist and racialist ideologies which are collective forms of self-aggrandizement were fostered by secularist conceptions of the self as well (W30).

Although Said Nursi does not limit the scope of secularist philosophy of humanism to modern times, he was apparently responding to secularist humanism of modern times and their representatives in the Muslim World. As I described in the previous chapter, Abdullah Cevdet, in his book Funun ve Felsefe (Sciences and Philosophy), presented quotations for his secularist humanist idea of becoming like God from Western and Islamic sources. For example, he said that the hadith (saying of prophet) which says, “Be molded by God-given ethics” was supporting the idea that the duty of human beings is to strive towards becoming like God. Said Nursi indicated elsewhere (T:246) that that he was aware of Abdullah Cevdet’s materialist and atheistic ideas before the establishment of the Turkish Republic and that some of his publications were responses to these ideas. He did not specify Abdullah Cevdet’s name in the Thirtieth Word in which he compared secularist and religious conceptions of the self.
However, Said Nursi, in the Thirtieth Word, referred to the same hadith which was brought up by Abdullah Cevdet in support of his secular humanism. Nonetheless, Said Nursi interpreted it in a completely opposite way. For him, the hadith (Be molded by God-given ethics) was calling the faithful for acknowledging their weaknesses and vulnerabilities so that they, in this state of humbleness, can turn towards God and seek refuge in his perfect attributes.

[In] the line of prophethood considered [...] the aim of humanity and duty of human beings is to be molded by God-given ethics and good character, and, by knowing their impotence to seek refuge with Divine power, by seeing their weakness to rely on Divine strength, by realizing their poverty to trust in Divine mercy, by perceiving their need to seek help from Divine riches, by seeing their faults to ask for pardon through Divine forgiveness, and by realizing their deficiency to be glorifiers of Divine perfection. (W:563)

According to the rule of: Be molded by God-given ethics, which is one of the principles of the line of prophethood concerning individual life, there is the instruction: “Be distinguished by God-given morals and turn towards God Almighty with humility recognizing your impotence, poverty, and defectiveness, and so be a slave in His presence.” Whereas, the self-seeking rule of philosophy, “Try to imitate the Necessarily Existent One” is mankind’s aim for perfection. No, indeed, the essence of humanity has been kneaded with infinite impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, while the essence of the Necessarily Existent One is infinitely omnipotent, powerful, self-sufficient, and without need. (W:564)

It seems to me that Nursi had observed the emergence of what Taylor (1992) called “exclusive humanism” which takes self-interested human flourishing and fullness as the greatest good. For Taylor “everyone and hence every philosophy is guided through some definition of human greatness and fullness.” In pre-modern societies, human fullness was mostly perceived in religious terms which formulated human fullness outside the self-interest of the individual. In modern times, human fullness is conceived and located exclusively with reference to the self. Therefore
human fullness became the primary good sought by a greater proportion of individuals in modern societies.

Self-centered moral philosophy is not exclusively peculiar to our ages but, Taylor contends, it has become a widely available option for a greater proportion of individuals only in modern secular societies. As it is described above discursive attempts at reversing the trend of exclusive self-centered secularist humanism constitutes one of the backbones of Said Nursi’s understanding of revival which has largely been overlooked by social scientific studies of him and the Movement he established (Ex: Mardin, 1989).

God or Nature?: Responses to the Ontological Foundations of Secularism

When responding to the philosophical foundations of secularism, Said Nursi was not only addressing issues regarding secularist humanism. Responses to the ontological foundations of the secularist paradigm such as materialism and naturalism are also central to Said Nursi’s discourse of religious revival. In fact, he sees a close connection between naturalism and secularist humanism. In his formulation, Nature and the aggrandized self are the two antithesis presented by secularism against God.

Nature is the imaginative ‘god’ of the secularists in macrocosm and the aggrandized self is their god in the microcosms (W:567). That is why the two sections of the Thirtieth Word are dedicated to “the Self” (ene) and to “the motions of atoms” (tahavvalat-ı zerrat). After addressing the issue of secularist humanism in the first section, Said Nursi presents arguments against the assumptions and axioms of naturalists and materialists.
The core idea in this section is that the existence, motions, interactions and transformations of atoms and their ordered journey towards perfection especially in biological mechanisms are manifestations of God’s perfect qualities at work, not the blind, senseless, impotent causes or what naturalist call the laws of nature which do not have any real existence beyond human beings’ perceptions of patterned occurrences.

In every facet of the motion of all particles the light of Divine unity shines like the sun. For as is proved briefly in the First Indication of the Tenth Word and in detail in the Twenty-Second Word, if every particle is not an official of God acting with His permission and under His authority, and if it is not undergoing change within His knowledge and power, then every particle must have infinite knowledge and limitless power; it must have eyes that see everything, a face that looks to all things, and authority over all things. For every particle of the elements acts, or can act, in an orderly fashion in all animate beings. But the order within things and laws according to which they are formed differ from one thing to the next. If their order was not known to the particles, the particles could not act, or even if they could act, they could not act without error. In which case, the particles which are performing their duties in beings are either acting with the permission and at the command, and within the knowledge and at the will, of the owner of an all-encompassing knowledge, or they themselves must have such an all-encompassing knowledge and power. (W:573)

[...]

Since the All-Wise Maker has specified for everything a suitable point of perfection and an appropriate level of the effulgence of existence, by giving everything a disposition that will strive to reach that point of perfection, He drives them towards it. This ‘Law of Dominicality’ is in force in all plants and animals, as it is in inanimate beings, in which it promotes plain earth to the rank of diamonds and to the level of priceless jewels. Within this truth, the tip of a mighty ‘Law of Dominicality’ is apparent. (W:579)

As I described above, it was in 1911 in his Muhakemat (Reasonings) that Said Nursi, for the first time, responded -albeit briefly- to naturalist denials of the existence of God. The first time he wrote an entire treatise Hubab (the Seed) in response to naturalism was in 1922 when he went to Ankara in the eve of the establishment of the
Turkish Republic. Having observed the development and transformation of the secularist movement especially including the Young Turks, Said Nursi was thinking that the new leaders of the society were raised by being exposed to and influenced by the materialist and naturalist ideas and that they were about to transform the society in accordance with and legitimized by these principles.

In order to revalidate religious worldviews in the eyes of the members of the newly established parliament in Ankara, Said Nursi wrote the treatise in Arabic. He expanded and translated it into Turkish (Tabiat Risalesi / the Treatise on Nature) (F23) after the establishment of the Republic which became one of the most widely circulated and read works of him.

In this treatise, Said Nursi identified three major naturalist and atheistic perspectives of Nature. These are (1) causes create things, (2) things come into existence and take up forms by themselves and (3) things naturally happen or Nature necessitates or creates them. After presenting three arguments about the impossibility of each of these three perspectives he moves onto presenting evidences for the idea of Creation by God. For example, in presenting one of the impossibilities for the idea things creating or forming themselves (in an orderly fashion), he said:

For you yourself are a being and not some simple substance that is inanimate and unchanging. You are like an extremely well-ordered machine that is constantly being renewed and a wonderful palace that is undergoing continuous change. Particles are working unceasingly in your body. Your body has a connection and mutual relations with the universe, in particular with regard to sustenance and the perpetuation of the species, and the particles that work within it are careful not to spoil that relationship nor to break the connection.

In this cautious manner they set about their work, as though taking the whole universe into account. Seeing your relationships within it, they take up their
positions accordingly. And you benefit with your external and inner senses in accordance with the wonderful positions that they take. If you do not accept that the particles in your body are tiny officials in motion in accordance with the law of the Pre-Eternal and All-Powerful One, or that they are an army, or the nibs of the pen of Divine Determining, with each particle as the nib of a pen, or that they are points inscribed by the pen of Power with each particle being a point, then in every particle working in your eye there would have to be an eye such as could see every limb and part of your body as well as the entire universe, with which you are connected. In addition to this, you would have to ascribe to each particle an intelligence equivalent to that of a hundred geniuses, sufficient to know and recognize all your past and your future, and your forebears and descendants, the origins of all the elements of your being, and the sources of all your sustenance.

To attribute the knowledge and consciousness of a thousand Plato’s to a single particle of one such as you who does not possess even a particle’s worth of intelligence in matters of this kind is a crazy superstition a thousand times over! (F:236-237)

At the end of the passage quoted above, Said Nursi asserts that believing in the naturalist ideas he mentioned and criticized was “a crazy superstition a thousand times over.” Obviously, the author is responding to the materialist and naturalist charges that religious teachings were superstition. By writing this treatise, Said Nursi wanted to show that it was the materialist and naturalist perspectives which would not be validated in the cosmos.

There are several other chapters in the Risale-i Nur including The Words (e.g., W12, W22 and W32) in which Said Nursi addresses similar issues and refutes materialist and naturalist denials of God’s existence. There are also numerous other chapters (e.g., LT20, R2, R3, R7, F30) and passages in the Risale-i Nur in which Said Nursi provides examples of reading the signs in creation in light of relevant Quranic verses. Such an approach is one of the defining, perhaps the most distinguished characteristics of Said Nursi’s approach to religious revival in modern times.
Said Nursi frequently mentioned throughout *the Risale-i Nur* that the greatest challenge to religion was coming from (ideological interpretations of) science and (atheistic) philosophy and emphasized that *the Risale-i Nur* stood firmly against this challenge with the help of methodological principles and evidences he learned from the Qur’an. Only with a few exceptions, all of the chapters of *the Risale-i Nur* opens with a Quranic verse relating to the content. For example, the chapter (*the Tenth Word*) in which Said Nursi presented evidences for bodily resurrection opens with the verse: “Look, then, to the signs of God’s mercy -how He restores life to the earth after its death-verily He it is Who quickens the dead, for He is powerful over all things (Qur’an, 30:50).” The body of these chapters also frequently include Qur’anic verses and terminology. In so doing, Said Nursi contended, *the Risale-i Nur* proved the truths of the Qur’anic teachings against the atheistic, materialistic and naturalistic charges against it.

Said Nursi was inspired during his formative years of reformist activism to establish a university (*Madrasatu’z-Zahra*) in which he could offer solutions to the challenges arising out of the disconnectedness of the classical madrasa education and the education provided in modern schools. In this regard, he proposed an institutional solution to the challenges to the secularization of education and he wholeheartedly pursued this project before the establishment of the Turkish Republic. When he was in Ankara shortly before the establishment of the Republic, he pursued the support of the new parliament, too. The petition was signed by 167 deputies but it was eventually rejected (Vahide, 2005, p. 172).
Said Nursi mentioned later (K:206, K:229, K:251, Em:35) that the Madrasatu’z-Zahra project remained as a life-long dream for him even after the establishment of the Republic. However, he did not advocate nor he was mobilized towards bringing institutional level change as part of his revivalism against the spread of secularist ideologies such as materialism and naturalism after 1923. The conversations he had with a group of students when he was in exile in the city of Kastamonu best describes this approach. When the students told he them their teachers were not teaching them about God, he said: “do not listen to the teachers listen to the sciences”.

In Kastamonu a group of high-school students came to me, saying: “Tell us about our Creator, our teachers do not speak of God.” I said to them: “All the sciences you study continuously speak of God and make known the Creator, each with its own particular tongue. Do not listen to your teachers; listen to them.

“For example, a well-equipped pharmacy with life-giving potions and cures in every jar weighed out in precise and wondrous measures doubtless shows an extremely skillful, practiced, and wise pharmacist. In the same way, to the extent that it is bigger and more perfect and better stocked than the pharmacy in the market-place, the pharmacy of the globe of the earth with its living potions and medicaments in the jars which are the four hundred thousand species of plants and animals shows and makes known to eyes that are blind even – by means of the measure or scale of the science of medicine that you study – the All-Wise One of Glory, Who is the Pharmacist of the mighty pharmacy of the earth. (R:226)

This anecdote indicates that just as he wanted to reorient his audience’s pursuit of the good towards a God-conscious direction by directly engaging them and offering them a schema of rational choice regarding existential questions, Said Nursi wanted to equip the Muslim community with methodological and rhetorical tools by which they
could be saved from the challenges of secularist ideologies such as naturalism and materialism. In this regard, he was not trying to respond to the impact of the ontological foundations of secularism in the society by trying to take over or controll modern educational institutions but by supplying the Muslims with methodological perspectives through which they could decipher the codes of the secularist worldview and read the universe from a God-centered perspective. In so doing, Said Nursi did not challenge the validity of scientific “findings,” he rather criticized the materialist and naturalist interpretation of them. This perspective is epitomized in his suggestions to the students that they should “listen to the sciences not the (naturalist) teachers” (R:226).

**Why Not Political Struggle?**

As it is described above Said Nursi went through several transformations in the ways in which he approached religious revivals. In addition to pursuing the support of the Sultan for his project of establishing a university with several branches in the Eastern Provinces, Said Nursi supported the constitutionalist movement when he went to Istanbul. He also wanted to give a religious direction to Young Turks revolution of 1908 and to the newly established government of Ankara after the War of Independence in early 1920’s. Around 1910, Nursi started to be more interested in and concerned about the philosophical foundations of secularism such as materialism, naturalism, scientism and humanism.

Observing that the secularists were using these ideas to attack the foundational teaching of the Qur’an such as the existence and unity of God and bodily resurrection, Said Nursi, especially after retreating to the city of Van in 1923, the year the Turkish
Republic was established. In Van, Said Nursi focused exclusively on strengthening the foundations of belief and deliberately and strictly abstained from being involved in political debates. Although he was continuously prosecuted, exiled and jailed until his death in 1960, Said Nursi remained faithful to this perspective and articulated the idea that politicization of revivalism and trying to change the society by being involved in power relations would be detrimental to spreading the message of the Qur’an.

Service of the All-Wise Qur’an severely prohibited me from the world of politics. It even made me forget about it. For the whole story of my life testifies that fear has never taken me by the hand and prevented me taking the way I considered to be right, nor can it. And why should I be frightened? I have no connection with the world apart from the appointed hour. I have no family and children to think of. It is not wanting to preserve worldly glory and renown which consists of hypocritical, undeserved fame, may God bless those who help in destroying it. There only remains the appointed hour and that is in the hands of the All-Glorious Creator. Who has the power to interfere with it before the time of its coming? Anyway we are among those who prefer honorable death to degradation in life. [...] Indeed, service of the Qur’an prevents me from thinking of socio-political life. [...] The bewildered man anxiously wonders: “Does he want to attract me with the light then hit me with the club?” And sometimes when, due to some defect, the club is broken, the light flies away, too, or else is extinguished.

They want to be saved, but cannot find the way: they are confused. As for the clubs, they are the political currents. And the light, the truths of the Qur’an. Light cannot be disputed, nor can enmity be held towards it. No one can detest it apart from Satan the Accursed. And so, in order to hold in my hand the light of the Qur’an, I said, “I seek refuge with God from Satan and from politics,” and throwing away the club of politics, embraced the light with both hands.

I saw that in the political currents, there are lovers of those lights in both the opposition and the supporters. It is necessary that no side and no group casts aspersions on or holds back from the lights of the Qur’an which are shown, or from the teachings of the Qur’an, which are far superior to all political currents and partisanship and are exempt from and free of all their biased considerations (L:69-70).
As he also articulated similar ideas elsewhere (L:84-85; L:487-488; F:143-144) Said Nursi contended that far from being able to provide solutions against the spread of atheistic ideologies such as naturalism and materialism, “the stick of politics” would ward off those who are in need of the eternal message (the light) of the Qur’an. Trying to make people religious by “the stick of politics” would only produce hypocrites and their religiosity would fade away when “the stick” get broken. The best way would be to awaken people to their existential needs by showing them the light of the Qur’an not “the stick of politics.” Therefore, he contended “the light” and “the stick” (the message of the Qur’an and political power) cannot be used at the same time.

Conclusion

As it is outlined in this chapter, Said Nursi’s approach to religious renewal and revival transformed over time in conjunction with the development and transformation of the secularist ideas and the secularist movement in the last two decades of the Ottoman Empire and in the formative years of the modern Turkish Republic. Until the Young Turks Revolution of 1908, Said Nursi in similar ways to the Young Ottoman intellectuals such as Namık Kemal, Ali Suavi and Ziya Pasha wanted to reverse the decline of the Muslim World through institutional and societal reform in the face of internal and external, material and intellectual challenges.

As a man of learning, he was initially concerned with the intellectual challenges faced by the Muslim community in the modern times. For him, the disconnection between the traditional madrasa education and the education provided in the newly established modern schools was conducive to dogmatism (taassub) and blind imitation
(taklid) among those who could not make sense of the findings science and to doubt and denial (şişpe) of Qur’anic teachings among those who are only exposed to modern education. Said Nursi wanted to address this issue by establishing a university in which he could teach religious and positive sciences side by side.

Especially in the beginnings of his reformist activism Said Nursi was also concerned about the worsening material conditions of the Muslim World which he thought was detrimental for spreading the message of Islam (ilayi kelimetullah). In response to this challenge, he, like most of the contemporary religious activists, favorably looked at the adoption and utilization of modern science (fen) and technology (sanat). With the purpose of uniting and mobilizing the Muslim community for working towards the rejuvenation of the Muslim World, he supported the idea of İttihad-ı İslam (Unity of Muslims).

Said Nursi, in the first years of his reformist activism, also advocated the idea that political despotism (istibdad) was one of the reasons of the decline of the Muslim World. In this vein, he supported constitutionalism (meşrutiyet) and parliamentarianism (meşveret). He championed the revolutions of 1908 which led to the reinstitution of the constitution of 1876. However, he was concerned that if the revolution did not go in the right direction it could lead up to the marginalization of religion in the society. In the articles he published in Ottoman newspapers advising the leaders of the revolution (members of the CUP) along the lines of such concerns.

Said Nursi’s revivalism until this time (1910-1911) was mostly in the form of reformist activism. He tried to convince the rulers, intellectuals and influential figures
of the Ottoman society about the necessity of the reforms he proposed or supported. In so doing, Said Nursi was not explicitly mobilized against a particular secularist ideology or movement. That is why his revivalist ideas were not characterized by a dialectical discourse. However, in the aftermath of the 1908 revolution, Said Nursi started addressing challenges posed by the development of explicitly secularist ideologies such as materialism and naturalism which were introduced and propagated by the Young Turks such as Abdullah Cevdet.

In the eve of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Said Nursi once again wanted to make sure that the newly emerging government does not go in the direction of secularizing the society. He went to Ankara in 1922 where the new government was based, but he was disappointed to see that secularist ideas were prevailing among the founders of the new government primarily including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Realizing that the secularist movement was about to fully capture the ruling heights of the society convinced him about the impossibility of reversing the secularization of the society by directly engaging the political establishment.

Said Nursi developed alternative approaches to religious revival after the establishment of the modern secularist Turkish Republic. Instead of endeavoring to reverse the process of secularization from the macro societal level, he aimed at transforming individuals one by one. Once they moved from the ranks of opposition to the halls of power, secularists were trying to change the society with their institutional power. As a response, Said Nursi was trying reverse this process by directly engaging the individual.
The strategy he used in this regard was to convince his audience by challenging the ontological and moral philosophical foundations of the secularist worldview. One part of this strategy was invalidating the naturalist and materialist reading of the cosmos which were introduced to the Ottoman society by the Young Turks such as Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik. The other part of Said Nursi’s revivalist methodology was the reorientation of the self’s pursuit of the good from a self-centered and temporal one towards a God-conscious and transcendent direction.

In this regard, Said Nursi wanted to convince his readers and followers that attainment of true happiness would only be possible by being God-conscious. As he presented it, attainment of true human happiness as the good pursued by all human beings is contingent on being secured from all of the humanly fears and being provided with all of the material and immaterial needs in the journey in time and space which prolong to eternity after death and resurrection.

Therefore, true happiness can only be attained by acknowledging that each and every component, moment and aspect of existence from pre-eternity to post-eternity was the creation of the all-powerful, all-knowledgeable and all-merciful God and by relying on Him. Because the naturalist and materialist reading of the cosmos denies that time and space and everything therein are created and under the control and command of the all-powerful God, it is not only an inaccurate reading of existence, it is also the source of desperation both in this world and in the next. Being self-centered and only seeking immediate pleasures at the expense of serenity in the long run is also an aberration from God-consciousness and therefore it is another source of human
vulnerability to desperation and misery in this world.

Therefore, Said Nursi implied, “the human effort to improve the human condition” cannot be the source of human happiness. I described in the previous chapter that the increasing emphasis on ‘the human effort to improve the human condition’ was one of the dominant characteristics of the secularist worldview which was also adopted by secularizing forces in the history of Turkey. The modern idea of civilizational progress was a reflection of this philosophy. One component of the idea of progress was being liberated from the ideological and political constraints of the traditional religious worldviews and the other component was the emphasis on the human endeavor through scientific means to master the universe with the purpose of understanding its ‘nature’ and eventually manipulating it for the benefit of improving and securing the conditions for unconstrained human flourishing on their own terms.

My readings of Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic indicates that he was challenging the materialist naturalist and scientist paradigm which was established around the idea of ‘the human effort to improve the human condition on its own terms’. However, he, after 1920s, did not focus on reversing this paradigm by restructuring the institutions of the society. Instead, he aimed at reversing it by reconstructing a religious worldview and by reorienting the self’s pursuit of the good towards a God-conscious direction.

By engaging a micro level approach to revivalism, Said Nursi was trying to reframe the conflict between secularism and revivalism in the mind and perspective of the individual and thus he was aiming at reversing the trend of secularism which was
being imposed from atop by the reorienting the self towards a God-conscious direction.

In this regards, Said Nursi was pulling the dialectical relationships between secularism and religiosity into an alternative space in which he could level the field *vis-à-vis* the institutional power of the secularist establishment.
CHAPTER V  
THE NUR MOVEMENT’S MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES  

Introduction  
As it is outlined in the previous chapter, Said Nursi was involved in revivalist activism for about two decades in the late Ottoman society. However, the emergence of the Nur Movement coincides with his exile into the Western Anatolian provinces in 1925 by the leaders of the Turkish Republic which was founded in 1923. Although the secularist establishment closely scrutinized and persecuted its members, including Said Nursi, the Nur Movement grew into one of the largest revivalist movements in Turkey and in the Muslim World.  

In this chapter, I will investigate mobilization strategies of the Nur Movement vis-à-vis the secularist establishment. In doing so, I will, by employing the Gramscian concepts of hegemony and civil society, explore the development of the secularist regime during the one-party rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s People’s Party (1923-1950). In this context, I will discuss the implications of the establishment of the secularist hegemonic order with regard to the development or lack thereof of the civil society during the one-party rule and with regard to the development of religious (and other social) movements. Consequently, I will explore the discursive, rhetorical and material strategies employed by the Nur Movement and its members vis-à-vis the policies and mobilization strategies of the secularist establishment.
The State, Civil Society, Religion and Religious Movements in the Recent History of Turkey

Centralization of government in a bureaucratic sense in the Ottoman Empire began as early as the sixteenth century under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (Atçıl, 2014). However, the centralized state’s expansion into the daily lives of its subjects at unprecedented and ever increasing levels started with the state-sponsored reform projects of the nineteenth century including the establishment and modernization of educational institutions (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). The sponsors of these reforms in the higher echelons of the state machinery, in certain cases including the sultan (e.g., Mahmud II), pursued to phase out the traditional intermediaries between the state and the citizenry, such as the ulema and the leaders of minority millet communities, in order to facilitate the expansion of the modernization projects (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). Parallel to the increasingly centralized state’s expansion into the lives of the citizens in the late Ottoman society was the growth of a secularist movement and their transition from the ranks of opposition into commanding heights of the society (i.e., the state). As the secularists moved from the periphery into the center, their secularist idea was to become the ideology of the state, starting with the Young Turks revolution of 1908 and the counter coup d’état attempt of 1909 (the 31 March Incident). The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 represented the triumph of the secularist revolution and epitomized the development of an aggressively secularist regime, which was committed to secularize all aspects of the society with the intention of catching up with the progress of the Western civilization. With its
militaristically implemented top-down reforms, the secularist movement sought to establish a hegemonic and dictatorial domination over the Turkish society in the Gramscian sense, especially during their single party rule between 1923 and 1950. Individuals and groups who directly or indirectly challenged the power or ideological foundations of this system were criminalized and subsequently punished. The Nur Movement, which was established by Said Nursi after his exile into Western Anatolia, was the religious group that was scrutinized, prosecuted and persecuted the most by the secularist regime; even though the movement adopted a mobilization strategy which was not based on direct confrontations with the regime.

Marxist theoretician Gramsci contended, in repudiation of the economic determinism (fatalism) of Karl Marx, that the ruling classes do not rule only and necessary by controlling the means of economic production, they also do so by controlling the production of meaning and ideas (ideology). Marx, too, emphasized the role of ideology as part of his explanations of the ways in which ruling classes subordinate the lower classes. According to Marx, ideologies are forms of false consciousness that are constructed by those who control the means production and imposed on the rest of society in order to sustain the status quo. Ideologies, in Marx’s theory, do not develop or change independent of economic relations. In other words, transformations and fluctuations in ideologies are necessary reflections of transformations in relations of production. Consequently, the transformation of the society (i.e., revolution) in favor of the exploited classes can only and necessarily be possible by the transformation of the relations of production. Gramsci reformulated the
classical Marxist perspective by emphasizing the role of ideology in its own right and at least somewhat independent of production relations. Not denying that ideologies mostly serve the interests of the ruling classes, Gramsci postulated that it is possible to transform the prevalent ideology (or ideologies) of a social system without significantly transforming the economic structures. That is why, he asserted, political struggle could and should also be directed towards the transformation of the dominant ideology (or culture) in the society (Kertzer, 1979, p. 321-328). In the Gramscian sense, the ruling classes do not always persuade the subordinate classes by force to preserve the status quo or to guide the society in new directions. The powerful constructs worldviews and they aim to direct the society towards the actualization of these worldviews. They also seek to win the consent of the masses during this process. However, they do not directly and explicitly negotiate the validity and legitimacy of this worldview; rather, they seek to establish implicit consent through their domination of the civil society which is composed of private social institutions such as the church, trade unions and schools (Lears, 1985, p. 568-569). This implicitly manipulated and thusly dominated consent is what Gramsci calls (cultural) hegemony. In this sense of hegemony, domination is not unequivocally exerted from above, it is, at least to a certain degree, negotiated and reformulated. This makes cultural hegemony a dynamic process that needs to be constantly reinvigorated by the ruling classes in order to maintain the status quo. Otherwise, alternative worldviews might grow and contest the ideological bases of the existing order (Gramsci, 1971).
Although Gramsci emphasized the role of (implicit) consent, he affirmed that the preservation of cultural hegemony also involves the legitimized use of coercive force which is implemented by the political society (the police, the army, the judicial system etc.). The ruling classes, under normal conditions, reassure the consent of the masses (i.e., cultural hegemony) by controlling the political society. When coercive force predominates over consent in the ruling classes’ attempts at constructing, maintaining or transforming their worldviews, this system is not a pure hegemonic any more in the sense that it was conceptualized by Gramsci. Especially when the ruling classes cannot win the implicit consent of the masses, they largely turn to the power of the state apparatus to coerce the masses to accept and abide by their worldviews (values, norms, policies etc.). Such a system comes closer to what Gramsci calls “dictatorship [plus] hegemony” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 239). In this system, the dictatorial system cannot express itself in terms of an overarching consensual hegemony, but it can assume the leadership role of allying classes and groups (Salvadori, 1979, p. 251).

According to Öncü (2003), foundation of the secularist Turkish nation state after the War of Independence took the form of “dictatorship plus hegemony” in the sense it was conceptualized by the Gramsci. The political revolution, to which the masses were oblivious, brought about comprehensive transformations in the political, legal and educational institutions of the country, leading to the secularization of politics - and to some extent of social life. Among these transformations, the emergence of the nation-state, the Republic of Turkey, in October 1923, was certainly the decisive one. […] This process, spreading over two decades, the 1920s and the 1930s, constituted a "social revolution from above," proceeding in the footsteps of the Young Turks. […] [The new regime] failed to confront all facets of the question of democracy, that is, of establishing a secular democratic republic based on
political and civil rights and freedom [...]. As early as 1927 the Ankara regime had established absolute domination in all parts of the country, mostly through coercive measures. (Öncü, 2003, p. 314-316)

In the first three decades of the Turkish Republic, the secularist establishment controlled the state apparatus (the police, the army and the judiciary) and maintained its “dictatorship plus hegemony” over the weak civil society. They closely scrutinized ideologies and movements, which in their eyes had the potential of threatening “the regime”. There were two major groups whose ideology posed intolerable threats to the secularist Turkish nation state. First, the new Turkish Republic was established as a nation state that heavily utilized Turkish nationalism as its primary tool for identity formation. Ethnic identities (e.g., Kurdish) other than Turkisness were a serious threat to the state’s nationalist building blocks. The new republic was also established based on an aggressively secularist worldview (ideology). Any type of religious worldview, identity, movement or organization (including Sufi orders) which had the potential of challenging the social, political and philosophical foundations of the secularist establishment were, in many cases, prosecuted and persecuted under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his secularist predecessors such as Ismet Inonu. And as Atatürk’s biographer Andrew Mango (2002 put it, his authoritarian policies hindered the development of the civil society in Turkey.

It remains nonetheless true that Atatürk’s practice was in line with the authoritarian tradition of government in Turkish society. Moreover, his decision to ban dervish orders in 1925, and his single-party rule in the 1930s, either outlawed or subordinated or subordinated to the state such autonomous organizations as did exist. Atatürk’s practice thus froze, where it did not set back, the development of Turkish civil society. It can thus be argued that while Atatürk laid the foundations of democracy, he arrested its development. (p. 21)
The Kemalist approach to secularism was also embraced by the founding fathers and the rulers of other countries in the Middle East and the Muslim majority North Africa. The dictators of Egypt (Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak), Tunisia (Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali), Syria (Hafiz Asad) and the Shahs of Iran (Reza Pahlavi) as well as the ruling elite who supported them were secularists who imagined establishing and developing new nations distilled from the forces and influences of religion by using all of the means at their disposal, including the use and abuse of power, to suppress any potential rivalry from religion against the secularist state and its authority. Another common characteristic of the Middle Eastern nations is that most of them had at some point been ruled under military dictatorships in their recent history. Kemal Atatürk (ruled: 1923-1938) and Ismet İnönü (1938-1950) of Turkey, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) of Egypt, Hafiz al-Asad of Syria (1971-2000), Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) of Iraq and Muammar Qaddafi (1961-2011) of Libya were all military generals. This reinforced the militaristic and therefore dictatorial nature of secularization in the Muslim World. Religious movements, especially including those that had revivalist orientations, were criminalized and were denied access to operate in the dominated civil society. In some cases, this led to violent encounters between the secularist establishment and these revivalist movements. Such encounters had long lasting legacies in these societies.

During the one party rule of Mustafa Kemal’s People’s Party, elections were held in the format of ‘open voting close counting’ (açık oy, gizli tasnif). In 1950,
Turkey had its first free and fair elections (*close voting, open counting*) in the eve of its entrance into the NATO. The Democratic Party, which was established under the leadership of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes, won the parliamentary elections consecutively in 1950 (52.7%), 1954 (57.6%) and 1957 (47.9%). Celal Bayar became the third president of the Turkish Republic and Menderes was elected as the first democratically elected prime minister. The Democratic Party, under the primacy of Adnan Menderes, abrogated some of the restrictive laws against religious practices such as the ban on Arabic *Azan* (call to prayer). Adnan Menderes was deposed in 1960 by the army, which assumed the role of the vanguards of the secularist regime since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. After the military coup d’État, Adnan Menderes and two ministers from his cabinet were hanged by the junta.

Necmeddin Erbakan’s Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), the first explicitly religious political party that won the parliamentary elections in Turkey in 1996 and formed a coalition government. However, they party was deposed and outlawed by the secularist establishment in the aftermath of the secularist February 28th Coup D’etat in 1997. Prime Minister Erbakan, together with several other prominent members of the Welfare Party, were barred from participating in elections for 5 years. Other members of the Welfare Party established the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*) in 1998. Merve Kavakçı, a woman wearing the headscarf, was elected as a member of the parliament in the 1999 elections from the Virtue Party. However, members of other political parties including the newly elected Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit aggressively protested her presence in the parliament and prevented her from taking the oath of office. Eventually,
Merve Kavakçı’s Turkish citizenship was revoked by the state. The chief prosecutor filed a case at the Constitutional Court against the Virtue Party five days after Merve Kavakçı was denied the opportunity to take the oath in the parliament. The Constitutional Court declared the Virtue Party unconstitutional and closed it in 2001 on grounds that its members violated the secularist principles of the Republic.

Tayyip Erdogan was elected as the mayor of Istanbul in 1994 from the Welfare Party. He was deposed in 1998 by the constitutional court because a poem he recited in a gathering in the city of Siirt “incited hatred and included divisive rhetoric”. He was jailed for 10 months and barred from participating in parliamentary elections. In 2001, he played the leadership role in the foundation of the Justice and Development Party, which won the parliamentary elections in 2002. The new government lifted the ban barring him from participating in elections and he became the Prime Minister of Turkey in 2003. In 2008, secularists filed a closure case against the Justice and Development Party and requested the barring of 71 prominent members of the party from politics with the claim that they violated the Republic’s principle of laicite (secularism). Seven votes were required for the constitutional court to approve the closure request. Of the 11 judges, only six approved the request, which consequently saved the party from being outlawed. Thereafter, the coalition of religious groups that allied with the Justice and Development Party under the leadership of Erdogan started gaining the upper hand in Turkish politics and curbed the power of the secularist army and the judiciary.

During the single party rule of the People’s Party and until the establishment of religiously oriented political parties (i.e., the Democratic Party) and their success in the
first democratically held election in 1950, Said Nursi and the revivalist Nur Movement he established were at the frontline of the dialectical relationships between secularism and revivalism. In the previous chapter, I explored sociological implications of rhetorical response of Said Nursi to the philosophical foundations of secularism. In the following sections of this chapter, I will explore social movement dynamics of Said Nursi’s and the Nur Movement’s mobilization strategies vis-à-vis the “hegemonic [plus] dictatorial” policies of the secularist establishment. As part of this endeavor, I also investigate the ways in which members of the Nur Movement interpreted Nursi’s revivalist ideas and how these ideas were turned into action in this process.

**The Special Mission of the Nur Movement: ‘Jihad of the Pen’**

After his disappointment with the secularist inspirations he observed among the leaders of the new government established in Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, Said Nursi returned to the Eastern city of Van, which is where he spent most of his formative years. In his first year in Van, Said Nursi stayed in Nurşin Mosque and started teaching religious sciences and the exegesis he wrote during WWI, to a group of students as well as learned mollahs (Atasoy, 2011, p. 116). He also occasionally provided sermons in Kurdish at the mosque. When he knew that there were Turks among the audience, he was giving his sermons in Turkish (Akgündüz, 2014, p. 518). As the number of people coming to the Mosque to visit him and ask his opinions in various matters increased, Said Nursi lamented that that the local people were still approaching him as the “Old Said” who was involved in reformist activism and talked about issues pertaining to politics. He withdrew to the remnants of an Armenian
monastery and eventually to a cave in the Erek Mountain, which he used as a madrasa with a small group of his students (Atasoy, 2011, p. 162). According to the accounts provided later by Molla Hamid, one of these students, Said Nursi was focusing only on issues regarding “fundamentals of belief” such as the existence and unity of God, evidences of bodily resurrection and contemplation over God’s creation in his teaching (Atasoy, 2010, p. 128; Şahiner, 2011, p.115-116). Said Nursi and his students returned to the city only for Friday prayers and during cold weather (Vahide, 2005, p. 177-179).

When Said Nursi was in Van, a group of Kurdish notables were preparing for an armed uprising under the leadership of Şeyh Said against the government of Mustafa Kemal. These notables contacted Said Nursi several times directly and indirectly and asked his support for the revolt. When Şeyh Said wrote a letter asking his support, Said Nursi replied:

The struggle you are embarking on will cause brother to kill brother and will be fruitless. For the Kurds and Turks are brothers. The Turkish nation has acted as the standard-bearer of Islam for centuries. It has produced millions of saints and given millions of martyrs. The sword may not be drawn against the sons of Islam’s heroic defenders, and I shall not draw mine! (Trans., Vahide, 2005, p. 181)

As Molla Hamid described it, Kör Hüseyin Pasha, the chief of Haydaran tribe, approached Said Nursi around the same time and told him that he had prepared five thousand men armed with weapons and ammunitions, and that he was waiting for his order to strike the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal in the city of Van. Said Nursi talked to him for about an hour and dissuaded him by arguments in similar ways for why he refused to join Şeyh Said’s revolt (Atasoy, 2011, p. 190-193).
Sheik Said revolted in February 1925 citing the new regimes betrayal to the religion of Islam. He captured the city of Elazığ and some of the small towns in the region. The government in Ankara passed the Law of Restoration of Order (Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu) on March 4 and reestablished the Independence Tribunals. The government suppressed the revolt and captured Şeyh Said in Mid-April (1925) and executed him with several dozen of his prominent men.

After suppressing the Şeyh Said rebellion, the government in Ankara dislocated scores of Kurdish notables (e.g., Şeyhs, landlords and tribal leaders) and exiled them to different parts of Turkey. Although he did not take part in the rebellion and declared it illegitimate, the government decided to exile Said Nursi as well. In February 1926, Said Nursi’s madrasa was raided and he was exiled to the South-Western province of Burdur. He was sent from Van to the coastal city of Trabzon, where he and other exiles boarded a ship and were sent to Istanbul. From there, Said Nursi was sent to the southern coastal city of Antalya. He arrived in Burdur in May 1926 (Akgündüz, 2014, p.606-626).
Figure 14. Map of Turkey
Shortly after arriving in Burdur, Said Nursi started giving lessons (*ders*) and sermons to the local people and visitors at the Delibaba Mosque for about seven months (Şahiner, 2013, p.234). While he was in Burdur, he started writing a collection of (11) short treatises (*ders* / lessons) which were later compiled into the booklet *Nurun İlk Kapısı* (The First Gate of the Risale-i Nur). These treatises were very similar to *The Short Words* (the first 8 chapters of *The Words*), which were analyzed in detail in the previous chapter. Like he did in *The Short Words*, Said Nursi, in these treatises, was aiming at transforming the pursuit of happiness towards a God-conscious direction, by maintaining that human beings are in an eternal journey in time and space, and only by finding an unlimited source of power and mercy they could be saved from their fears and provided with what they need. In this regard, he was also emphasizing that faith in God and afterlife and acting accordingly was the source of finding heaven (true happiness), and beings saved from eternal suffering (hell) even in this world. He was also emphasizing that focusing on the immediate worldly pleasures was at odds with turning towards God and finding true happiness.

“O the heedless arrogant! What happened to you that you are inviting Muslims towards the worldly in the way of the foreigners? That life is nothing but a dream in deep sleep and a heedless indulgence. [...] Do you know what your situation looks like? It looks like a heedless drunk who thinks the lion is a horse, the gallows is a swing and the wound is a red rose. In such a state, he still thinks he is a true guide (müşəhid). [...] (NIK:3. Trans. ZN).

Contending that the lion is death, the gallows is the grave and the wounds are human beings’ limitless impotence and (existential) poverty, Said Nursi asserted that the heedless side of the contemporary civilization and the students of misguided philosophy were the source of such a delusion.
The disciples of the misguided and heedless civilization and the misleading philosophy became deluded with their ambitions and tyranny. Yet, with deceptions they are inviting Muslims to the customs of the foreigners [Europeans] and to leave the pillars of Islam. They fail to understand that in every foundational tenet of Islam is a wisdom and a [truthful] sign. (NİK:3. Trans. ZN).

Adding a note to the manuscript that his criticism of philosophy was only directed at the ideologically interpreted side of philosophy (and science) which attacked the tenets of Islam, Said Nursi gave hand-produced copies of these short treatises to his visitors. These writings, together with the growing numbers of people visiting Said Nursi and participating in his lessons (ders) might have alarmed the secularist authorities who relocated to him to the city of Isparta in January 1927, and eventually to the remote village of Barla, which was interlocked between the lake of Eğirdir and surrounding mountains. The village did not have access to motorways at that time.

In the first two years of his exile in Barla, Said Nursi’s contact with the local people was very limited as it was intended and mandated by those who exiled him. He spent most of his time going out to the gardens and hills surrounding the village for contemplation. However, it was in Barla that the vast majority of the Risale-i Nur was written and the foundations of the Nur Movement were laid down. One of the first individuals who established connections with Said Nursi in Barla was a young man named Süleyman (Kervancı) (1898-1965). Below is an excerpt from his account of how he met and established connections with Said Nursi.

I met Bediuzzaman [Said Nursi] in the Spring of the year he came to Barla. It was an afternoon; I was chatting with a group of young men on the side of the road which passes through the village. I had not met with him until that day, I was too young then. However, I was seeing him go to the gardens and hills outside the village and come back in the evening. It was raining the day I met
him and the road was muddy. Bediuzzaman was passing through fifteen meters away from where we were chatting. He greeted us with his hand and we greeted him back. Then, I realized that he only had one shoe on his feet. The other was missing. It was torn and he was carrying it in his hand. [Out of my compassion] I could not bare it. I wanted to go and help him. I walked after him and as I approached, he turned back and said: “Come my brother!” We went to his house. I brought water from the fountain and washed his shoes. He asked my name. I said: “Süleyman”. He said: “You can come here when you have time”. I started visiting him, taking lessons from him and helping him out, and I never quit. (Akgündüz, 2014, p. 683. Trans. ZN)

Süleyman Kervancı regularly visited Said Nursi and offered his help to him with domestic work and with scribing and copying his writings. In a letter he sent to Said Nursi several years later (c. 1935), he talked about how reading the treatises of the Risale-i Nur provided him a sense of happiness which he could not find elsewhere and how confident he was that the Risale-i Nur would someday prove the truthfulness of the Qur’an to the world.

As your servant, student and brother, I have read all of the treatises of the Risale-i Nur which have been written thus far. I have seen them as bright suns and immensely benefited from each and every one of them. These lights have enlightened the path of my eternal journey and they have shown me what I was lacking in the path towards afterlife. [...] I have never seen the equivalent of the contentment and happiness I observed in the sea [sic] of the Risale-i Nur in other places. As a result of the considerations I had in my conscience, I came to the conclusion that each and every one of the treatises of the Risale-i Nur are true exegeses of the Qur’an. With my limited capacity, I was able to understand that the study of these [treatises] are healing and very effective cures for those who are struggling with [spiritual] wounds. I have the opinion that time will show the value of these [treatises] and it will be spread all around the world from the East to the West. It [time] will also show Europe how bright of a sun is the Qur’an. (B:56-57. Trans. ZN)

Another person who was among the first to meet and become a disciple of Said Nursi was Şamlı Hafız Tevfik (Göksu). Born in 1887 in Barla, Şamlı Hafız Tevfik spent most of his formative years outside the village with his father Hafiz Veli Efendi,
who was a captain the army. When his father was stationed in Damascus, he had seen, but not met Said Nursi when he gave his famous (Damascus) sermon in the Umayyad Mosque in 1911. During his father’s stay in Damascus for twenty years, Şamlı Hafız Tevfik received education in religious sciences in the local madrasas. Before Said Nursi was exiled to Barla, Şamlı Hafız Tevfik had returned to his village and started working as an imam at one of the mosques in the village. After meeting Said Nursi, Şamlı Hafız Tevfik played a significant role in the writing and circulation of the *Risale-i Nur*. Most of the *Risale-i Nur* was written in the form of dictation. Şamlı Hafız Tevfik together with several others were the scribes of Said Nursi, hand writing the treatises he was dictating. These scribes were also making fair copies of the treatises and distributing them to the growing number of Nursi’s following. Because Atatürk mandated the use of the Latin alphabet (in 1928) and banned publications in the Arabic (Qur’anic) script, which had been used throughout the Ottoman history and because the spread of Nursi’s writings was sanctioned by the government, members of Nur Movement were secretly hand copying the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* in the Arabic script for themselves and for those who could not produce their own copies. Thousands of copies of the *Risale-i Nur* were reproduced and distributed by this way. Those who copied, distributed and read the *Risale-i Nur* called themselves *Nur Talebesi* (Students of Nur/Students of Light/Nur Students) were prosecuted by the secularist establishment. Hundreds of them were arrested and jailed between 1935 and 1960. Şamlı Hafız Tevfik was also jailed in 1935 and again in 1943 together with Said Nursi (Şahiner, 2011, p. 288; Şahiner, 2013, p. 244; Akgündüz, 2014, p. 736-738).
Another scribe of Said Nursi during his exile, was Ahmed Galib (Keskin), who was a teacher at the elementary school in Barla. Ahmed Galib was not only serving as a scribe. As he was also a poet, he was writing poems in praise of the writings of Said Nursi, which at that time was referred to as *Sözler (The Words)*.

The human’s truthful knowledge are your Words
The interpreter of the treasures of the Unity [of God] are your Words

[...]

Protecting from the waves of disbelief
Like the Arch of Noah are your Words

[...]

Drowning the Pharaohs of denial
Like the Tablets of Stone are your Words.

[...]

Disproving the people of misguidance
Like the eloquence of Aaron are your Words

Destroying the disbelieving army of the Goliath
Like the voice of David are your Words

[...]

Your proof of resurrection stands ever-strong
Like the predictions of Ezra are your Words

[...]

Saving the mind from heavy burdens
Like the light of Elijah’s abstinence [from apostasy] are your Words

[...]

Constantly reminding the mercy of the Merciful
Like the gratitude of the compassionate Zechariah are your Words

[...]
Reviving the dead and curing the blind
Like the breath of Jesus are your Words

[...] (B:99-101. Trans. ZN)

Contending that Ahmed Galib’s praise of *The Words* can be considered as the praise of the Qur’an because *The Words* are an interpretation of it (BL:85), Said Nursi included this poem in one of the volumes of *the Risale-i Nur* (B:99-101).

The poem of Ahmed Galib reveals much about the discourse and motivations of those who devotedly reproduced, distributed and read *the Risale-i Nur*, even at the risk of being prosecuted. Ahmed Galib saw and presented Nursi’s works as a protective shield against the challenges of secularist ideas and venerated them as highly convincing tools for restoring the faithful’s confidence in the validity of the worldview of the Qur’an such as ‘the existence and unity of God’ and ‘bodily resurrection’. The fact that he likened the Risale-i Nur to the symbolic achievements of Biblical and Qur’anic prophets indicates the degree of the bewilderment he experienced because of his exposure to the imposition of secularist worldviews. His claim that Risale-i Nur was “Saving the mind from heavy burdens” attests to this bewilderment. Born in the year 1900, Ahmed Galib must have witnessed the spread of secularist ideas during his education in the years the Committee of Union of Progress was in power (1908-1914). As a teacher, he also must have witnessed the top down imposition of secularist ideas in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. Perhaps Ahmed Galib was thusly exposed to the intrusion of secularist ideas more than others. That he became a scribe and a follower of Said Nursi and that he wrote such poems in veneration of *the Risale-i Nur*
are indications that he found a voice and reassuring point of support in Said Nursi’s revivalist ideas.

A similar account was provided by Refet Barutçu. In a letter he wrote to Said Nursi, Refet Barutçu said:

We used to regret that we were living in a time disbelief (*dinsizlik*) was spreading. Now there is no grief and no regret. Because we found a teacher (*üstad*) like you, we are not worried about what kind of a time we are living in. (B:208)

Refet Barutçu (1886-1975) was born in Istanbul during the Hamidian Era in which the Young Turks were increasing their pressure on Sultan Abdulhamid II with the demand of the reinstitution of the constitution and the parliament. As was described in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation, some of the Young Turks were also introducing secularist ideas and attacking religious worldviews during this time. Born and raised during the prominence of the Young Turks, Refet Barutçu studied at the prestigious *Mekteb-i Aliye-i Sultaniye* and at *Mekteb-i Harbiye* (the War College) (Şahiner, 2011, p. 385). As was also discussed in the same chapter, military schools, including the War College, in the late Ottoman society were centers of secularist and revolutionist ideologies. Ottoman materialists like Beşir Fuad and Abdullah Cevdet were educated in these schools. The founding fathers of the secularist Turkish Republic including Mustafa Kemal and Ismet Inonu received education in these schools as well. Refet Barutçu’s concerns about “the spread of disbelief” might be accentuated because of his familiarity with the secularist ideologies he gained at these schools.

Like many of others, Refet Barutçu did not join the Nur Movement because he was proselytized by other members of the movement. As he describes it, he had heard
about Said Nursi when both were in Istanbul and that he had seen him once at a mosque in Istanbul in 1921. However, they did not meet each other personally then. In 1930, Refet Barutçu retired from his position as a captain in the army at the age of 34, and started serving as an imam at a mosque in Istanbul. One year later, he married someone from the city of Isparta and moved there. As he described it (Şahiner, 2011, p. 383-384), Refet Barutçu mentioned the name of Said Nursi in a conversation he was having with a librarian about contemporary scholars, adding that he did not know where he was. When the librarian told him that Said Nursi was in the village of Barla (in the province of Isparta), Refet Barutçu visited him, although he was advised by the local people that he could be punished by the government. Thereafter, he became one of the prominent members of the Nur Movement. Some of the letters he exchanged with Said Nursi were included in different volumes of the Risale-i Nur. In addition, some of the questions he asked Said Nursi resulted in the writing of some of the treatises of the Risale-i Nur (e.g., F12). For example, he sent a letter seeking explanations about the content of two Qur’anic verses. The first one was about the idea of God giving the sustenance of all of the living beings from the smallest to the largest without any exception (Qur’an, 29:6), and the second was about the meaning of the Qur’anic expression that “seven (layers of the) heavens were the creation of God (i.e., Qur’an 17:44; 2:29; and 65:12)” (F:99-103). Apparently, Refet Barutçu was looking for assurances for the truthfulness of Qur’anic teachings regarding Nature, which were challenged by ideological interpretations of science such as materialism and naturalism.
which he might have been familiar with because of his education and his career in the
army.

Another letter written by Refet Barutçu indicates that it was not only the Risale-
i Nur’s refutation of the ontological side of the secularist ideas (i.e., naturalism and
materialism), which appealed to him. Said Nursi’s criticism of the humanist side of
secularist philosophy which was based on the idea of “the human effort to improve the
human condition” through scientific tools and methods also resonated with him.

Those who are thinking of themselves as intelligent, considering the progress of
science as their own achievement, and begging truth and knowledge from
Europe are turning away from the eloquent Qur’an which is the treasure of
truth. Had they studied this excellent text [a treatise Said Nursi wrote about the
eloquence of the Qur’an (W25)] with curiosity and without bias, they would be
awakened from their ignorance and understood the value of this book which
contains the great principles and truthful guidelines for the happiness of human
beings in this world and the next. (B:64)

Another noteworthy aspect of Refet Barutçu’s remarks is his emphasis on the
peculiarity of ‘the time’ (in which disbelief was spreading) his was living in. The
emphasis on the peculiarity of ‘the time’ was actually one distinctive characteristic of
the revivalist discourse and mobilization strategies of Said Nursi and the Nur
Movement. They regularly emphasized that it was ‘the time for saving faith (iman)”
because never before the foundations of faith were challenged so strongly as it was
done by science and philosophy in the contemporary society. In the words of Said
Nursi;

[The first and the foremost important mission] is to save faith [iman] in a way to
silence the philosophy and the materialist ideology because of the challenge of
science and philosophy and the spread of materialism and naturalism. (E:266)
With the emphasis on the peculiarity of the time was born the idea of a unique mission for the Nur Movement. It was the “jihad of the pen.” There were several aspects of how the idea of “the jihad of the pen” was formulated and put into practice by the Nur Movement. The first was the refutation of the materialist and naturalist ideas, which were used as evidences against the teachings of the Qur’an. This first mission found its best expression in the Nur Movement’s discourse of *imani kurtarmak* (saving the faith) (e.g., S:749, S:663, Ş:359, Ş:441-442, Ş:555, T:287, T:708, B:366, K:22, K:78, E:67, E:112, E:219-220, E222), *küfrün belini kırmak* (breaking the backbone of atheism) (T:95, T:162), *küfrü mutlakı kırmak* (breaking down absolute atheism) (T:492, E:118, E:239, ST:223), and *ehl-i küfrün tahriblerini tamir* (repairing the damage of atheism) (T:623).

The second aspect of the peculiar mission of the Nur Movement was strengthening the foundations of faith through the contemplation over the universe in light of Qur’anic verses. This approach was called *iman-i tahkiki* (investigative faith) in the discourse of the Nur Movement. They contended that if the foundations of faith (*iman*) are not strengthened through investigation (*tahkik*) it could be easily defeated especially at a time when these foundations were attacked by the articulations of materialism and naturalism. Therefore, the mission of the Nur Movement was to elevate the unsubstantiated imitative faith (*taklidi iman*) of the masses to the level of investigative faith (*tahkiki iman*) with the purpose of empowering them with tools through which each and every one of them could nourish their faith and protect it against the challenges of atheism (E:266, S:690, S:749, S:761, S:766, S:772, M:376).
“Yes, because the load-bearing walls of imitative faith have been shattered and curtailed in this devastating age, every believer needs to obtain investigative faith with strong foundations so that they can be protected from the organized attacks of the misguided. At a most needed and delicate time in this fearsome age, the Risale-i Nur is fulfilling this duty by providing strong evidences for even the deepest and more subtle matters of the truths of the Qur’an. Thus the sincere students of the Risale-i Nur who attain investigative faith (iman-i tahlkiki) also become points for support and confidence for the other faithful in their villages and towns. Therefore, the strength of their faith gives the sense of confidence and courage [about the truthfulness of the Qur’an] to other believers even if they do not see each other. (M:466)


I was able to finish scribing the Thirtieth Word which defeats and silences the deniers and the polytheists with its state of the art “equipment of the jihad of Unity [of God] (malzeme-i cihadiye-i vahdaniye) and with its steel-like power and strength, diamond-like value and sardonyx-like fortresses. (B:41)

There is no doubt that anybody even those have a trace amount of fair reason, intelligence and sense of humanity should testify how the extraordinary success of this “jihad of the pen” [cihad-i manevi] which is declared against the harmful
individuals [eshaš-i muzīra] of this age disproved and silenced this contemptible group of people. (B:45)

As we have seen in the other passages above, the emphasis on the peculiarity of the time (i.e., harmful people of this age) and the special mission of the Risale-i Nur (i.e., jihad of the pen) are observable in Sabri Arseven’s letter. There are several other points in this excerpt, which need to be explored further. First, he mentions that the “jihad of the pen” stood firmly against “the harmful people of this age”. Although he does not specify who these people are, he was, I think, implicitly referring to Atatürk and his close friends. Therefore, the success of the Risale-i Nur in disproving atheistic arguments and providing evidences for the teachings of the Qur’an, in his eyes, was a success against the secularism of Atatürk and his policies. These statements, therefore, indicate that despite all of the top-down secularist reforms, which were in many cases implemented by brute force, the Risale-i Nur gave hope, courage and confidence to the group of religious people of Anatolia who formed a revivalist movement around the ideas of Said Nursi.

Said Nursi wrote extensively until 1950 and the members of the Nur Movement such as Sabri Arseven secretly reproduced these writings by hand and distributed around. Sabri Arseven played a critical role in the logistics of this endeavor. He was an imam at a mosque in the village of Bedre. The village of Barla where Said Nursi was exiled was located in the West side of the Eğirdir Lake which detached Barla from most the motorways. Bedre was in the South West side of the same lake. Unlike Barla, Bedre had access to the motorways. More importantly, there was a small pier at the village,
which served a connecting point for the transportation of people and goods between the nearby villages, the town of Eğirdir and the provincial city of Isparta.

When he was an imam in Bedre, Sabri Arseven served as the connecting point for the circulation of the *Risale-i Nur* and transferring letters between Said Nursi and his students elsewhere. It was because of this crucial role that he was called “the Customs Officer of the *Risale-i Nur*” (*Risale-i Nurun İskele Nazırı - Nur İskele Memuru / Nur*) by Said Nursi (K:7, K:120, K:129) and he was known as “Station Sabri” (Santral Sabri) among the other members of the Nur Movement (Şahiner, 2011, p. 293). Sabri Arseven was arrested in 1943 and spent nine months in jail. He died in a traffic accident in 1954 (Şahiner, 2011, p. 292). Many of the letters he exchanged with Said Nursi were included in one of the volumes of the *Risale-i Nur* (Barla Lahikasi).

Not all members of Nur Movement were as educated as Ahmed Galib, Refet Barutçu or Sabri Arseven. For example, Adilcevazlı Bekir Ağa was an uneducated man who became a member of the Nur Movement and who carried manuscripts of *Risale-i Nur* and letters between Said Nursi and other members of the movement. With the help of an educated person, he sent a letter to Said Nursi explaining his motivation for joining the movement.

Although I am illiterate, I have had all of your treatises read to me and I listened to them. [...] In hearing them I have investigated the state of my spirit and my heart. I tried to comprehend what I understood and what I felt. I saw that there was a strong urge and excitement in me, calling me to duty; “go!, go!” I saw the [bright] keys these treatises showed me. I understood that I should find my brothers who are more knowledgeable about [the *Risale-i Nur*], and I considered it a duty to myself to join them and help them. In order for the attacks of those who betrayed religion to stop, I looked for and found my brothers. (B:54-55)
Bekir Ağa’s words indicate that even uneducated people were well aware of the secularist dictations and policies. This is not surprising given that the government, under the leadership of Atatürk, had closed down all of the madrasas, banned the use of Arabic script, punished those who were teaching the Qur’an, mandated the recitation of the call to prayer in Turkish and forced everybody to wear a felt hat instead of the fez or the turban. What is more interesting in Bekir Ağa’s letter is that he saw a potential in the discourse of Risale-i Nur for stopping or reversing these policies. The excitement described in his letter, also gives hints about what motivated and mobilized members of the Nur Movement at the risk of being punished by the secularist regime.

Another uneducated person who played a significant role in the formative years of the Nur Movement was Abdullah Çavuş (Kula) (1901-1987), a farmer from a village (İslamköy) in the vicinity of Barla. He was around the age of 30 when he met Said Nursi. Like Sabri Arseven he took a significant role in distributing the Risale-i Nur and in facilitating the communication between the members of the Nur Movement and Said Nursi. As he described in an interview he gave to Şahiner (2011, p. 310), he was carrying manuscripts of the Risale-i Nur and letters between Barla and other villages at nighttime so that he would not be detected by the secularist establishment.

I was leaving İslamköy at nighttime with the mail bag on my shoulders and stopping by other villages. I was arriving at Barla at dawn and giving [letters and manuscripts of the Risale-i Nur] to the Hoca [Said Nursi]. He was greeting me with gratitude when I arrived. We used to pray the Morning Prayer together. Then I was going to bed and sleeping. (Şahiner, 2011, p. 310)

Abdullah Kula’s village, İslamköy, became one of the centers of the newly emerging Nur Movement. People of this village were writing the Risale-i Nur day and
night which was the reason why Said Nursi called the village “Nur Fabrikasi” (the Factory of Nur / Light” (K:201). Hafiz Ali (Ergün) (b. 1898), one of the most prominent members of the Nur Movement during its formative years, was from İslamköy. He died in the Denizli Prison in 1944 where he was held with Said Nursi and other members of the movement. Because of his contributions to the movement, Hafiz Ali was also called by Said Nursi as “the owner of the Factory of Nur” (e.g., K:21, K:82).

Figure 15. A page of the Risale-i Nur handwritten by Hafiz Ali in Arabic (Ottoman) script (c. 1930-1940) (Courtesy of Ahmet Akgündüz)
Hafız Ali started learning religious sciences and memorizing the Qur’an at an early age. He served as an imam in the villages of Isparta province. He moved back to his own village around 1930 as an Imam and as a Qur’an teacher. After meeting Said Nursi in 1930, he started reproducing hundreds of copies of treatises from *the Risale-i Nur* with his wife Ümmühan. They also introduced Risale-i Nur to the other residents of the village who joined them in reproducing these texts. Some of the letters Said Nursi exchanged with Hafız Ali were included in different volumes of *the Risale-i Nur*.

Not all members of the Nur Movement during its formative years were people who were originally from the vicinity of Barla. One of the most prominent followers of Said Nursi during this period was Colonel (İbrahim) Hulusi Yahyağil who was born in 1896 in the Eastern Anatolian city of Elaziğ. His father, Mehmed Husrev Yahyağade was a low rank officer in the army. After receiving his first education at a local mosque, Hulusı Yahyağil was enrolled in the Military Middle School (Askeri Rüşdiye) in the same city. He started his Military High School education in the neighboring city Erzincan and finished it in Istanbul. He was enrolled in the War College (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*) in Istanbul. When WWI broke out, Hulusı Yahyağil, like many of his peers, were ordered to join the army as a sub-lieutenant before graduating from the War College. Having fought in different frontiers during WWI and in the Turkish War of Independence, he went back to the War College in 1925 and graduated 1927 with the rank of a Captain (*Yüzbaşı*). After serving short spells in other places, he was appointed in 1928 to the battalion in the town of Eğirdir which was in the vicinity of Barla where Said Nursi was exiled in 1927 (Atasoy, 2014, p. 25-45).
Since his childhood, Hulusi Yahyagil was a very pious and observant Muslim who was interested in Sufism. He also had connections with Sufi traditions and masters. However, as he described it later, he had not heard about Said Nursi until he was appointed to Eğirdir. It was a man named Şeyh Mustafa (1890-1959) who was his neighbor in Eğirdir who mentioned Said Nursi in praise to Hulusi Yahyagil during their conversations they had before and after they attended the local mosque. Upon hearing about his presence in Barla, Hulusi Yahyagil visited Said Nursi in 1929. As he indicated later, during these times he was in search of a (Sufi) shaikh who could be his guide (BL:29).

Hulusi Yahyagil was in the opinion that perhaps Saïd Nursi could be the shaikh he was searching for. In their first meeting, they had a several-hours-long conversation. Said Nursi might have understood what Hulusi Yahyagil was searching for. He told Hulusi Yahyagil that he was “not a shaikh but an imam, like Imam Ghazali and Imam Rabbani (Ahmad Sirhindi)” (Atasoy, 2014, p. 60). Because these two figures (Imam Ghazali and Imam Rabbani) were influential figures in religious renewal in the history of Islam, Said Nursi was, obviously, indicating that he had revivalist orientation not necessarily a Sufi approach.

Although he was not too far away from Barla, Hulusi Yahyagil visited Said Nursi only a few times. He mostly communicated with Said Nursi through letters. In at least two of these letters, Hulusi Yahyagil indicated that Said Nursi convinced him that Sufism was not a viable option in modern times as it could respond to the peculiar challenges of the time.
As my life was passing through in searching for the truth, the destiny had put me five years ago in the Naqshbandi Sufi path [tarikat] by way of the great Naqshbandi shaikh Muhammed Kufrevi. Then, because of a temporary eclipse, this path was also lost [by me] and I was amongst darkness and thorns. Finding your Sözler [The Words] I was taken away from the darkness into the light, from turbulence into safety and from calamity into happiness. “All praise is to God, this is His favor”. And you are saying “it is not time for Sufism [tarikat].” [And I say:] ‘Well-said, I agree’. (B:32)

[Said Nursi] gave me and to all of those who are listening the lesson that “It is not the time for Sufism [tarikat], it is the time to save faith [iman]. [...] I have wholeheartedly said “yes!” to this, to the other lessons he taught in the Risale-i Nur and to the truths he deducted from the Qur’an. I approved it and thusly I have called this person “Üstad” [Master] who gave me the lesson of my life. This was the first time I called someone Üstad in my life. It was not a mistake and I was right. (B:29)

Hulusi Yahyagil related later that meeting with Said Nursi profoundly changed his life and that he dedicated all of his time and energy to reading and writing the Risale-i Nur (Şahiner, 2011, p.320). However, he had to leave Eğirdir because he was appointed to another place as part of the routine in the army. However, he remained in contact with Said Nursi through the letters they exchanged. In many of these letters, Hulusi Yahyagil asked questions to Said Nursi about the Qur’an, hadith and about theological matters in addition to giving feedback to newly written treatises of the Risale-i Nur. Said Nursi’s answers to these questions constituted the vast majority of one of the largest volumes of the Risale-i Nur, Letters (Mektubat). Said Nursi praised Hulusi Yahyagil, for his effort towards the establishment of “investigative faith,” in many of the letters he wrote to him and to the other members of the Nur Movement (e.g., B:250-251).
Hulusi Yahyagil’s departure from Eğirdir was one of the turning points in the history of the Nur Movement. As it is mentioned above, his relocation from the battalion in Eğirdir was part of the routine practice in the Army. However, he requested to be relocated to the eastern city of Elazığ where he originally hailed from. Shortly
after arriving at Elazığ, Hulusi Yahyagil started reading and discussing the Risale-i Nur with a group of people at the house he inherited from his father (Atasoy, 2014, p. 104). In addition to being a symbolic turning point in terms of the Risale-i Nur’s expansion out of the South Western Anatolia where Said Nursi was exiled, reading together and discussing the Risale-i Nur like Hulusi Yahyagil and his friend did became a common practice among the members of the Nur Movement. As the movement grew and expanded into different parts of Turkey, so did the number of people getting together and reading the Risale-i Nur.

In the beginning, they were convening at each other’s houses as it was done by Hulusi Yahyagil’s group. However, members of the Nur Movement also started designating separate apartments and houses for this practice. The act of getting together and reading the Risale-i Nur was called ders (study) and the placed they were holding ders sessions were called dershane (studyhouse). These places were are also occasionally called as medrese (madrasa).

Especially after 1935, Said Nursi (L:257, L:267, T:548) strongly and regularly advised his followers to establish dershanes contending that these places would facilitate the study of the Risale-i Nur and revive the (traditional) madrasa education in a better form.

[...] It is imperative for the students of the Risale-i Nur to open a small dershane everywhere, if possible. Although everybody can benefit to a certain degree from reading Risale-i Nur not everybody can fully understand everything. And because it [Risale-i Nur] is the interpretation of the truths of the Qur’an, [reading it] is both religious science (ilm), knowledge of God and thus a kind of worship. In five-ten weeks, the study of the Risale-i Nur provides the results of what was achieved in five-ten years in the madrasa education in the past, and it [the Risale-i Nur’s success] has been doing so in the last twenty years. (E:249)
As I describe below, the secularist establishment, concerned about the growth of the Nur Movement, relocated Said Nursi in 1935 from the village of Barla to the city of Isparta and in subsequent years to other cities. The government wanted to keep Said Nursi in close surveillance by relocating him to urban centers where the eye of the government was stronger in city centers. He was first sent to Isparta and then to Kastamonu and Emirdağ. His relocation to urban centers only contributed to the growth of the Nur Movement and facilitated the expansion of the *dershanes* in other cities including Istanbul and Ankara. A letter signed by several members of the movement (c.1948-1952) says that there were close to 200 *dershanes* only around the Eastern province of Diyarbakır (Em:231).

Through the combination of the practice of *ders* and the space of *dershane*, the idea of “jihad of the pen” which constituted the core of the Nur Movements revivalist discourse had found its first and most significant institutional form. The vast majority of the treatises included in *the Risale-i Nur* was written in Barla. Educated and uneducated people of the region participated in “the jihad of the pen” by reading, reproducing or distributing the Risale-i Nur in their locality. Those who were able to read and write the Ottoman Turkish in the Arabic script were mostly doing the reproduction of manuscripts of *the Risale-i Nur* and those who were uneducated where contributing to the logistics of this endeavor by distributing *the Risale-i Nur* and carrying letters between the members of the movement. The expansion of the movement into urban areas with Said Nursi’s relocations significantly increased the pace of the reproduction of the treatises of *the Risale-i Nur* and the growth of the
movement. On the one hand, members of the movement who were in urban areas started finding places to publish *the Risale-i Nur* with copier machines and with the printing press. On the other hand, the institution of the dershane eased the mobilization of the movement by serving as connecting points and places of collective action between the members of the movement. These places served as places of proselytization as well.

In one sense, *dershanes* were a form of the embodiment of Said Nursi’s idea of establishing a university in which he could teach religious and modern sciences together. He was not able to realize his dream of establishing a university but the *dershanes* his followers established served as a substitute for this university project.

Although they were frequented by men of all backgrounds, those who were staying at the *dershanes* were unmarried men, mostly high-school and university students. In the morning time, they were studying at the modern educational institutions and in the evenings and during the weekends they were personally and collectively studying *the Risale-i Nur*, organizing *ders* sessions and carrying out the reproduction of *the Risale-i Nur*. Veli Işık Kalyoncu who was a student in Ankara in 1950’s described their *dershane* life.

Publications [of the Risale-i Nur] were continuing in the Doğuç Printing House. One day, brother Said [Özdemir] said: ‘Let us rent a place nearby the printing house and follow publications from there’. We rented a large room in the upstairs of a restaurant in Ulus district on Dışkapı Street. Things like proofreading were done there. We were going there in the evenings after getting out of college and working until late hours. We also moved the Dershane which was in the Nizip Apartment to an apartment nearby the theology faculty. We were going to college and at the same time we were doing our share of duty in the service of Risale-i Nur. We were seven people staying in this dershane. [...] Over time, this dershane started to become a destination for some of the
religious students of the faculty. We were getting together on Saturday evenings and reading from the Risale-i Nur. [...] When our master [Said Nursi] sent our brothers who were staying with him to Ankara, they were staying with us. We used to ask about our master from these brothers. We used to learn a lot from them. (Şahiner, 2008, p. 299)

Thusly, dershanes became alternative educational institutions where Said Nursi’s revivalist ideas and his interpretation of the Qur’anic verses were put into practice by growing number of people. The political system did not allow for them to study religious and modern sciences side by side under the structure of one institution but they were able to this by attending dershanes and modern educational institutions simultaneously.

Dershanes did not have any official recognition. Nor did the Nur Movement try to make them official. Therefore, they were not part of the civil society which barely existed in the formative years of the Modern Turkish Republic. In this regard, dershanes were alternative spaces in which the Nur Movement was mobilized to reach out to greater numbers of people in the society especially in the urban environment. This was a way of carving out their own civil society or, in other words, their domain of mobilization under the scrutiny and pressure of the secularist political establishment.

In this regard, dershanes gave a strong footing to the movement in terms of affecting the opinion of the masses and undermining the expansion of the secularist Weltanschauung which was projected and in certain ways imposed on the society by the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic. As I explore it below, the Nur Movement deliberately and persistently avoided the use of political discourse and political mobilization strategies even though they were continuously prosecuted by the secularist
establishment. Nonetheless, they were accused of forming organizations against the new regime and trying to demolish it. Said Nursi and his followers were arrested and put into jail and tried in different courts. They were eventually acquitted because the prosecutors could not provide hard evidences to support their accusations.

However, I think that the secularist establishment’s concern that the Nur Movement was undermining their secularist revolution was genuine. At the societal level, Atatürk and the cadres of his the single party rule destroyed the symbolic power of religion and thus humiliated and marginalized religion and religious people, but those who were mobilized around the *Risale-i Nur* offered reassurances for their religious convictions and a sense of accomplishing a very special historical mission. In doing so, Said Nursi took the leadership role of reorienting the discontent felt by Anatolian Muslims towards a discursive and rhetorical realm. The idea of “jihad of the pen” was one of the central components of the ways in which he reoriented the resentment of Muslims towards a battle of ideas.

**The Nur Movement’s Encounters with the Secularist Establishment**

Especially after 1930, the number of men and women reproducing *the Risale-i Nur* by hand and reading them in hiding was growing under the increasing scrutiny of the secularist establishment. In a few years, the scope of the Nur Movement expanded beyond the vicinity of Barla where the vast majority of *the Risale-i Nur* was written. Concerned with the growth of the Movement, the Ankara Government sent an official memorandum to the governor of Isparta in 1934 urging him to relocate Said Nursi from Barla to the city of Isparta (the provincial center) and to closely follow his actions. The
letter which was sealed by the Interior Minister clearly stated that the secularist establishment perceived Said Nursi as a threat to their “revolutions” (devrim). Figure 18 is a copy of the memorandum and the translation of its content.

Figure 18. A memorandum (about Said Nursi) which was sent by the interior ministry to the gubernatorial office in Isparta (July 7, 1934) (In Akgündüz, 2014, p. 1069)
R. 7/7/ [1]934 About Bediuzzaman Saidül Kürdi

To the Governorate of Isparta,

It is understood from our investigations that a response was not provided [by your office] to the inquiry, dated 9 April 1934 with the registration number 2797, about Bediuzzaman Said-i Kurdi.

It is not appropriate to keep this person in Uluborlu [the district which included Barla] as he is attributing a sacred duty to himself and deceiving people around your province and in this way he is walking [acting] against our revolution. It is requested from you to immediately relocate him to the provincial center [Isparta], to closely watch his actions and not to let him involve in any negative propaganda without any condition.

Interior Minister

On July 25th, 1934 Said Nursi was taken by the authorities to the city of Isparta where he was forced to live in a house. A police officer was stationed permanently in front of his door in order to prevent him from communicating with others. Only a few of his students were allowed to enter the house and attend his needs (Vahide, 2005, p. 212). Said Nursi was kept in this house under surveillance for about nine months.

Under the house arrest, he continued writing treatises. During this time, he was occasionally permitted to attend Friday prayers. In one of these occasions, in the spring of 1935, thousands of people gathered on his path to the mosque to see him. This incident further panicked the secularist establishment. They started searching the houses and businesses of those who were associated with Nur Movement. Hundreds of members of the Nur Movement including Said Nursi were arrested in April 25th, 1935.

Said Nursi and 120 of these men were handcuffed, loaded to trucks and sent to the prison in the city of Eskişehir in the beginning of May 1935. Said Nursi was put
into solitary confinement. The prosecutor charged Nursi and his students with abusing religion for political purposes and disrupting the public order. In his defense, Said Nursi emphasized that they were only concerned about existential issues and that they did not and would not exploit religion for social and political matters which are not as important. Contending that they have never disrupted the public order and they would never do so, he asserted that because the new system claims to be secular (laic / laik), it should abide by this principle and not intervene in peoples’ religiosity just as it does not intervene in the lives of those who are not religious.

For sure, just as the sun cannot be a satellite of the moon and follow it, so belief in God, which is the luminous, sacred key to eternal happiness and a sun of the life of the hereafter, cannot be the tool of social life. There is no matter in the universe more important than the mystery of belief, the greatest question and greatest riddle of the world’s creation, so that belief may be made the tool of it.

[…] Can all the most weighty political questions of the world loom larger than death for someone who is certain of death, so that he can make it the tool of those questions? For the time of its coming is not known, the appointed hour may come at any time to cut off your head. […] The ever-open grave is either the door to a pit of nonbeing and eternal darkness, or the gate to a world more permanent and light-filled than this world. […]

Is it at all fair, is it at all reasonable, to consider the Risale-i Nur, which discloses and explains hundreds of questions related to belief like this one [resurrection after death], to be a biased and harmful work that exploits politics? What law requires this? […]

Also, since the secular republic remains impartial according to the principle of secularism and does not interfere with those without religion, of course it also should not interfere with religious people on whatever pretext (T:218. Trans. Vahide, 2005, p. 221).

Our concern is faith [iman]. With the brotherhood of faith, we have brotherly relationships with the ninety-nine percent of the population of Isparta. Society and social order is about the coexistence and integration of the few with the majority. Social order is not the subjugation of ninety-nine people to one person. Only, a cruel person who thinks that the rest of the society is against
religion like him will consider being religious as something against the social order. (T:226, Trans. ZN].

Of the 120 who were brought to the Eskişehir prison, 104 were acquitted and released. One of them died of heart attack during his interrogation. The remaining 15 and Said Nursi were sentenced to 6 months and 15 months in prison respectively. Although they were all acquitted from the charges of forming an organization to change the political system and disrupting the social order because the prosecutor could not present evidence to these claims, Said Nursi and these 15 men were sentenced because of a treatise (F:24) Said Nursi wrote about the “naturality” of hijab (Şahiner, 2013, p.266).

Said Nursi was released from the prison of Eskişehir in March 1936 and sent to the city of Kastamonu which was located in the Northwestern Black Sea Region. After being forced to live inside the police station for three months, he was put into a house right across the police station. His communications with the outside world was restricted and his house was regularly searched by the police for the copies of the Risale-i Nur. A more aggressively secularist governor Avni Doğan, who had previously served in the War Tribunals, was appointed to Kastamonu to increase the pressure on Said Nursi.

Among the few who were able to directly communicate with Said Nursi during this time were Mehmet Feyzi Pamukçu (1912-1990), a man in his mid-twenties who had a sound background in religious sciences. He helped Said Nursi in making fair copies of his writings and writing the letters they exchanged with the other members of the Nur Movement who were in Barla and Isparta. These correspondences were
compiled into one of the volumes of *the Risale-i Nur, Kastamonu Lahikası* (Kastamonu Letters). Mehmet Feyzi Pamukçu also facilitated Nursi’s communication with the other members of the movement in the region (Atasoy, 2013). Among the other people who communicated directly with Said Nursi - albeit infrequently - were Ziya Dilek (1902-?) who was a high ranking civil servant in the neighboring town of İnebolu, Ahmed Nazif Çelebi (1891-1964) and his son Selahaddin Çelebi (1913-1977). The Çelebi family bought a manual copier machine (teksir makinesi) from Istanbul and started the mass reproduction of *the Risale-i Nur*. They also contributed to the development of the Nur Movement in İnebolu.

Said Nursi stayed in Kastamonu and had very limited contact with the outside world for more than seven years as he was under the surveillance of the state. However, the movement was still growing in the vicinity of Kastamonu and around Turkey which increased the pressure of the state over the movement. When members of the Nur Movement were subject to the second *en masse* arrest in September 1943, Said Nursi together with many other members of the movement, was taken to the prison in the Southwestern city of Denizli. They were charged with the accusations they were tried in Eskişehir.

The court in Denizli formed a committee of experts from two local school teachers to investigate the content of the Risale-i Nur to decide if it contained political rhetoric and if it provoked unrest against the regime. Contending that this committee was not qualified for the task, Said Nursi requested from the court the formation of a committee of scientific and scholarly experts and if needed bringing scientists from
Europe. The request was accepted by the court and a new committee of experts including university professors was formed. The committee was asked to read all of *the Risale-i Nur* and all of the letters the authorities had apprehended theretofore from the members of the movement. However, the committee unanimously reported that they did not find any evidence about political instigation or anything against the established (theological) principles of Islam. As a result, Said Nursi and all of the other arrested members of the movement were acquitted and released in December 1944 (Şahiner, 2013, p. 285; Vahide, 2005, p. 260-261).

After the acquittal and release from the prison, the government sent Said Nursi, in August 1944, to Emirdağ, a town in the province of Afyon, around 170 miles to the northeast of Denizli. His life in Emirdağ was very similar to what he experienced in Kastamonu. He was put into a house nearby a police station. There were guardians at his door, making it very difficult for him to communicate with the outside world. He was also chaperoned by gendarmes whenever he went outside his residence. Yet, a group of men from the Çalışkan family who were local merchants established connections with Said Nursi and facilitated Nursi’s communication with the members of the movement in and outside Emirdağ. The Çalışkan family dug a hole from the neighboring store into Said Nursi’s residence and smuggled *the Risale-i Nur* and the letters he exchanged with the other members of the movement elsewhere (Vahide, 2005, p. 272-273; Şahiner, 2013, p. 292-303).

Said Nursi and his followers were arrested for the third time in 1948 and put into jail in Afyon. With the same accusations they were charged before, they were held
in prison for 20 months. Initially the court found Said Nursi and seven others guilty of forming a political organization, spreading ideas against the new regime and having a political agenda. However, the appellate court in Ankara annulled the ruling on grounds that Said Nursi and his students were acquitted from similar charges before (in Denizli). They were released from the prison in September 1949. After being held at a house in Afyon for about two months, Said Nursi was taken back to Emirdağ (Şahiner, 2013, p. 303-313).

In 1950, free and fair elections were held for the first time in the history of modern Turkish Republic. Between 1923 and 1950, the political system of Turkey was the single party rule. Atatürk died in 1938 but the secularist cadres of the People’s party especially including İsmet İnönü continued mandating secularist policies and persecuting religious individuals and groups. İsmet İnönü served as the second president of Turkey between 1938 and 1950. In addition to the People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), the Nationalist Party (Millet Partisi) and the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti) which was more tolerant towards religion and religious groups participated in the elections. The Democratic Party won the vast majority of the seats in the parliament and formed the new government. One of the first things the Democratic Party did was permitting the recitation of the call to prayer in Arabic which was banned by the People’s Party previously. Said Nursi openly expressed his support of the Democratic Party against the People’s Party, congratulated its leaders and praised their decision to allow the recitation of call to prayer in Arabic. The election of the Democratic Party eased the mobilization of the Nur Movement but did not fully
eliminate the pressure of the secularist establishment which still controlled most of the state apparatus.

Around 1950, Said Nursi consented his followers to print *the Risale-i Nur* with the new (Latin) alphabet. Until this time, *the Risale-i Nur* was written in the Arabic script mostly by hand. The language of *the Risale-i Nur* was the Ottoman Turkish but the alphabet was Arabic. Atatürk made the use of the Latin alphabet mandatory and banned the use of Arabic script in 1928. Said Nursi and his followers wrote and reproduced *the Risale-i Nur* exclusively in the Arabic script but since 1950 they started the publication of *the Risale-i Nur* with the new letters. One of the first treatises published in the new letters was the Guide for Youth (*Gençlik Rehberi*). A group of Nursi’s followers who were students at Istanbul University printed several thousand copies of “the Guide for Youth”. The booklet included Said Nursi’s advice to the youth for not being indulged in the transient side of the world and the worldly.

> Your youth will definitely leave you, and if you do not remain within the bounds of the licit, it will be lost, and rather than its pleasures, it will bring you calamities and suffering in this world, in the grave, and in the hereafter. [...] As for life, if it is without belief, or because of rebelliousness belief is ineffective, it will produce pains, sorrows and grief far exceeding the superficial, fleeting enjoyment it brings. Because, since, contrary to the animals, man possesses a mind and he thinks, he is connected to both the present time, and to the past and the future. He can obtain both pain and pleasure from them. Whereas, since the animals do not think, the sorrows arising from the past and the fears and anxieties arising from the future do not spoil their pleasure of the present. Especially if the pleasure is illicit; then it is like an altogether poisonous honey.

> [...] Life for the people of misguidance and heedlessness, and indeed their existence, rather their world, is the day in which they find themselves. From the point of view of their misguidance, all the time and universes of the past are non-existent, are dead. So their intellects, which connect them to the past and the future, produce darkness, blackness for them. Due to their lack of belief, the future is also non-existent. Furthermore, because they think, the eternal
separations resulting from this non-existence continuously produce darkness for their lives.

Whereas, if belief gives life to life, then through the light of belief, both the past and the future are illuminated and find existence. Like present time, it produces elevated, spiritual pleasures and lights of existence for the spirit and heart-in respect of belief. (W:158)

As I described in the previous chapter, reorientation of the pursuit of happiness from a worldly perspective to an everlasting one was one of the core components of his revivalist discourse. By contending that true happiness can only be attained by God consciousness not only in hereafter but also in this life, Said Nursi tried to reorient individuals towards a religious life. Another component of Said Nursi’s revivalist approach related to the secularist interpretation of science such as materialism and naturalism. In this regard, he, on the one hand, challenged the epistemological and ontological foundations of materialism and naturalism and, on the other hand, he wrote treatises in which he interpreted the cosmos as the reflections of the Perfect Attributes of God (Esma-ul Husna). In so doing, he wanted to equip Muslims of all backgrounds with rhetorical and methodological tools through which they could understand the invalidity of secularist worldviews such as naturalism and materialism and to enable to read the cosmos as the creation of God. Especially in his life before the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic, Said Nursi wanted to establish a university so that he could teach this perspective in an institutional setting but since the establishment of Turkish Republic under the leadership of Atatürk, Said Nursi espoused an individual-based approach for responding to the challenges of ontological and epistemological foundations of secularism (e.g., materialism, naturalism, determinism and scientism).
This approach was best reflected in his answer to the high school students when they said “Our teachers are not talking about God. Help us learn more about Him”. Said Nursi replied” Listen to the sciences not the teachers” and gave examples of how to “listen to the sciences” and learn about God (R:226). The conversation he had with the high school students was also included in the Guide for Youth. Therefore, the Guide for Youth included responses to both the moral philosophical (the attainment of happiness and the pursuit of the good) and ontological foundations of secularism (i.e., naturalism, materialism and scientism).

In 1952, a prosecutor in Istanbul filed an indictment against Said Nursi and those who published the booklet. However, the committee of judges, after hearing the defense of Nursi and those who published the Guide for Youth, acquitted them (Vahide, 2005, p. 311-313; Şahiner, 2013, p. 324-328). It was the last time Said Nursi went through a major trial after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

When he was acquitted in 1952, Said Nursi was 74 years old. He had a relatively easier life afterwards. At his own will, he spent the rest of his life -still under surveillance- in places he had lived or forced to leave before (e.g., Barla, Isparta, Emirdağ, Istanbul and Ankara) and oversaw the development of the Nur Movement and the publications of the Risale-i Nur. He made his first trip back to Eastern Anatolia after 35 years. Only three days after arriving in the city of Şanlıurfa, Said Nursi died at a hotel room on March 23, 1960. He was buried in a shrine (Halilurrahman Dergahi) which is believed by local Muslims to be the mausoleum of Prophet Abraham. After Said Nursi’s burial, the mausoleum attracted growing number of people around Turkey.
In 1960, the Democratic Party was deposed by a military junta which tried and executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes with two other ministers from his cabinet. The secularist military junta also opened the grave of Said Nursi and relocated his remains to an unknown location.

Although Said Nursi and many other members of the Nur Movement were prosecuted and persecuted by the secularists especially in the first three decades after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, they deliberately refrained from being involved in political power relations and from developing a politically intonated discourse. Said Nursi’s writings played a dominant role in the development of such a strategy. Instead of contesting the authority and legitimacy of the secularist state, he strongly challenged the philosophical foundations of the secularist weltanschauung especially including its ontology and moral philosophy. Said Nursi understood that the secularist weltanschauung had implications at the societal level, too. He also wanted to counterbalance the expansion of this worldview in the society. However, his strategy of reversing the processes of secularization, after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, was not based on the idea of capturing or manipulating the commanding heights of the society (i.e., political, social, economic institutions). Instead, he aspired to reverse the expansion of secularization by trying change the worldview of the self through reorienting individuals’ pursuit of the good towards a God-conscious direction and through offering them discursive tools for deciphering the codes of secularist ideologies (e.g., naturalism and materialism) and, instead, reading the cosmos “in the
name(s) of God”. In this regards, Said Nursi developed a micro level, persuasion and conversion based approach to religious revival.

Abstaining from political discourse was one of the core components of Said Nursi’s strategy of persuasion-based revivalism. If one half of his revivalist strategy was engaging the individual from an ontological and moral philosophical perspective, the other component was the discourse he used against involvement in power relations. He frequently emphasized that involvement in power relations would deter people even if they are convinced about the truthfulness of the message presented to them. As he described it, if the message of the Qur’an is presented with a political discourse or by political means, the audience might be concerned that those who are presenting the message in one of their hands are hiding a stick in the other. Therefore, he asserted, the audience should not only be persuaded about the truthfulness of the message, they should also be convinced that there is not a hidden political agenda especially at a time when political propaganda is and has a bad reputation for being untrustworthy.

[C]urrent politics has become so intermixed with lies and trickery and evil that it has become like the very whisperings of Satan (W:498).

But if you ask why service to the Qur’an and belief prohibit me, I would say: Since the truths of belief and the Qur’an are each like diamonds, if I was polluted by politics, the ordinary people who are easily deceived, would wonder about those diamonds I was holding, “Aren’t they for political propaganda to attract more supporters?” They might regard the diamonds as bits of common glass. Then by being involved with politics, I would be wronging the diamonds and as though reducing their value (LT:85).

All praise be to God, because I withdrew from politics, I did not reduce the diamond-like truths of the Qur’an to the value of fragments of glass amid accusations of political propaganda. Indeed, the diamonds increase their value in the view of every group in brilliant fashion (LT:71).
In this vein, Said Nursi asserted that one of the reasons he patiently endured all of the hardships given to him by those who exiled him from one place to another, prosecuted and persecuted him with false claims was that all of them gave a message to the common people that “there is a truth which cannot be sacrificed for anything else” and that “it is only the truth which speaks” (T:685; Em:78).

Another reason Said Nursi presented for not being involved in politics was that political action might lead to physical and nonphysical harm to innocent people. If I join the opposition for the purpose of force and to provoke an incident, there would be the possibility of committing thousands of sins in order to obtain a doubtful goal. Many people would be afflicted by disaster on account of one. So saying that in conscience [I] could not accept committing sins and causing the innocent to commit sins due to a one or two in ten possibility, [I] gave up cigarettes together with the newspapers, politics, and worldly conversation about politics. Decisive evidence for this is the fact that for the past eight years I have not read a single newspaper nor listened to one being read (LT:84).

In terms of persuading his own followers for not being involved in politics, he asserted that the most important duty for everyone is to correct themselves first. But because political matters are more attractive to people, they ignore the most important realm of responsibility and waste their time and energy by busying themselves with politics where they have the smallest power and duty. He also warned his audience about the harms of politics. For example, he said that politics is about taking sides with a group against another which blinds people to the mistakes of their side and approved the mistreatment and oppression of the other (R:223-224). Because it is the nature of politics that people take sides, people with different political orientation will be biased if the message of the Qur’an if it is presented by their opponents (E:180). In addition, wasting time with politics would also distract people from their existential questions
and needs. That is why a true believer cannot be a true politician and vice versa, according to Said Nursi (E:57).

These ideas must have appealed to or transformed the other members of the Nur Movement that they, too, avoided political rhetoric. Thusly, Said Nursi was able to mobilize his followers with the idea of “the jihad of the pen” and not through a discourse of “political jihad” or “the jihad of the sword”. Said Nursi also convinced his followers that this was the method of the Qur’an. Colonel Hulusi Yahyagil wrote a letter to the other members of the Movement and said:

“What the path of the Risale-i Nur is the highway of the Qur’an. We should remain in this path and not abstain from the service of it. We are only humble servants of God. We should not try intervene in the unfolding of the divine destiny. The contemptible things which are inherited today are the results of our own making that is why the will of God permitted their unfolding. We should not try to reverse them [by political action] against the will of God for the capital of politics are lies and untrustworthiness.

The purpose of our existence is to search for and learn more about our Sustainer who created us. We should strive for abiding by the principles of the Qur’an which is revealed to the Prophet. This light [the Qur’an] is the guide and teacher in our hands. Therefore we should distribute the Risale-i Nur which will help us understand our guide and teacher [the Qur'an]. Let us do our duty and leave the result to our Merciful Creator. We should not refrain from praying to each other which is our strongest power. (B:297)

Discussions and Conclusion

I think that what characterizes the Nur Movement’s mobilization strategies is “the simultaneous engagement and disengagement of the secularist movement at the same time”. There were several ways in which the movement used this approach. (1) The movement’s contestation of the ontological and moral philosophical side of secularism but not the political authority of the secularists, (2) its discourse of the
“jihad of the pen” and (3) the development of the *dershane* structure were all parts of this same strategy.

It is important to explain what I mean by engaging and disengaging the secularist movement at the same time, before I describe how and why I think this is the case. I developed the idea of “engaging and disengaging the secularist movement at the same time” from Wuthnow’s analysis of the Reformation Movement in his book *Discursive Communities* (1989). In his study of the discursive nature of the rise of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Robert Wuthnow (1989) observed that the success of the Reformation movement was about this movement’s articulation and disarticulation with its social environment at the same time. On the one hand, the Reformation successfully related to the needs and aspirations of people, proponents and opponents alike, who lived in the sixteenth century. Some, including those in the ranks of power, aspired to take side with the Reformation movement while others were so deeply alarmed with the prospects of this movement to a degree that they took up arms against it. On the other hand, the agents of the Reformation managed to protect themselves from being proxy actors advancing the interests of certain groups. Hence, they were able to “set the terms of their debates rather than simply providing legitimization for those in power or for those aspiring to power” (p. 4). This enabled their discourse to establish conditions for its own perpetuation somehow independent of the social conditions in which they emerged. Consequently, the agents of the Reformation “were able to provide moral meanings and ideas relating to the longstanding questions of freedom, will, righteousness, faith, individual discipline and civic order to various
segments of European societies enduring beyond the sixteenth century” (p. 4-5).

Therefore, Wuthnow proposed, social scientists who are interested in the study of the Reformation should not only inquire into the social conditions which fashion its ideology but also study “the reasons why these conditions did not shape it more” (p. 5).

It seems that Wuthnow’s reflexive sensitivity in terms of going beyond contextual power relations in his analysis of the Reformation is an implicit reaction to prevalent power relations biased approaches to social movements, especially including revivalist movements, in social sciences which mostly try to understand these movements with reference to power relations fixed in a particular point in time and space. Perhaps, this is the reason why Wuthnow, in these discussions, used the phrase “social conditions” almost exclusively to refer to contextual power relations pertaining to a particular place and time. In other words, most social scientists limited their understanding of “social conditions” to power relations in the context of revivalism. In response, Wuthnow suggests that the scope of the analysis of the Reformation should go beyond the boundaries of these “social conditions”.

Wuthnow’s alternative approach is not any less sociological compared to studies focusing solely on “social conditions” given that these conditions is generally understood as something limited to explicit contextual power relations. His approach calls into attention an aspect of the Reformation which should be included in an in-depth sociological analysis. There was something in the Reformation that crossed the boundaries of time and space and Wuthnow contends that we need to understand what and why it was. Focusing only on immediate “social conditions” (i.e., power relations)
of the places where it started to emerge would not be sufficient for a fuller sociological understanding of the Reformation movement. This, I think, is the reason why he studied the Reformation from the “communities of discourse” perspective.

There is no doubt, Wuthnow is very well aware that any social movement let alone revivalist movements have some sort of discourses. However, he chose to describe his study of the Reformation movement as a study of a “community of discourse” in order to make it clear that his analysis of this movement is not confined to contextualizing it’s mobilization to immediate power relations. I think that the underlying idea behind this approach is that material forms of social movement mobilization can be fixed and limited to a specific context but the discourse might transcend these boundaries. Therefore, discourse, especially in this regard, is broader than material aspects of mobilization. It is also more powerful because it can -in the case of the Reformation movement it did- bring change in a broader scope. If this is the case, sociological implications of the discursive aspects of the Reformation should be investigated. Wuthnow implied that this is what he does.

Conceptualizing the Nur Movement as a discursive movement, I argue that similar approaches can and should be applied to the case of this movement. I am not suggesting that what Said Nursi and Nur Movement did were the same as the Reformation Movement or that they would have similar historical impacts. What I propose is that the study of the Nur Movement, too, should go beyond contextual analysis of power relations as they deliberately tried to transcend the boundaries of the immediate power relations. As Taştekin (2014, p. 67) pointed out, Risale-i Nur’s
apoliticism which reflects itself in the form of de-territorializing and universalist approach to religious revival played a significant role in its success of appealing to a broad base of followers and sympathizers inside and outside Turkey.

The revivalist movements literature, especially in the case of the Muslim World, has been biased towards contextual socio-political implications of these movements and towards movements whose rhetoric was politically inclined. Indeed, this is the reason why the discourse of Nursi and the Nur Movement is understudied in the first place. Because the discourse of this movement can hardly be contextualized (territorialized) especially in terms of power relations when only social (socio-political) conditions are taken into account, it was to a greater extent left unexplored compared to other revivalist movements (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-i Islami) in the Muslim World. This dissertation project aims to fill this gap in the literature by inquiring into the sociological implications of this “community of discourse”.

One of the primary questions that set me out for studying the Nur Movement was to understand the reason of why the Nur Movement unlike other major revivalist movements in the Muslim World was deliberately mobilized against the ontological and moral philosophical aspects of secularization instead of trying to reverse secularization by controlling the commanding heights (the state) of the society. I think that the perspective of “engaging and disengaging the secularist movement at the same time” offers an explanation to my initial question. The Nur Movement effectively used this approach to undermine the development of a secularist hegemony in the society.
For example, responding to the ontological (i.e., construction of reality) and moral philosophical (i.e., construction of the self) foundations of secularism but not to the political system by which secularism was supported, the Nur Movement, under the leadership of Said Nursi, developed a strategy of simultaneously engaging and disengaging the sociopolitical context in which they were mobilized. They were directing their religious responses to the development and in many cases the imposition of secularist ideas in the contexts they lived in but they were not mobilized to change the political system which imposed these policies. The movement reproduced and distributed Said Nursi’s writings which challenged secularist worldviews. In addition to reassuring the faithful about the validity of the religious worldview, Said Nursi’s writings invalidated philosophical foundations of secularism in their eyes.

The Nur Movement’s formulation of “jihad of the pen” was part of the same approach as well. The notion of *jihad* in the Islamic tradition has individual and societal level implications. The inner individual level *jihad*, which is described as the greater *jihad*, is the struggle for the attainment and application God-consciousness in the personal thought processes and actions. The outer *jihad*, which is described in the Islamic tradition as the lesser *jihad*, is the struggle for the establishment of the ordained (*emr-i bil-maruf*) and for the prevention of the expansion of the forbidden (*nehy-i anil munker*). Historically the notion of *jihad* remained as an effective mobilizational power in Muslim societies both at the individual and societal levels. The outer *jihad* also had collective connotations. It is the responsibility of all of the community of the faithful. Therefore, by employing the notion of *jihad* (of the pen) Said Nursi used a widely
comprehensible conceptual tool for mobilizing Muslims from all backgrounds. However, by reformulating the *jihad* as the “jihad of the pen,” Said Nursi was able to reorient the *jihad* towards the ideological foundations of secularism and not towards the removal of the secularists from the halls of power. This was making the idea of *jihad* much less confrontational. Therefore, the notion of “the jihad of the pen” was part of the strategy of simultaneously engaging and disengaging the political authority of the secularist regime.

The structure of dershanes and their position in the society was another form of how the Nur Movement engaged and disengaged the secularist movement (state) at the same time. The *dershane* was an institution but it was not part of the civil society. Therefore, *dershanes* were not the places in which religious groups negotiated and came to terms with the state. It was not a legitimate institution in the eyes of the state in the first place. However, the movement did not use these places to challenge the political authority or to change it. In this regard, *dershanes* were places outside the civil society (which barely existed in the formative years of the Turkish Republic) and they were disengaging the secularist state. However, the *dershanes* also contested the secularist hegemony by serving as places of articulation and mobilization towards challenging the ideological (philosophical) foundations of the secularist worldview. Accordingly, the Nur Movement, through the *dershane* structure, was indirectly engaging the state at the same time. In a sense, the movement was carving out its own civil society and producing an alternative public space for itself in which they set their
own term of engagement with the rest of the society. This, I think, made the secularist establishment more aggressive and less compromising towards the movement.

There were two major implications of the strategy of engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment at the same time. Firstly, it was an effective tool for reversing the expansion of secularism without the use of or without access to institutional power. Instead of mobilizing its resources for the removal of the secularists from the halls of power which was not easy to achieve, the Nur Movement, with all of its mobilizational resources, focused on reversing the expansion of secularism at the grassroots level. The secularists were using their institutional power to secularize the society while the Nur Movement was utilizing all of its mobilizational resources for directly engaging the individual and thusly reversing the expansion of secularism. With this strategy, the movement was building barriers for the establishment of a secularist hegemony in the society.

Although Said Nursi and the other members of the Nur Movement did not confront the secularist establishment and their policies directly and politically, they together played a significant role in undermining the establishment of the ideological hegemony of secularism in the Gramscian sense. As it is outlined in the introduction of this chapter, Gramsci contended that dominant groups do not only rule by controlling the means of production and by forcing masses to accept their authority, they also explicitly seek or manufacture the consent of masses for their worldviews through interacting with them in the realm of civil society (institutions). This is what he called (cultural hegemony). However, when the ruling elite cannot produce the illicit consent
of the masses it tends to use and abuse coercive power more frequently. This is how a social system becomes what Gramsci called “dictatorship [plus] hegemony”. In this sense, Said Nursi and his followers were mobilized against the cultural and ideological hegemony of the secularist worldview which was imposed on the society by political means. Perhaps because they saw Said Nursi and his followers as a major threat against the establishment of a secularist hegemony, Atatürk and the other leaders of the People’s Party scrutinized, persecuted and prosecuted them for several decades. Together with Said Nursi and hundreds of other members of the Nur Movement including all of the names mentioned above (with the exception of Hulusi Yahyagil), were at some point in their lives were arrested and jailed because they reproduced, read or possessed parts of the Risale-i Nur or simply because their names were mentioned in the letters of the members of the Nur Movement exchanged.

The Nur Movement also used its strategy of disengaging the political power of the secularists as an effective mobilization strategy for winning the hearts and minds of the people at the grassroots level. Considering that its target population might be deterred and discouraged to willfully embrace their message if they think that the movement had a hidden political agenda, the Nur Movement used every opportunity including being persecuted and not doing anything in return to give a message to the masses that they did not have a political agenda and they were not seeking power. In addition to not using a politically intonated discourse, the members of the Nur Movement, primarily including Said Nursi, also denounced ‘politics’ as deceptive and
dishonest. Such a strategy seemed to prove successful as the movement was able to mobilize individuals from all educational, ethnic, class and regional backgrounds.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

One of the main conclusions to be drawn from this dissertation is that neither secularism nor revivalism have fixed categorical natures and boundaries. I started this dissertation with rigidly defined categorical assumptions about secularism and revivalism. My analyses of the development and transformations of the discourses and mobilization strategies of the secularist movement in the history of Turkey and the revivalist Nur Movement suggested it otherwise.

For example, I considered secularism to be a tightly defined ideology with clear-cut boundaries. As a reflection of this perspective, I expected that the secularists would have a resolutely consistent worldview across time and space although I was expecting differences in terms of the ways in which the secularists were mobilized to secularize the society and in the degree to which they succeeded in this endeavor. That is to say, I was ready to find variations in the reflections of secularism in the (Ottoman/Turkish) society but because I had an essentialist approach to secularism, I did not conceive of significant variations in the development of the ideological and philosophical aspects of this ideology. The third chapter of this dissertation, which is dedicated to the study of the secularist movement, showed the inadequacy of this Perspective and indicated it otherwise. There are substantial variations in the ideological and philosophical foundations of secularism. Historical processes, socio-
political contexts, geographies, socio-economic and educational backgrounds and ideological orientations of actors, and their interactions with the state, with religion and with religious forces played significant roles in the emergence of substantial variations in the ideological and philosophical foundations of secularism. The secularists’ approach to religious ideas and in certain cases their confrontations with religion showed significant differences depending on these factors as well.

However, this dissertation also suggested that these movements can be consolidated in a specific context. For example, I observed a gradual consolidation of secularism and the secularist movement in the history of Turkey. Although it was not the case before, secularism was consolidated into a rigidly defined official ideology of the state after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As it was dictated and sanctioned by the state, secularist ideas were not open to interpretation and contestation anymore. Because secularism became an official ideology which was imposed by the state, mobilizational flexibility of the secularist movement was lost to a greater extent as well. When the secularists were in opposition, they showed a greater level of variation in their ideological positions and mobilization strategies.

The gradual consolidation of secularism and the secularist movement in the history of Turkey happened in tandem with several parallel historical processes. The first was the progressive centralization of the state and its intensified extension into the lives of its citizenry in the process of the transformation from an imperial and monarchical structure to a nation state. Centralization of the army which was followed
and supported by the centralization of other institutions primarily including education and political administration were the major components of the rise of the nation state.

The second parallel process was the birth of a political opposition movement. The Ottoman state sent students to Europe so that they acquire and bring back the science and technology of the West in order to facilitate the modernization of the Empire. However, some of these students who came back and began working in the newly established bureaucratic offices started criticizing the inadequacy of the reforms and the corruptions of the administrative structures. As a result they found themselves at odds with the powerful bureaucrats and with the Sultan. Consequently, many of these Western-educated reformists left their bureaucratic positions and started printing newspapers and journals in which they presented their reformist ideas and their criticisms of the bureaucratic elites and the Sultan. Therefore, the civil reformist opposition movement was born in the Ottoman society. The uniting factor among this first generation of opposition was their demand for the establishment of a constitutional and parliamentary political system.

The third process was the birth of an expressly secularist movement. The first generation of opposition in the late Ottoman society especially including the Young Ottomans such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha and Ali Suavi maintained a reconciliatory approach between religious and secular ideals. They presented religious justifications for the ideals and concepts (liberty, justice, equality, constitution, parliament, nationhood, motherland etc.) they acquired through their exposure to the developments in Europe. Although some of the discourse of the Young Ottomans such as their
emphasis on liberty and territorially defined patriotism (nationalism) carried secular connotations, an openly secularist movement had not emerged in their generation. It was among the next generation of reformist intellectuals and activists that an unequivocally secularist movement was born.

The emergence of the explicitly secularist movement (e.g., the Young Turks) in the late Ottoman society coincides with (1) the presentation of science as an alternative and antithetical worldview providing ontological and epistemological invalidations of the fundamental teachings of religion (2) the transition from a reconciliatory approach to Westernization and religion to the idea of wholesale borrowing of the Western civilization and (3) the transition from Pan-Ottoman and Pan-Islamist ideologies to Turkish nationalism. It was through these transitions that the Ottoman reformist intellectuals were separated into unequivocally opposite ideological camps; religious and secularist.

Yet another analogous process was the militarization (in literal meaning) of the secularist movement. Traditionally the strongest challenge to the authority of the Sultan in the Ottoman history came from the army corps primarily including the Janissaries. In the first wave of reforms which were sponsored by Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II, the state wanted to curb the power of the traditional army corps. These reforms were relatively successful in terms of neutralizing the janissaries. Especially after the Tanzimat (1839), the main frontier of opposition in the Ottoman society was a civilian reformist movement who demanded the establishment of a constitutional system. The Young Ottomans were the pioneers in this respect and they played a significant role in
the declaration of the first constitution and the establishment of the parliament in 1876. However, Sultan Abdulhamid II abolished the constitution and the parliament in 1878 which gave rise to the development of more radical and revolutionary oppositional movements. The Young Turks movement and the CUP which carried out the revolution of 1908 were born in this context. Most of the leading figures in the Young Turks Movement and in the CUP were educated in the military academies which were also centers of secularist ideologies such as materialism and naturalism. Although the CUP included influential civilians in its formative years, the organization was gradually dominated almost exclusively by the military officers who were educated in the modern military academies. It was these soldiers who marginalized the civilians and executed the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and reinstituted the constitution and the parliament and eventually controlled the government. Especially after the counter-revolution of 1909 (March 31 Incident) that the CUP, now fully an organization of soldiers, became aggressively secularist.

The triumph of the CUP was a turning point in the history of the secularist movement in Turkey. Until the revolution, the secularist movement was, to a greater extent, in the ranks of opposition. However, in the aftermath of the revolution they started controlling the state which has been centralizing in the past two centuries. The secularist movement’s extension into the halls of power reached its peak with the establishment of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Atatürk and his close friends who were also coming from military backgrounds and from the ranks of the CUP.
As the secularists moved from the ranks of opposition to the halls of power, their discourse and mobilization strategies were also significantly transformed. When they were part of the journalistic opposition movement, secularists used discursive strategies to convince the Sultan, the bureaucracy and to a lesser degree the general public about the necessity of the reforms they advocated. They enriched their discourse with the intellectual and scientific terminology they borrowed from the enlightenment and the post-enlightenment movements and with the terminology and concepts they acquired from the Islamic tradition. As the secularist movement increased in power by controlling the state, they started implementing top-down secularist reform and silenced any opposition with brute force.

All of these parallel processes were part and parcel of the consolidation of the secularist movement in the history of Turkey. The transformation and consolidation of the secularist movement was also reflected in the development and transformation of revivalist ideas and mobilization strategies in the same society as we see it in the case of Said Nursi and in the Nur Movement he established shortly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

To begin with, I also assumed that Said Nursi, who was actively involved in revivalism throughout his entire life would carry on an essentially similar philosophical (and discursive) approach to religious revival as well as a consistent perspective of the philosophical foundations of secularism. As it was the case with my initial assumptions about the secularist movement, I was expecting to see significant differences in Said Nursi’s mobilization strategies especially after the establishment of the Turkish
Republic. However, I did not expect substantial differences especially in the ways in which Said Nursi interpreted secularist ideologies and as a result in his revivalist discourse. As it is outlined in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, there were significant differences in his approach to the philosophical foundations of secularism as well. Such a shift was reflected in his revivalist discourse and in his mobilization strategies.

Until the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Said Nursi’s reformist and revivalist perspective was similar to the discourse of the Young Ottomans such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha and Hoca Tahsin. Said Nursi, in the first years of his activism, maintained a reconciliatory approach to reform and renewal. Like many of his contemporaries, he favorably looked at selective borrowing from the West. Contending that spreading the message of the Qur’an was contingent on material progress especially in modern times, he asserted that science and technology of the West -but not its worldview and culture- could and should be borrowed. Because he was concerned that the disconnection between the curriculums of the traditional madrasas and modern schools would lead to dogmatism in the first and doubt and denial of religion (such as the existence of God) in the latter, he proposed the establishment of a university in the Kurdistan region where he could teach religious and modern sciences side by side to address this challenge. In order to awaken Muslims to these issues and mobilize them towards action, he embraced the idea of İttihad-ı İslam (Unity of Muslims) as it was formulated by his predecessors like Namık Kemal, al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.
In similar ways to the Young Ottoman approach, he supported the constitutionalist movement with religious justifications and initially championed the revolution of 1908.

What makes Said Nursi different from the Young Ottomans was that he did not only provide religious justifications for the political reforms he advocated, he also wanted to give a religious character for the new system to be established. That is why he was concerned that the revolution of 1908 could go into another direction and secularize the society by marginalizing religion. He published open letters to the members of the new parliament urging them to maintain fundamental principles of freedom and to make sure that religion will not be marginalized. It did not take long for him to realize that the revolution was actually going towards a more secularist direction.

Especially until the end of 1910, Said Nursi was not explicitly mobilized against a secularist or any other movement, nor did he develop a dialectical revivalist discourse. He was mostly involved in reformist activism by explaining his ideas in the newspaper articles he published and in the conversations he had with other intellectuals and with the statesmen in Istanbul. He also submitted petitions to the palace asking the financial support of the Sultan for the university project he proposed. The petition was eventually accepted and the foundations of the university were laid down in the outskirts of the city of Van but it was not finished because of the Balkan Wars and WWI.

It was with the publication of his first major work Muhakemat (Reasonings) in 1911 that a major shift was observable in Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse. For the first
time in his life, he started publicly addressing philosophical implications of secularist ideologies such as materialism and naturalism. Such a shift in Said Nursi’s discourse coincides with the increasing number of publications, including journal articles and translated books, about these ideologies around the same time. Among them was the translation of Ludwig Büchner’s *Force and Matter* which greatly influenced secularist intellectuals (e.g., Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet, Baha Tevfik and Ahmet Nebil) in the late Ottoman society. In this book, Büchner challenged the idea that there is a creative force (i.e., God) outside and disconnected from matter. Likewise, he argued that the order which is observed in Nature is the result of the motions and interactions of atoms and the necessary outcomes of the properties of different forms of matter, not the dictations of an outside will and power. Ludwig Büchner and the other materialists who were introduced into the Ottoman society also emphasized how scientific inquiry nullified and invalidated religious dogmas.

Said Nursi presented his criticism of materialist ideas -albeit briefly- in *Muhakemat* which signaled a turning point in his revivalist discourse. He stopped emphasizing the need for acquiring modern sciences for the purpose of improving the material conditions of life in the Muslims World which he previously presented as a precondition for spreading the message of the Qur’an. A much sharper shift in Said Nursi’s revivalist discourse came when he went to Ankara in the eve of the establishment of the Turkish Republic with the invitation of Atatürk who wanted the new parliament to officially recognize his contributions to the war efforts during WWI and for his support of the Turkish War of Independence. Just as he did in the case of the
Young Turks Revolution of 1908, Said Nursi wanted to give a religious direction to the new social system which he realized was under the process of development. He was disappointed to see that the leaders of the new government primarily including Atatürk were inspired to establish a new society exclusively based on secularist ideals. He wrote a treatise against naturalism in Arabic in an attempt to undermine this project and distributed it to the members of the parliament but it did not yield the effect he expected. He retreated to the city of Van in Eastern Anatolia. From then on, he dedicated a great deal of his writings and discourse for responding to the philosophical foundations of secularist ideas such as materialism, naturalism and scientism.

Especially after his exile into the Western Anatolian provinces in 1926, he formed a movement around this discourse.

Before the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Said Nursi only and briefly criticized the ontological aspects of ideological interpretations of science. Although he intensified his dialectical approach to these ontological issues (construction of reality) afterwards, his criticism of the moral philosophical implications of secularism and scientism which pertain to the construction of self took up a much larger space in his revivalist discourse especially in formative years of the Nur Movement. He, from an existential perspective, extensively but subtly tried to challenge the secularist ideal of “the human effort to improve the human condition by humanly and secular means”.

As I described in the third chapter of this dissertation, the idea of “the human effort to improve the human condition” was one of defining characteristics of the secularist paradigm and that it was the underlying foundation of the idea of
(civilizational) progress which has been one of the strongest and most influential ideologies in the modern world. One of core components of the idea of progress was the human endeavor to improve the material conditions of life through science and scientific methods as precondition to the attainment of happiness. The other central component of the idea of progress was the conception of the infinite perfectibility of human beings (self-realization) by their own (secular) terms. Human happiness was contingent on the opportunities of self-realization as well. In its ideal form, the function of social organization (civilization) is to facilitate the development of the human effort to improve the human condition. This is the where humanism becomes social.

Although Said Nursi did not directly use the concept of humanism or the notion of “the human effort to improve the human condition” in his writings, my analyses of his revivalist discourse (Chapter IV) suggests that his reaction to the expansion of secular humanism, in other words his response to the moral philosophical foundations of secularism, is one of the major elements of his revivalist discourse. He contended that because human beings, unlike animals, are connected to their past, present and future at the same time with their minds, hearts and spirits; they have fears, concerns, pains, hopes and pleasures coming from these multiple directions which are far out of their control. That is why, for him, no human effort, not even science and technology, can secure human happiness. He asserted that only by acknowledging and relying on the perfect attributes of God (All-Powerful, All-Wise, All-Merciful etc.) which are reflected in creation, human beings can find happiness not only in hereafter but also in this world. In addition to being unrealistic, (because, for him, human beings are
inherently very weak and vulnerable although they are entrusted with very delicate and sensitive qualities), self-centeredness and self-aggrandizement are at odds with God-consciousness. It is through their existential insecurities and vulnerabilities that human beings turn to God and find the true source of happiness in their eternal journey in time and space. Because, he argued, self-centeredness and self-aggrandizement blind human beings by turning their attention towards the temporal and the transient, they become sources of misery rather than happiness. He also contended that a path of perfection opens to human beings when they, as a result of the acknowledgment of their own weaknesses, start studying and excelling in the knowledge of God’s perfect qualities. In order to substantiate the religious idea that God is the creator of the cosmos and that there is life after death, Said Nursi also wrote several treatises about the existence and unity of God and about the evidences for resurrection. In this vein, Said Nursi also wrote several chapters with the purpose of disproving naturalist and materialist arguments.

Accordingly, Said Nursi tried to reorient his audiences’ pursuit of happiness towards a God-conscious direction and thusly he aimed at preventing the expansion of secularism.

This leads me to think that perhaps the main line of conflict between religious worldviews and secularism, especially at the societal level, is not about the ontological question of whether the universe is the creation of God or not. It is rather about the conflict between the secularist idea of “the human effort to improve the human condition” as opposed to the religious idea of “providence of God.” In this sense, ontological arguments become peripheral to and supporting points for moral philosophical positions (construction of the self). This also convinces me to suggest that
Charles Taylor might be right when he argued that the emergence of secularism is mainly about the rise of exclusive humanism and secular conceptions of the human good.

Another noteworthy point in Said Nursi’s revivalist writings (the Risale-i Nur) after the establishment of the Turkish Republic is the domination of the micro level persuasion- and conversion-based approach to religious revival and the lack of an explicitly political discourse. This was a point I was already familiar with before I started writing this dissertation. Indeed, one of the goals of this project was to sociologically explore and understand the reasons of why this was the case. Towards the very end of this project (in writing the sixth chapter of this dissertation which focuses on the mobilization strategies of the Nur Movement), I started thinking that Said Nursi’s deliberate abstinence from politically intonated discourse and from challenging the authority and legitimacy of the (secularist) political system was an essential component of his strategy of “simultaneously engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment” as a way of mobilizing masses at the grassroots level.

I developed this idea from reading Wuthnow’s (1989) book Communities of Discourse in which he discussed how some of the discursive movements in history articulated and disarticulated the immediate power relations in the contexts in which they were developed. Although I did not arrive at the same conclusions with Wuthnow in terms of the sociological implications of this strategy, I realized that the strategy of “simultaneously engaging and disengaging immediate contextual power relations” was the most essential component of the Nur Movement's mobilization strategies vis-à-vis
the secularist establishment. Given that the Nur Movement is in many ways a
discursive movement, and that it deliberately and explicitly refrained political rhetoric
and mobilization -which was one of the questions which galvanized this dissertation
project-, it is not surprising to see the presence of the strategy of simultaneously
engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment. Of course, the more important
question is the sociological implications and significance of this mobilization strategy.

In studying the development and transformation of the Nur Movement, I
identified three core elements in this movement’s discourse and mobilization strategies.
These three elements are (1) contesting the ontological and moral philosophical aspects
of secularism but not the political authority of the secularists, (2) the discourse of “jihad
of the pen” and (3) the development of the dershane institution (private apartments and
houses in which followers of the movement came together to read and discuss the
Risale-i Nur, establish networks between the members of the movement and device
mobilization strategies in their localities). I observed that all of these three elements are
part of the same strategy of simultaneously engaging and disengaging the political
structure of the secularist establishment.

First of all, by mobilizing towards responding to the ontological and moral
philosophical foundations of secularism, the movement tried to undermine the
development of a secularist hegemony (in the Gramscian sense) in the Turkish society.
As Gramsci pointed out, ruling classes do not only maintain their authority over the
masses by only controlling the means of production and by compelling them with brute
force. The ruling classes also seek to produce an illicit consent about the validity of
their worldview among the ruled. Especially in the modern context, the ruling classes seek the illicit consent of the masses by compromising and negotiating with them in the civil society. Since this is the case, Gramsci contended, the hegemony of a ruling class can be thwarted by undermining its worldview and therefore without directly engaging their political authority. Similarly, it seems that regardless of whether it succeed or not, the Nur Movement’s focus on the ontological and moral philosophical foundations of secularism was a strategy of undermining the secularist ideology and therefore the secularist movement by engaging its ideology. However, the Nur Movement, by deliberately not developing a politically intonated discourse and by not mobilizing towards the transformation of the political system which was under the control of the secularists, was disengaging the secularist establishment. Therefore, this movement was engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment at the same time.

As I described in the fifth chapter, the notion of “jihad of the pen” was one of the strongest components of the motivational discourse among the members of the Nur Movement. By using the widely comprehensible notion of jihad which bears dialectical and in certain cases confrontational connotations, the movement aimed at mobilizing individuals against the expansion and top-down implementation of secularism which had also given rise to widespread resentment in the Turkish society in which religion was still very influential at least in the personal lives of individuals and in local communities. However, by reframing jihad as “the jihad of the pen” instead of “the jihad of the sword,” the movement channeled the resentment of religious individuals towards an ideological battle rather than a more direct confrontation. This, I think, is
another strategy of engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment at the same time. The members of the movement were involved in jihad (i.e., confrontation of an oppositional force) but not in an openly confrontational way.

Thirdly, as the Nur Movement expanded outside the locality in which it emerged, members of the Nur Movement started using privately owned apartments and houses as places for getting together for reading and discussing the Risale-i Nur, for establishing connections between the members of the movement particularly in urban environments, and for arranging meetings to discuss their mobilization strategies. The collective activity of reading and discussing the Risale-i Nur was called ders (study). Dershane (study house) was the name of the places in which the ders sessions were held. The movement also used dershanes as places of proselytization. Members of the movement invited their friends, relatives, colleagues and other acquaintances for the ders sessions.

Dershanes were not legally recognized and they did not have any official status. Indeed, these places were under the close surveillance of the secularist establishment. Therefore, dershanes were not part of the civil society, according to the formulation of Gramsci, because they were not places through which the movement directly engaged the state and the ruling establishment and came to term with them. However, the Nur Movement was using these places to engage the rest of the society in an attempt to counterbalance the expansion of secularist ideas with the purpose of indirectly undermining the hegemony of the secularists.
As for the question of why the movement chose this strategy of engaging and disengaging the secularist establishment at the same time, it seems to me that, first, it was an efficient strategy of resource mobilization. Especially when the opposition was a consolidated secularist movement which controlled the centralized nation state and monopolized the use and abuse of coercive power, challenging the authority of the state or trying to transform the political structure might very well not be a viable option. Secondly, the movement deliberately used its abstinence from politics and from political struggle as a way of appealing to and mobilizing masses. Contending that their target population would be deterred from joining the movement or accepting its message if they think that the movement was surreptitiously seeking power, Said Nursi and other members of the movement tried to undermine the establishment of the secularist hegemony by the other means, as I described and discussed above.

In addition to testifying to the fluidities, variations and transformations in secularist and revivalist movements; and to the dynamic nature of their interactions, findings of this study reiterated one of my initial hypothesizes that secularization (and religious revival) should be studied with respect to human element (i.e., social movement dynamics). Although there were fluidities, transitions, diversities and variations in the history of secularism and revivalism, the end result of the respective roles and positions of secularism and religiosity in the society is a result of the mobilization and counter-mobilization of human beings, collective or individual.

As I describe in the second chapter, the development of secularization in the modern world has been mostly studied from an abstractionist and reductionist
perspective by the proponents of both the secularization theory and the rational choice theory. I only studied the articulated ideas of the secularists and the revivalists and I only described what has been observed and recorded. Yet, this study provided enough evidence, even more than I expected, to conclude that almost every aspect of the major transformations in the (Turkish) society were either single sidedly deliberated or mutually contested regardless of whether the actual outcomes were or were not in the ways in which they were deliberated or contested. This includes the development and popularization of science, which is portrayed by many theorists of secularization as the root cause of the marginalization of religion in modern societies as well. I do not imply that one side wanted the development of science and that the other rejected it. It is about the question of whether science would develop and expand without the efforts of those who believed in its pragmatic, philosophical or ideological value. More importantly it is about whether science as an abstract being would marginalize religion without the human effort to interpret the findings and the methodology of science from a secularist perspective.

Especially in the case of the Ottoman society, religious intellectuals including the *ulema* did not oppose the idea of adopting modern sciences. They (e.g., Hoca Tahsin and Said Nursi) were even suggesting that it was not an option but a necessity for the flourishing of the Muslim World and for the spread of the message of the Qur’an. It was after the introduction of secularist ideas which were based on ideological interpretations of science, (e.g., materialism and naturalism) that it was presented and used as a tool for attacking and marginalizing religion and therefore religious forces.
This was not peculiar to the Ottoman society either. Such perspectives of science were developed in the enlightenment and post-enlightenment movements in Europe and they were subsequently borrowed by secularist intellectuals and introduced in the late Ottoman society. As I mentioned above, the translation of Ludwig Büchner’s *Force and Matter* in 1911 into Ottoman Turkish was a milestone in this regards.

Such a transition was also reflected in the transformation of revivalist approach to science. As I described above, there was a major shift in Said Nursi’s approach to science around the time of the translation and publication of Ludwig Büchner’s *Force and Matter* in the late Ottoman society. Although he continued to emphasize the need for being familiar with the language of science, he started criticizing philosophical foundations of scientific secularism (materialism and naturalism). Especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who was strongly influenced by these ideologies, Said Nursi formed a revivalist movement which was mobilized around the idea of repudiating naturalism and materialism. Regardless of if and who won this ideological battle, the history of the development of scientist ideologies such as positivism, materialism and naturalism and revivalist responses to these challenges attest to the significance of the human element behind these processes.

One of the weaknesses of this study is its very broad scope. I studied the development and transformation of secularization in the last three centuries of Turkey in four subsequent stages of reform with the purpose of providing a coherent historical analysis. In so doing, I described and discussed the role of major historical
developments (The Declaration of Tanzimat, The First and the Second Constitutional Eras, 1908 Young Turk Revolution, The 31 March Incident, WWI, The Turkish War of Independence and the establishment of the Turkish Republic), influential reformist figures, oppositional movements which played significant roles in the development of secularist ideas (i.e., the Young Ottomans, The Young Turks and the CUP), political ideologies (i.e., İttihad-ı İslam /Pan-Islamism, Pan-Ottomanism, Pan-Turkism /Turkish Nationalism, Centralism and Decentralism), and secularist philosophical ideologies (i.e., Positivism, Materialism, Naturalism, Scientism and Evolutionism). Moreover, I described and discussed socioeconomic backgrounds and reformist discourses of intellectuals and ideologues who played significant roles in the development of secularist ideas in the late Ottoman society and in the formative years of the Turkish Republic. On the other hand, I studied the development and transformation of Said Nursi’s reformist and revivalist discourse before and after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As part of my analyses of Said Nursi’s revivalism, I also described and discussed socioeconomic backgrounds of some of the influential members of the Nur Movement. What is more, I borrowed and used concepts and terminologies from different social scientific disciplines (i.e., philosophy, theology, history and political science) in my study and analyses of the secularist and revivalist movements in Turkey. Although I have endeavored to establish a systematic approach to the study of these issues and the use of these concepts and tried to confirm my descriptions and findings from multiple reliable sources, generalizations and in certain cases superficiality become almost inevitable when such a broad history with multiple issues in question
are studied at the same time. Not being trained as an academic historian makes it easier to fall prey to methodological and factual errors.

Another limitation is that this dissertation mostly focused on discursive aspects of secularism and revivalism and focused on the secularist and the revivalist movements’ mobilization and counter-mobilization strategies with regard to the construction of meaning. Especially in the case of the Nur Movement many other issues remained unexplored. For example, the organizational structure and power relations within the movement is an area which needs to explored further. Moreover, I only studied the development of the Nur Movement during the lifetime of its founder, Said Nursi, whose ideas to a very large extent shaped the discourse and mobilization strategies of the movement. That is also why the Nur Movement, during this period, maintained a consistent and consolidated structure. My preliminary explorations indicate that there were more variations even conflicts within the Nur Movement after the death of Said Nursi. It would be informative to study the lines of variations and conflicts within this movement and their sociological implications.

I hope that despite its limitations, this study will engage in meaningful conversations with theoretical and empirical studies of secularization and revivalism in other social scientific disciplines. This dissertation could also significantly contribute to the study of the Nur Movement in particular. Despite being one of the largest (revivalist) movements in Turkey and in the Muslim World, the Nur Movement remained as a largely understudied in social sciences including sociology, mostly because its discourse was not easy to contextualize with regard to the immediate power
relations in the society in which it was developed. In addition, the tripartite model I
devised in this dissertation project for investigating the mutual ways in which secularist
and revivalist movements conceive of and mobilize towards the construction of reality
(ontology), the self (moral philosophy) and the society (political philosophy) can be
effectively used in comparative studies of secularist and revivalist movements not only
in the Muslim majority societies but also in the other parts of the World.
Childhood and First Encounters with the Madrasa Education

Said Nursi was born in 1878\(^1\) to a Kurdish family in the village of Nurs which was part of the eastern province of Bitlis in the Ottoman Empire. His father was Sofi Mirza, a pious man and a modest farmer who was associated with the Khalidi Naqshbandi Sufi order, a revivalist movement which was well established with its madrasas and tekkes in the region. His mother Nuriye was also a deeply religious person. Sofi Mirza and Nuriye raised seven children of which Said Nursi was the fourth in age. The first two, Duriye and Hanım were girls. Although it is not known where and how she acquired her education, Hanım became renowned in her community as someone who was well-versed in religious sciences. She married another religious scholar and went into a self-imposed exile in Damascus with her husband in the aftermath of the 1913 Bitlis incident (Vahide, 2005, p. 3-4).

It was the third child, Abdullah, who brought a stronger dedication for the study of religious sciences into the family. Influenced by his elder brother (Molla) Abdullah who excelled in religious learning, Said, at the age of nine, started attending a madrasa under Molla Mehmed Emin in Tağ, a nearby village (Şahiner, 2013 p. 39-40). Education in this madrasa was overseen by Şeyh Abdurrahman Taği, one of the influential figures in the Khalidi Naqshbandi movement (Mardin, 1989, p. 66). Because of his quarrels with fellow students and his arguments with the teacher Molla Mehmet Emin, Said left the madrasa and returned home. However, his experience at this

\(^1\) There is an ongoing debate about Said Nuri’s date of birth. Akgündüz (2013, p. 83-91) provides a detailed account of why he is convinced that Said Nursi was born in the spring of 1878.
madrasa and his observations in the community established around it under the tutelage of Şeyh Abdurrahman Taği deeply influenced young Said, as he described towards the end of his life.

[Şeyh Abdurrahman Taği] trained many students and preachers and learned men, and when all began to sing his praises, I, immersed in scientific disputations of a high caliber and placed within a wide circle of science and tarikat [Sufi path], was convinced that these preachers were about to conquer the earth.

When the famous ulema and the saints (evliya) and learned men and kutps were mentioned, I, nine or ten years old, would listen with rapt attention. My heart felt as if these students, the men of learning, had made extensive conquests in the field of religion.

If a student showed sign of superior intelligence he would be accorded great importance. If someone scored a success in a debate around a problem he would be made much of. I was struck by the fact that I became animated with the same feelings. There was, in fact, an extraordinary competitive spirit among the şeyhs [shaykh] at the level of township, sub-province and province. (E:53, as cited in Mardin, 1989, p.66).

After returning home, young Said continued his studies under the guidance of his older brother Molla Abdullah who came back home once a week from his madrasa. A year later, young Said started attending another madrasa, under a Naqshbandi Şeyh, Sayyid Nur Muhammad. Because of his dissatisfaction with the education provided, his conflicts with other students and the commanding tones of the teachers, Said’s studies at this madrasa and several other local madrasas were all cut short (Vahide, 2005, p.6-9). He eventually headed north around the age of fourteen and arrived at the city of Beyazıt to study under Şeyh Muhammed Celali.
Until this time, Said’s studies were limited to the books and treatises on Arabic grammar and syntax (Vahide, 2005, p. 9-10). It was in the town of Beyazıt that young Said was set to study advanced level works on subjects such as legal theory (usul al-fiqh), theology (kelam), hadith, logic (mantık) and rhetoric (belagat). However, Said was critical of the strict lines of studying major scholarly books on these subjects through reading a series of commentaries and annotations written about them. He asked his teacher to directly study these texts. In so doing, Said studied several dozen major scholarly works including al-Subki’s Jam al-Jawami on the theory of jurisprudence and Sharh al-Mawaqif of al-Jurjani on matters of theology (Şahiner, 2013, p. 45-46).

Şerif Mardin (1989, p. 68-69) argues that Said’s challenges against the cumbersomeness of the curricula used in madrasas and the authoritarianism of religious scholars at this early age can be attributed not only to the independent personality of him but also to the educational and bureaucratic reforms of the Tanzimat which penetrated well into the Ottoman periphery in the second half of the nineteenth century. Through their acquaintance with the new educational system, intellectuals such as Ali Suavi, who was also educated in the madrasa system, and students like young Said were able see the deficiencies in the traditional educational methods practiced in madrasas. Young Said was also critical of the hierarchical structure of Sheiks and madrasa teachers and their tendencies for the exploitation of the local population through increasing the amount they collected from the peasants in the form of zakat (alms). Traditionally, madrasas in this region were economically supported by the local population who gave a proportion of their alms (zakat) to these madrasas. Said rejected
collecting and accepting zakat at a very early age (Mardin, 1989, p. 71; Vahide, 2005, p. 8).

After four months of self-study in seclusion in Beyazıt, Saïd passed the examination of Şeyh Muhammad Celali who gave him his diploma (*icazet*) in 1892 and thus young Said was awarded the title Molla Said at the age of fourteen. Thereafter, Molla Said took off from Beyazıt with the aim of going to Baghdad to meet with and study under accomplished religious scholars there. After three months of travel on bare foot, Molla Said reached Bitlis, his home province, along the way. He attended the lectures of Mehmet Emin Efendi (once again) for two days. His former teacher asked Molla Said to start wearing the traditional dress of scholars because he had already obtained his diploma (*icazet*). Said refused the offer with a response that he did not think it would be a good idea for someone who is still very young and who still considers him a student to wear the dress of matured and learned people. After his short stay in Bitlis, Molla Said headed to Şirvan where his elder brother Molla Abdullah was teaching at a madrasa (Şahiner, 2013, p. 46-48). As it is reported in Said Nuri’s official biography (T:435), his elder brother asked Molla Said about what he had studied since the time they departed. When Molla Said said that he studied eighty books including books which were not included in the curricula of the traditional madrasa education, Molla Abdullah, while he was still a teacher at the local madrasa, asked questions to young Said to test whether he had actually studied these books. Surprised by his younger brother’s level of knowledge in the answers he provided, Molla Abdullah started taking lessons from his young brother in private.
Departing Bitlis after several months, Said reached the city of Siirt where he visited the madrasa of locally famous scholar Molla Fethullah Efendi. Biographers of Said Nursi (Vahide, p. 13; Şahiner, 2013, p. 48-49) reports that after his examination of young Said, Molla Fethullah Efendi was astonished by his knowledge of religious sciences, the power of his intellect and his memory. That is why he started calling him Bediuzzaman (the Wonder of Age).

When the news of the arrival of this young Molla spread in the vicinity of Siirt, local ulema gathered around him and challenged him for a debate which was a customary practice in the local madrasa to establish credibility and superiority among the men of religious learning. Molla Said accepted the challenge and he reportedly answered all of the questions asked by the “learned doctors of Islamic Law” in a debate organized by Molla Fethullah Efendi (Mardin, 1989, p. 71). However, this led the growth of jealousy among other madrasa students and the local ulema which resulted in physical attacks against the young Molla (Mardin, 1989, p. 71; Vahide, 2005, p. 13). The local population who admired and sided with Molla Said after the debate saved him from bodily harm. News of the quarrels reached the mutasarrif (sub-governor) of Siirt, who asked Molla Said to leave the town (Mardin, 1989, p. 71).

Complying with the request, Molla Said moved to Bitlis where he had previously stayed with Şeyh Mehmet Emin on two different occasions. Vahide (2004) contends that Molla Said chose Bitlis as his next destination in order to prove and establish himself in the provincial center. Nonetheless, Şeyh Mehmet Emin dismissed Molla Said on grounds that he was too young to get involved in serious matters of
religious learning and scholarship. Molla Said asked his former teacher to give him an opportunity to test his knowledge and his abilities. Şeyh Mehmet Emin agreed and prepared a list of questions for Said. He reportedly answered the Şeyh’s questions without hesitation. Eventually, Molla Said started preaching at the Kureyş Mosque in Bitlis (Vahide, 2005, p. 14).

According to Mardin (1989, p. 72), Molla Said, during his stay in Bitlis, was giving advice of moderation to the local notable families of şeyhs who were in bitter conflict with other notable families and to the madrasa students who were in conflict with their teachers. This, for Mardin, was the first time Said assumed a reconciliatory role. Yet, the city of Bitlis was divided into camps after his arrival. On the one side was the growing number of Molla Said’s followers and on the other was Şeyh Muhammad Emin and his following. Concerned about the growing tensions between the two sides, the governor of Bitlis expelled Molla Said from the city of Bitlis.

After a short stay in Şirvan, Molla Said, at around the age of sixteen, arrived at the village of Tillo where the famous Ottoman scholar İbrahim Hakkı (1703-1780) had studied for some time (Mardin, 1989, p. 72). Retreating to a place called Kubbe-i Hassa next to İbrahim Hakkı’s mausoleum, Molla Said dedicated his time to his studies. His food was brought by his younger brother Mehmed once a day. According to Said Nursi’s authorized biography, he was sharing much of this food with the ants around mausoleum. When he was asked about the reasons of why he did it so, he replied that he admired the “republican character of the ants and bees” (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 299). Given that the concept of republicanism (cumhuriyetçilik) was a modern development,
this is obviously an indication that young Said, by this time, was informed about the constitutionalist movement (i.e., the Young Ottomans) and their discourse in support of constitutionalism and parliamentarianism.

**First Step into Politics: Young Said and İttihad-ı İslam**

The next destination of young Said was the city of Mardin which represented a turning point in his intellectual life. There, he met two followers of the famous reformist Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh who were leading figures in the development and expansion of pan-Islamist (İttihad-ı İslam) ideas throughout the Muslim World. Born in the region around the border between Afghanistan and Iran, Al-Afghani traveled to India in 1856 at a very early age and lived there for about a decade. India was home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the World and like other groups they were under the rule of the British at that time. When he was in India, Al-Afghani observed the conditions of Muslims under the British imperialism. He was also exposed to the anti-imperialist movement which was developing in contemporary Indian society (Keddie, 1983). Al-Afghani left India and moved back to Iran upon the invitation of Shah Naser Al-Din. However, al-Afghani’s sharp tone in his political speeches and writings concerned the Shah who expelled him to Moscow. Al-Afghani continued his anti-British activism as he lobbied the court of the Tzar against the British. The Shah, once more, invited him back to Tehran but to expel him yet another time shortly after al-Afghani’s arrival because of his criticism of the rulers of Persia for their failure of fully understanding and not being able to prevent the takeover of their lands by the imperialists (Mishra, 2012, p. 104). The rest of al-
Afghani’s life continued as a perpetual journey, mostly because he was forced to do so, from one place to the other in the Muslim World (mostly in Cairo and Istanbul) and in Europe (i.e., London, Paris, Munich and St. Petersburg).

Al-Afghani’s message, which aimed at preventing and reversing the decline of Muslim societies, was two folded. On the one side, he tried to appeal to the ruling elite in the Muslim majority lands by urging them for the implementation of institutional reformation and modernization of these societies. On the other side, he tried to appeal to the masses by promoting the idea of the unity of Muslims (İttihad-ı İslam) around the world against the invasions of the Muslim lands by Western powers (Keddie, 2005, p. 11-29). In this regard, al-Afghani’s discourse was not substantially different from the reformist discourse of the Young Ottomans’ such as Namık Kemal, Ali Suavi and Ziya Pasha. However, al-Afghani was more successful in terms of establishing a broad-based reformist movement across the Muslim World and influencing a greater number of politicians as well as intellectuals.

Al-Afghani found the strongest voice and following in Cairo where he met one of his most famous and most influential students; Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), who became known as an Islamic scholar, jurist and as a political activist criticizing traditional educational systems of contemporary Muslim societies and dogmatic religious practices. Like his master al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh also promoted pan-Islamist ideas (İttihad-ı İslam) (Haddad, 2005). Serving as a teacher at the University of Al-Azhar, as the grand mufti of Egypt, the chief editor of the official newspaper al-Waka-i al-Misriyya (The Chronicle of Egypt) while he was in Egypt and publishing the
journal *al-Urwath al-Wuthqa* (The Strong Bond) while he was in exile in Paris with his master al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh played an enormous role in the expansion of reformist and pan-Islamist ideas throughout the Muslim World (Kedourie, 1997; Hourani, 1983; Kurzman, 2002, p. 50).

It was in this conjecture that young Said, around year 1892, met two disciples of the Muslim reformist thinkers Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, who further opened his eyes to the issues regarding the decline of Muslims societies. Around the same time, Molla Said also met one of the members of the Senussi order (Vahide, 2005, p. 22; Mardin, 1989, p. 75) which was formed by Muhammad Ibn Ali as-Senussi (1787-1859) with the aim of pursuing the revitalization of the religion of Islam in North Africa and its liberation from the occupation of imperialist powers. However, it did not take long for young Said to discover similar voices within the borders of the Ottoman Empire which to a greater level awakened him to the social and political issues regarding the state of affairs of the Muslim World. As he described twenty years later, (Munazarat, p. 23) it was Namik Kemal’s “*Dream*” (*Rüya*) which truly awakened young Said when he was in Mardin. *Dream* was written as a prose by Namik Kemal in 1887 describing his desires for seeing the establishment of freedom in a fictional story in which the angel of freedom descending from the clouds of the sky and addressing the people about the beauties of justice and freedom from oppression and striving towards the advancement of the nation. The angel of freedom also urged its audience to awaken from their deep sleep.

O people, who are fallen into misery, are you waiting to open your eyes in the morning of the hereafter? [...] The powerful artist [God] gave eyes and the
power of sight so that you observe his works of mercy [in creation]. You are closing this lover of truth and trying to see with your imagination and with your ears, and thus you are sleeping while your eyes are still open. As you are doing this, you are becoming like dead bodies. The sight and perception of the most experienced master \([pir]\) among you cannot reach the truth as much as the dream of a child who was born blind.

It will not take long that there will be a time when your bodies will not move even if your heart wants to enter into the field of effort. Even if your power of intellect starts searching for truth, it will not be able to understand anything. [...]

Sleep! Sleep! There is no easy way to transform this ignorance of life to the sleep of death! (Namık Kemal, 1993 [1873], p. 251)

Apparently young Said was moved by the sharp language of Namik Kemal. As the rest of his life until the beginning of the WWI testifies, Said Nursi dedicated much of his time energy in his activism to issues regarding the unity of Muslims and the reformation and revitalization of the Muslim societies. In this respect, he was following the footsteps of reformist Muslim intellectuals as he, too, admitted in 1909.

My predecessors in this matter [İttihad-ı İslâm] are Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the late Mufti of Egypt Muhammad Abduh, Ali Suavi Efendi, Hoca Tahsin Efendi, Namık Kemal Bey and Sultan Selim [II]. (Said Nursi, 2004c [1910], p. 163)

Although the reasons of it are not clearly known, Molla Said was expelled yet another time from Mardin by the sub-governor (mutasarrıf). He was taken back to Bitlis, the provincial center, with the escort of two armed gendarmes. Not long after his arrival at Bitlis, the governor, Ömer Pasha, invited Molla Said to stay at his residence. Accepting the offer, Molla Said remained in the residence of the governor for two years in which he spared most of his time to the study of classical Islamic texts (Mardin, 1989, p. 75).
Governor Ömer Pasha was an elite governor who was educated in the Mulkiye Schools which were established during the Tanzimat Era. He was speaking several foreign languages such as French, Greek and Albanian (Kırmızı, 2007, p. 86). There are reports in Said Nursi’s biographies that the governor was not a strongly religious person (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 314; Vahide, 2005, p. 24). We do not have firsthand accounts of why he would invite a young Molla, albeit an unconventional one, to stay in his residence. However, Said Nursi wrote in one of his letters more than 50 years later that he “stayed in the residence of the Governor of Bitlis for two years because of his insistence and his respect for learning” (E:257). While Said was in Bitlis, he also took lessons from the Hanafi scholar Muhammad Kufrevi (1775-1898). This was the last time young Said studied under the tutelage of others. In one of his letters, Said Nursi respectfully recalled his last teacher.

 [...] It was honorable Şeyh Muhammad Kufrevi who, as a scholar, gave me this last and most enriching lesson and who showed me enormous compassion, beyond the limits of what I would expect. (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 319)

Apart from the lessons he took from his master, Said continued his self-led studies. According to his authorized biography, Molla Said, who was around the age of twenty, studied around 40 classical texts in the fields of theology, exegesis, grammar, syntax, rhetoric and logic while he was staying in the residence of the governor (Beysülen & Canlı, 2010, p. 90). Ömer Pasha was not the only bureaucrat interested in having Molla Said stay in his residence. A notable bureaucrat who was known as Şemsi Pasha invited Said to stay in his residence in Van which was one of the biggest cities in the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 330). This was the
first time in the last several years that Molla Said was changing his place of residence in peace with local administrative authorities. The details of Said’s relationships with governor Şemsi Pasha is not well documented. However, staying in his residence provided an opportunity for him to safely continue his studies and provided him the opportunity to acquaint himself with the city of Van and its socio-political dynamics (Yaşar, 2014, p. 40).

The appointment of Tahir Pasha as a governor by Sultan Abdulhamid II to Van in place of Şemsi Pasha was a major turning point in Said Nursi’s life and in his revivalist activism. Tahir Pasha was a well-educated governor and he was well respected by the Sultan who appointed him to Van which was a pilot region of modernization in the eastern frontier of the Ottoman lands. Besides being an accomplished statesman, Tahir Pasha was closely interested in the recent developments in modern sciences and contemporary intellectual debates. In addition to having an extensive library, he was receiving newspapers and journals published in Istanbul and in Europe. He made his residence a meeting place of the modern bureaucrats and teachers who were educated in the reformist environment of the Tanzimat.

Said continued staying at the residence of Tahir Pasha after the departure of Şemsi Pasha. Unlike his short stays and constant travels in the past, Said remained based in the city of Van for about twelve years, from 1895 to 1907. During his stay at the governor’s residence, he was encouraged by the governor to actively participate in the conversations and debates of the modern educated bureaucrats and teachers individuals which perhaps for the first time exposed him directly to the effects of
modernization reforms, the new secular education system, the expansion of the modern secular sciences and the development and expansion of other secularist ideologies such as materialism, positivism and naturalism.

Tahir Pasha served as the governor of Van until 1912 and kept Said Nursi closer to him for about a decade. On the one hand, he encouraged Said and provided him the opportunities to continue his self-led education. According to Said Nursi’s own account, he was given a room in the residence in which he continued his studies. He was also dedicating three hours before going to bed for reviewing all of the books he had studied theretofore (Vahide, 2005, p. 28). On the other hand, the governor was trying to open the eyes of this young man to the socio-political developments not only in the Muslim World but also in the world at large especially in Europe.

Apparently, the governor’s encouragements and directions proved successful. Said started thinking that the traditional educational system of madrasas and classical religious sciences and texts were not sufficient for understanding and responding to the challenges of modern times and to the doubts raised about the teachings of the Qur’an (Müküslü Hamza, 2004 [1918], p. 588-589). That must be the reason why Said, in the residence of Tahir Pasha, started studying sciences such as geography, mathematics, physics, inorganic chemistry, history and philosophy. As a result of these studies, he wrote *Talikat*, which was a short treatises on logic which was written as a commentary on the theologian and mathematician İsmail Hakki Gelenbevi’s (1730-1790) book *Burhan-ı Gelenbevi*. He also wrote a short treatise on algebraic equations. These booklets were written in Kurdish and they were never published (Akgündüz, 2013, p.
In the meantime, Molla Said started learning and speaking Turkish. Until that time he was only speaking Kurdish which was his mother tongue and Arabic and Persian which were the languages of education and literature in the region he grew up.

The Dream of a University

One day, governor Tahir Pasha told Said that he had read in a newspaper about the remarks of the British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies who said: “As long as the Qur’an remains in the hands of Muslims we will not be able control and rule them”.

[1] in that year suddenly learned about Europe’s evil intentions toward the Qur’an through the late governor, Tahir Pasha. He even heard from a newspaper that a British secretary for the colonies had said: “So long as the Muslims have the Qur’an, we will not be to dominate them. (Ş:70)

Biographers (e.g., Akgündüz, 2013, p. 341; Şahiner, 2013, p. 64; Menek, 2008, p. 30) of Said Nursi claim that these remarks were made by William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) who in his long career, served, among other things, as the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, the Secretary of the Treasury (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and as the Prime Minister. However, Gladstone’s term as the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies was between the years 1845 and 1846 which was more than four decades before Said met Tahir Pasha in the province of Van. As Said Nursi (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 341) recalls it, the conversation between him and Tahir Pasha about the remarks of the British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies was in year in year 1316 according to the Hijri calendar which corresponds to year 1889 in Gregorian calendar. Given that Gladstone’s active political career ended in 1894, there
seems to be some inconsistencies in these reports. Otherwise, either the newspaper the
governor read was reporting what had been said earlier, or Tahir Pasha was mentioning
something he had seen in a newspaper previously. Another possibility is that Said Nursi
was did not accurately recalled the year in which the conversation happened between
him and the governor.

A careful examination of the language Said Nursi used -as I quoted above-
reveals that he neither specified the year in which the British Secretary of State for War
and the Colonies uttered these words, nor he said the that governor read about the
remarks from the newspaper in that year. It seems from Said Nuri’s descriptions that he
only talked about the year (1889 [1316]) in which he had the conversation with Tahir
Pasha. Said Nursi did not specify the name of the British Secretary of State for War and
the Colonies, either. However, there is consensus among the biographers of Said Nursi
(e.g., Akgündüz, 2013, p. 341; Şahiner, 2013, p. 64) that it was William Ewart
Gladstone.

Gladstone has been known for his aversion to the religion of Islam and for his
anti-Islam remarks (Biagini, 200, p. 215; Ahmad, 2013, p. 182). He was especially
harsh against the Turks (Ottoman Empire) because of their territorial advancement into
Europe by force and their conflicts with the European Christians. He described the
Turks as “a scourge to the world” and the Ottoman government as “a disgrace to human
civilization” and “a curse to humanity” in a speech he gave in his eighty fifth birthday
(Burke, 1895, p. 197). Speaking of the Ottoman Empire, in 1893, he said:

We may ransack the annals of the world, but I know not what research can
furnish us with so portentous an example of the fiendish misuse of the powers
established by God for the punishment of evildoers and the encouragement of them that do well. No government ever has so sinned, none has proved itself so incorrigible in sin, or which is the same, so impotent in reformation. (Harland, 1896, p. 44)

Gladstone also asserted that the religion of Islam is “radically incapable of establishing a good and tolerable government over civilized and Christian races” (Ansari 2004, p. 80) However, there is no established evidence yet to confirm that he actually made the remarks Said Nursi quoted. Nonetheless, several sources report that, Gladstone described the Qur’an as “an accursed book” and claimed that “so long as there is this book there will be no peace in the world.” (Zakariya 1991, p. 59-60; Nall, 2013, p. 507). Regardless of whether he actually uttered these words or not, news have been circulating since then in the Muslim World that Gladstone declared in speech he gave in the British House of Commons that “so long as the Qur’an remained in the hands of Muslims it would be impossible to control them”. Muslims around the world, especially in India organized rallies against the remarks of Gladstone. There were newspapers in the Muslim World reporting these remarks and publishing responses against them (See Akgündüz, 2013, p. 343-349). Said must have heard one such report.

Said Nursi recalled later that similar conversations he had with the governor significantly transformed his approach to learning.

About the year 1316, [I] underwent a radical change in [my] ideas. It was as follows: up to that time, [I] had only been interested in, and had studied and taught, the various sciences; it was only through theoretical knowledge that [I] had sought enlightenment. Then at that date, [I] suddenly learned through the late governor, Tahir Pasha, of Europe’s dire and evil intentions toward the

2 http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7846000/7846601.stm
Qur’an. [I] heard that a British Secretary for the Colonies had even said in a newspaper: “So long as the Muslims have the Qur’an, we shall be unable to dominate them. We must either take it from them, or make them lose their love of it.” [I] was filled with zeal. [...] [I] understood that [I] should make all the various sciences [I] had learned steps by which to understand the Qur’an and prove its truths, and that the Qur’an alone should be [my] aim, the purpose of [my] learning, and the object of [my] life. (Vahide, 2005, p. 30-31)

Regardless of the details of the conversation(s) he had with Tahir Pasha, it is interesting to see that his initial response to the colonial encounters of the Muslims with the European powers and their orientalism did not carry an explicitly political tone. Instead of formulating a political solution or a physical encounter against imperialism, he came up with the idea of responding to these challenges by focusing on learning various sciences as a necessary step towards proving the truthfulness of the teachings of the Qur’an. In other words, he saw this challenge as an ideological and philosophical challenge, more than as a political and physical one. Perhaps, he was also aware, because of his conversations with the bureaucrats and teachers who were educated in newly established modern schools and because of his exposure to the ideas of the reformist elite and secularist opposition in Istanbul, that the challenges against the religion of Islam and the teachings of the Qur’an were developing within contemporary Muslim societies as well. As I described in the previous chapter in detail, secularist fractions in the Young Turks Movement and in the CUP had already been supporting secularist ideas and presenting challenges against religious worldviews. Given that he had access to a large library at the governor’s residence and periodicals published in Istanbul and in Europe, there is little doubt that Molla Said knew about the
development of secularist ideas and the secularist movement (i.e., The Young Turks) in the Ottoman Empire.

Said Nursi regretted several decades later that such an awakening was delayed because of “many deceiving obstacles in that period of youth”. But he said that “the clash and clamor of war [WWI] awakened him and that such ideas “sprang to life; it began to emerge and be realized” (Vahide, 2005, p. 30-31). However, one idea that he developed as a response to his studies, conversations and observations during his stay at the residence of the governor remained with him during rest of his life. It was the establishment of a university with the name Madrasatu’z-Zahra in the Eastern part of the Ottoman Empire in which he could teach religious and natural sciences together. He had the intention of opening three branches of this university in the provinces of Van, Bitlis and Diyarbakır.

**Reformist Activism in Istanbul**

Tahir Pasha was in support of Said’s idea of opening a university in Van but neither Said, nor the governor had enough financial resources to build these schools. Said decided to pursue the help of the Sultan for his project. With the encouragement and support of the governor, Said, around the age of 30, left the City of Van and went to Istanbul in 1907. He first stayed in the residence of Ferik Ahmet Muhtar Pasha (1861-1926) for about two months. For a short while, he stay as a guest in the house of an Armenian in the Şisli district. Şekerci Han, a large building in the Fatih district

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3 Some sources claim that this wasn’t Said Nursi’s the first time Said Nursi came to Istanbul. He made first trip to Istanbul in 1896 (at around the age of 18) (Köseoğlu ,1999, p. 45)
where some of the notable intellectuals lived, was the next destination of Said. Among the intellectuals who were residing in the Şekerci Han were famous poet Mehmet Akif (1873-1936) and Fatin [Gökmen] Hoca (1877-1955) who was the director of the observatory (Şahiner, 2013, p. 70; Mardin, 1989, p. 78-79). It did not take long for Said to establish himself in Istanbul as a scholar. He became known as Said-i Meşhur (Said the Famous). Former head of the court of appeal, Ali Himmet Berki, who was a student at the Law Faculty remembers the coming of Said to Istanbul.

During those years I was a student in the Madrasatü’l-Kuzat (the equivalent of the Law Faculty). [...] Nursi’s name and fame had spread throughout Istanbul; everyone was talking about him in scholarly circles. We heard reports that he was staying as a guest in a han in Fatih and that he answered every sort of question that anyone put to him. I decided to go with some fellow students. One day we heard he was in a teahouse answering questions. We went there immediately. There was quite a crowd, and he was wearing unusual clothes— not the dress of a scholar, but the local dress of eastern Anatolia. When we got close to Nursi he was answering the questions being put him. He was surrounded by scholars who were listening to him in rapt silence and wonder. Everyone was satisfied and pleased with the answers they received. He was replying to the theories of the Sophist philosophers, demolishing them with rational proofs. (Şahiner, 2011, p. 159-160; Vahide, 2005, p. 38).

A similar account was published in the Uhuvvet newspaper in 1964 related by Seydişehirli Hasan Fehmi Efendi (1874-1964) who received his diploma and title of Müderris (madrasa teacher) several months after Said’s arrival in Istanbul and who later served as a teacher and as a consultant in various positions at different madrasas and several administrative (mostly judicial) offices.

It was about the time of the second constitutional period. I was studying in the Fatih Madrasa. I heard that a young man by the name of Bediuzzaman had arrived in Istanbul that he hung the following sign on his door: “Here any
problem is solved, all questions are answered. But no questions are asked.” I thought someone that presumptuous could only be mad. As I began to hear of the many flattering comments concerning him and the admiration expressed by the community of believers and the ‘ulema and students, I was intrigued and tried to get to know him better. I decided I would make up a list of questions covering the most difficult and subtle problems of theology. I, too, was considered quite an expert on such questions at the time. Finally, one day I went to visit him. I presented him with my problems. The answers I received were extremely original and showed great depth. He had answered the questions as if he had been at my side when I prepared them on the preceding night. I was completely satisfied with his performance. (Mardin, 1989, p. 79)

It seems that by posting such a note on his door and participating in scholarly debates, Said Nursi was trying to prove himself to the intelligentsia and consequently to reach out to the Sultan and convince him to financially support his project of establishing a university (Madrasatu ’z-Zahra) in the Eastern provinces. Indeed, Hasan Fehmi Efendi described that after providing answers to his questions, Said Nursi started talking about his proposals for educational reform in the Eastern Provinces (also known as Kurdistan) where the vast majority of inhabitants were speaking Kurdish.

He got out a map, and explained the necessity of opening a university in the Eastern Provinces, emphasizing its importance. At that time there were Hamidiye Regiments in the Eastern Provinces. He explained to us convincingly the deficiencies of this form of administration and said that the region had to be developed through education, industry, and science. He explained that he had come to Istanbul to realize this aim, and he said: “The conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences, and the intellect is illuminated by the sciences of civilization.” (Vahide, 2005, p. 40).

As I describe in more detail below, Said Nursi presented arguments in support of his university project and as part of the solutions he proposed to prevent the decline of Muslim societies. It seems at this point that Said Nursi did not imagine and present his university project exclusively based on religious concerns. In other words, it was
not a project by which he only aimed understanding and responding to the ideological and philosophical challenges of the modern times primarily including the disconnection between the traditional madrasas and modern schools. He also presented this university project as a solution to immediate socioeconomic and sociopolitical challenges facing the Kurdistan region.

Eventually Said Nursi was able to establish connections which would enable him to submit his requests to the Sultan asking him to support the university project (Mardin, 1989, p. 79). He submitted a petition shortly before the Young Turk Revolution (24 July 1908) (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 385). Nonetheless, the petition was rejected by the Palace.

According to Akgündüz (2013, p. 378-414), the petition was blocked in the ranks of bureaucracy before it reached the Sultan. However, Said Nursi published an article in a newspaper in January 1909 describing a conversation he had with Süleyman Şefik Pasha, the Minister of Internal Security (Zabıta Nazırı), reveals that the Sultan might be informed about the petition and the demands it contained. According to Nursi’s account, Süleyman Şefik Pasha told him: “the Sultan [did not accept your project but] sent his greetings and proposed [you] a salary of 1000 Kuruş [cents] which will later be 20 to 30 Liras”. Said Nursi reported that he rejected the offer by saying: “I am not a beggar of salary. I would not accept it even if it was 1000 Liras. [...] With what purpose are you delaying education but hurrying about the salary?” (Said Nursi, 1909, December 2, p. 38-39). It is also documented in governmental archives (See
Akgündüz, 2013, p. 406-407) that the Palace asked Said Nursi to go back to his homeland and that he was offered help to pay travel expenses which he rejected.

We understand from an official telegram sent from Istanbul to the gubernatorial administration in Van on 19 July 1908 that Said’s requests were received with suspicion in the already volatile atmosphere in the eve of the Young Turks Revolution 24 July 1908.

Figure 19. Ottoman archival document recording the secret message (şifre) sent to the authorities in Van (19 July 1908) (Courtesy of Ahmet Akgündüz).

A secret message to the gubernatorial office in Van,

Molla Said (of Bitlis), who was reported in the telegram [we received from you] dated 21 March 1324 [3 April 1908] to be a notable man of good nature is about to arrive [in your region]. However, some of his actions here aroused suspicions that he might attempt at creating some problems there and being part of conspiracies among the local tribes. It is imperative to [monitor his actions and] report whether he is capable of causing such problems. [Published in Akgündüz (2013, p. 405), Trans. ZN].
Not complying with the requests of the palace, Said Nursi remained in Istanbul and continued his activism mostly by publishing articles in support of constitutionalism and the expansion of freedom from political absolutism and despotism. He championed the Revolution of 1908 with the expectation that it would eliminate the obstacles against the flourishing of the Muslim World. However, he was also concerned that the revolution, if it did not go in the right direction, could marginalize religion. That is why he was also publishing open letters to the members of the new parliament expressing these concerns. Said Nursi was publishing some of these articles in the newspaper *Volkan* (Volcano) which was associated with the society of İttihad-ı Muhammedi which was established under the leadership of Derviş Vahdeti.

The newspaper *Volkan* was closed in the aftermath of 31 March incident which was an unsuccessful countercoup attempt against the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress in mid-April of 1909 which came to power after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. As I described in the previous chapter, a broad-based unorganized frontier of opposition was being formed against the CUP as it was increasingly becoming secularist and more authoritarian. Revolts in the form of mutinies against the CUP broke out on the 31st of March (according to the Rumi calendar, which corresponds to April 13, 1909 in the Gregorian calendar) and continued for about ten days. Although the question of who initiated and instigated the revolts is still debated in the academia (Kayalı, 2012, p. 29), it is reported that lower rank *ulema*, madrasa students and *Alaylî* soldiers were among the crowd (Zürcher, 2010, p. 76; Hale, 2013, p. 39) which demanded the institution of the Sharia and resignation of the CUP.
members from high ranking government positions. These uprisings were suppressed by
the Action Army which was formed with the help of the CUP in Rumelia.

A court martial was established to try those who were arrested by the Action
Army because of their involvement in the 31 March incident. Chief among them was
Derviş Vahdeti who was arrested on grounds that it was him and the society of İttihad-ı
Muhammedi under his leadership who instigated the uprising and motivated the crowd.
Said Nursi was arrested, too, with similar charges against him although he published
articles in several newspapers (Volkan, İkdam, Serbesti, Mizan) during the days of
uprisings urging soldiers to remain in their barracks and obey their commanders.

The court martial declared that it found Derviş Vahdeti (1869-1909), who was
turned into the scapegoat of the countercoup attempt, guilty and hung him. Said Nursi
presented a long defense to the court describing his activism in support of
constitutionalism and how he discouraged the people who knew from being involved in
the uprising. He also openly and sharply criticized the CUP for its corruption of
constitutionalism:

Pashas and officers! By way of introduction I say: the manly and brave do not
stoop to crime. And if they are accused of it, they do not fear the punishment. If
I am executed unjustly, I shall gain the reward of two martyrs. But if I remain in
prison, it is probably the most comfortable place when there’s a despotic
government and freedom consists only of the word. To die oppressed is better
than to live as oppressor. [...] I opposed this branch of despotism here, which
has destroyed everyone’s enthusiasm and extinguished their joy, awakened
feelings of hatred and partisanship, and given rise to the formation of racialist
societies, whose name is constitutionalism and meaning is despotism, and who
has besmirched the name of unity and progress. [...] I think the enemies of
constitutionalism are people who make others hostile to mutual consultation by
showing constitutional government to be tyrannical, ugly, and contrary to the
Sharê‘ah. [...] If constitutionalism consists of one party’s despotism and it acts contrary to the Sharê‘ah, let all the world, men and jinn, bear witness that I am a reactionary! (Vahide, 2005, p. 78-79).

After staying in custody for 23 days (Yılmaz 2013, p.18) Said Nursi was acquitted and released by the court martial on the 23rd of May 1909. A few months later (September 1909) the defense he presented was published by Kurdizade Ahmet Ramiz in Istanbul. Local authorities which were under the control of the CUP confiscated some of its copies and requested the Action Army and the police department of Istanbul to ban its publication declaring that “it contained some ideas and description which have the potential of mobilizing the public opinion (efkar-ı umumiyeyi tehyic edecek bir takim ibareyi havi …) (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 668-671).

One Step Closer to the University Dream

Following his release from the prison, Said Nursi went back to the East and travelled among the local tribes with the purpose of urging them to take active part in the development of the constitutionalist system. He also traveled to Damascus and met with the local ulema to discuss the current state of affairs in the Muslim World.

During his travels among the Kurdish tribesmen and his visit to Damascus, Said Nursi was convinced once more about the necessity of establishing a University in the East which brought him back to Istanbul in the spring of 1911. Sultan Abdulhamid II was already deposed by the CUP following the 31 Mart Incident and replaced by his brother Sultan Mehmed Reşad (27 April 1909).

In June 1911, Sultan Mehmed Reşad set out for a well-organized trip to the volatile Rumelian territories of Macedonia and Albania with a large retinue including
dignitaries and delegations from different regions of the Empire. The convoy consisted of several ships. The battleship *Barbaros Hayrettin* was carrying the Sultan and his large personal entourage. Regional delegations were traveling aboard the steamer *Midhat Pasha* (Zürcher, 2014, p. 86-87). Said Nursi was among the delegation of Erzurum (Akgündüz, 2013, p. 792). The Sultan accepted regional delegations, including the delegation from Erzurum, in the second day following the arrival of the convoy in Salonica which was the first stop of the royal trip (Zürcher, 2014, p. 86-87).

The convoy boarded two trains for their next stop at Üsküp. Said Nursi was on board as well. Upon arriving at Üsküp, the Sultan offered his special favors to the local people and to the region. In addition to declaring amnesty to prisoners with the exception of murderers and distributing 30,000 Liras to pay off local feuds, the Sultan promised to financially support the establishment of a madrasa in Priştine (Zürcher, 2014, p. 90). It is reported by Nursi’s biographers that Said Nursi was present when the local notables requested the Sultan to support this project and that he participated in the conversation by claiming that the need for establishing a madrasa in the region of Kurdistan was more urgent (Vahide, 2005, p. 102).

The Sultan pledged financial support of 20,000 gold pieces for the construction of the Madrasa in Priştine. However, this project did not start because of the ensuing turmoil in the region and the First Balkan War (1912). Said Nursi asked the palace to provide the resources spared for this unrealized project to the establishment of the Madrasatu-z Zahra. The capital accepted the request and pledged financial support. Said Nursi returned to the province of Van and laid the foundations of his school in the
vicinity of the town Edremit with an official ceremony including Governor Tahsin Pasha (Şahiner, 2013, p. 125, Duman, 2008; Mardin, 1989, p. 87). Nonetheless, the Second Balkan War broke out soon after (1913) and made it more difficult for the government to send the promised financial assistance. A year later, WWI began and as a result the building of the university stopped and never started again (Mardin, 1989, p. 87). Remaining in Van, Said Nursi started teaching a group of students at a small madrasa in the outskirts of the city until the invasion of the region by the Russians.

**War, Captivity and Return to Istanbul**

When the Russians, with Armenian militia forces on their side, invaded Eastern Anatolia including the provinces of Van and Bitlis during WWI, Said Nursi started serving as an imam in the army (Öztürkçü, 2008, p. 79). When he was requested to form a militia force, he started fighting against the advancing Russian army and the Armenian bands with his students (Vahide, 2005, p. 111).

Said Nursi was captured in March 1916 during the defense of Bitlis and spent two years as a prisoner of war in the Russian city of Kostroma, 200 miles northwest of Moscow. Escaping the prisoners’ camp in the spring of 1918, Nursi traveled through Petersburg, Warsaw, Vienna and Sofia and finally arrived in Istanbul in June 1918 (Şahiner, 2013, p. 150-151).
Figure 20. Said Nursi during WWI in Eastern Anatolia (1916)

Figure 21. Said Nursi’s picture taken by the German authorities en route from the war camp in Kostroma (Russia) to Istanbul (1918).
Figure 22. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (right) in Istanbul with his nephew Abdurrahman in their traditional local dress (c. 1918-1919).

Life after the Establishment of the Turkish Republic

Said Nursi supported the independence movement against the invasion of Anatolia by the Western powers. When the newly established Turkish government was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal in Ankara after the success of the independence movement, Said Nursi was invited to the new capital to be recognized for his contributions to the war efforts against the Russians and for his support of the independence movement. During his several months long stay in Ankara, he had disagreements and arguments with the leaders of the independence movement primarily
including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk about the character of the new system to be established.

Said Nursi went back to the province of Van after his disappointment in Ankara. He later wrote that his trip back to Van started a new chapter in his life as he went through an intellectual transformation about the methodology of religious thinking and about the methodology of religious revival. He called the first part of his life before this intellectual transformation as “the Old Said” and the period after that as “the New Said.” When he went back to Van during the emergence of the New Said, he secluded himself from the society except for teaching religious sciences to a small group of students in the outskirts of the city.

The establishment of the new Turkish Republic was formally announced in 1923 which was followed by top-down secularist and nationalist reforms including but not limited to the abolishment of the caliphate (1924), banning religious schools (1924), closing Sufi lodges (1925), outlawing religious dress in public (1925), adding laicism (secularism) and nationalism as defining characteristic of the state to the constitution (1927) and replacing the Arabic script with the Latin (1928).

A group of Kurds living in the Eastern provinces revolted against the newly established secularist and nationalist Turkish State in 1925 under the leadership of a local Kurdish leader named Şeyh Said. The revolt was suppressed by the Turkish army. Şeyh Said was captured and executed. With the suspicion that they, too, could lead similar uprisings, dozens of Kurdish intellectuals and notables were exiled to other parts of the country. Among them was Said Nursi who was exiled to the Western city of
Burdur and eventually to Barla which was a remote village in the neighboring province of Isparta. The rest of Said Nursi's life past in exiles, house arrests and in prisons. He died in 1960.

Figure 23. Said Nursi with his followers in Ankara (1959)

Shortly after his exile into the Western provinces in 1926, Said Nursi started writing treatises which included his criticisms of the philosophical foundations of secularism. Although they were banned by the government, growing number of Nursi's followers reproduced (mostly by hand), read and distributed these treatises around Turkey.
Under the pressure of the secularist authorities, Said Nursi’s followers also started establishing dershanes (study houses) where they would come together to read and discuss the treatises (The Risale-i Nur) written by Said Nursi (Yavuz, 2003). Eventually, the following of Said Nursi (the Nur Movement) emerged as one of the largest revivalist movements in the Muslim World.
APPENDIX B

AN EXCERPT FROM THE TENTH WORD (EVIDENCES FOR RESURRECTION
AND HEREAFTER)

BY

SAID NURSI
Sixth Truth

The Gate of Splendour and Eternity,
The Manifestation of the Names of Glorious and Eternal.

Is it at all possible that the splendour of Dominicality that subdues and commands all beings, from suns and trees down to particles, just like obedient soldiers, should concentrate its entire attention on the wretched and transient beings that pass a temporary life in the hospice of this world, and not create an eternal and everlasting sphere of splendour, an unending manifestation of Dominicality? The display of Divine splendour in the changing of the seasons, the sublime motions of the planets in the heavens as if they were aeroplanes, the subjugation of all things and the creation of the earth as man's cradle and the sun as his lamp, vast transformations such as the reviving and adornment of the dead and dry globe - all of this shows that behind the veil a sublime Dominicality exists, that a splendid monarchy is at work.

Now such a Dominical kingdom requires subjects worthy of itself, as well as an appropriate mode of manifestation. But look at this hospice of the world, and you will see that the most significant class of its subjects, endowed with the most comprehensive of functions, are gathered together only temporarily and that, in the most wretched of states. The hospice fills and empties each day. All of the subjects stay only temporarily in this abode of trial for the sake of being tested in service. The abode itself changes each hour. Again, all of the monarch's subjects stay only for a few brief minutes in order to behold the samples of the precious bounty of the Glorious Maker, to look on His miraculous works of art in the exhibition of the world with the eye of a buyer. Then they disappear. The exhibition itself changes every minute. Whoever leaves it, never returns, and whoever comes to it, will ultimately depart.

Now this state and circumstance definitively shows that behind and beyond this hospice, this testing-ground, this exhibition, there are permanent palaces and eternal abodes that fully manifest and support God's everlasting sovereignty; there are gardens and treasurehouses full of the pure and exalted originals of the forms and copies we see in this world. If we strive here in this world, it is for the sake of what awaits us there. We work here, and are rewarded there. Bliss awaits everyone there, in accordance with his capacity, as long as he does not squander his share. Yes, it is impossible that such eternal kingship should concentrate exclusively on these wretched transient beings.

Consider this truth through the telescope of the following comparison. You are travelling along a road. You see a caravanserai ahead of you on the road, built by a great personage for people coming to visit him. Millions are spent on the decoration of the caravanserai so that guests should enjoy their one night's stay there, and for their instruction. But the guests see very little of those decorations, look at them for a very short time; briefly tasting the joys of what is offered them, they go on their way without
being satiated. But each guest takes a photograph of the objects in the caravanserai by means of his special camera. Also, the servants of that great personage record with great care the conduct of all the guests and preserve the record. You see, too, that he destroys every day most of the valuable decorations, and replaces them with fresh decorations for the newly arriving guests. After seeing all this, will any doubt remain that the personage who has constructed this caravanserai on the road has permanent and exalted dwellings, inexhaustible and precious treasures, an uninterrupted flow of great generosity? By means of the generosity displayed in the caravanserai, he intends merely to whet the appetite of his guests for those things he keeps in his immediate presence; to awaken their desire for the gifts he has prepared for them. So too, if you look upon the state of the hospice of this world without falling into drunkenness, you will understand the following nine principles:

**First Principle:** You will understand that this world does not exist for its own sake, any more than does the caravanserai. It is impossible that it should assume this shape by itself. Rather, it is a well-constructed hospice, wisely designed to receive the caravan of beings that constantly arrive to alight before departing again.

**Second Principle:** You will understand, too, that those living within this hospice are guests. They are invited by their Generous Sustainer to the Abode of Peace.

**Third Principle:** You will understand, further, that the adornments of this world are not simply for the sake of enjoyment or admiration. For if they yield pleasure for a time, they cause pain for a longer time with their cessation. They give you a taste and whet your appetite, but never satiate you. For either the life of the pleasure is short, or your life is short, too brief for you to become satiated. These adornments of high value and brief duration must, then, be for the sake of instruction in wisdom, for arousing gratitude, and for encouraging men to seek out the perpetual originals of which they are copies. They are, then, for other exalted goals beyond themselves.

**Fourth Principle:** You will understand also that the adornments of this world are like samples and forms of the blessings stored up in Paradise by the mercy of the Compassionate One for the people of faith.

**Fifth Principle:** You will understand, too, that all of these transient objects have not been created for the sake of annihilation, in order to appear briefly and then vanish. The purpose for their creation is rather briefly to be assembled in existence and acquire the desired form, so that these may be noted, their images preserved, their meanings known, and their results recorded. This is so that, for example, everlasting spectacles might be wrought for the people of eternity, and that they might serve other purposes in the realm of eternity. You will understand that things have been created for eternity, not for annihilation; and as for apparent annihilation, it has the sense of a completion of
duty and a release from service, for every transient thing advances to annihilation with one aspect, but remains eternally with numerous other aspects.

Look, for example, at the flower, a word of God's power; for a short time it smiles and looks at us, and then hides behind the veil of annihilation. It departs just like a word leaving your mouth. But it does so entrusting thousands of its fellows to men's ears. It leaves behind meanings in men's minds as numerous as those minds. The flower, too, expressing its meaning and thus fulfilling its function, goes and departs. But it goes leaving its apparent form in the memory of everything that sees it, its inner essence in every seed. It is as if each memory and seed were a camera to record the adornment of the flower, or a means for its perpetuation. If such be the case with an object at the simplest level of life, it can be readily understood how closely tied to eternity is man, the highest form of life and the possessor of an eternal soul. Again, from the fact that the laws - each resembling a spirit - according to which large flowering and fruit bearing plants are formed and the representations of their forms are preserved and perpetuated in most regular fashion in tiny seeds throughout tempestuous changes - from this fact it can be easily understood how closely tied and related to eternity is the spirit of man, which possesses an extremely exalted and comprehensive nature, and which although clothed in a body, is a conscious and luminous law issuing from the divine command.

**Sixth Principle:** You will also understand that man has not been left to graze where he wills, with a halter loosely tied around his neck; on the contrary, the forms of all his deeds are recorded and registered, and the results of all his acts are preserved for the day when he shall be called to account.

**Seventh Principle:** You will understand, further, that the destruction visited upon the beautiful creatures of summer and spring in the autumn is not for the sake of annihilation. Instead, it is a form of dismissal after the completion of service. It is also a form of emptying in order to clear a space for the new creation that is to come in the following spring, of preparing the ground and making ready for the beings that are to come and assume their functions. Finally, it is a form of Divine warning to conscious beings to awake from the neglect that causes them to forget their duties, from the drunken torpor that causes them to forget their obligation of offering thanks.

**Eighth Principle:** You will understand this, too, that the eternal Maker of this transient world has another, everlasting world; it is to this that He urges and impels His servants.

**Ninth Principle:** You will understand, also, that so Compassionate a Being will bestow upon His choice servants in that world such gifts as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, nor has their image crossed the heart of any man. In this we believe. (W:85-88)
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Zubeyir Nisanci was born in Bayburt (Turkey) to the family of İbrahim and Ayşe Nişancı. He finished elementary (1990) and middle schools (1994) in Bayburt and completed his high school studies in the city of Bilecik (1998). He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the Boğaziçi University in Istanbul (2003) and completed his Master's degree in Religious Studies at the Hartford Seminary (Hartford, CT) in 2007. During his Masters studies, Zubeyir also worked as a research assistant at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2004 to 2006).

Zubeyir started his PhD studies at Loyola University Chicago in 2007. In addition to working as a research assitant at Loyola, he taught various courses for the department of sociology and for the Islamic World Studies minor. He also served the Loyola community for two years as a statistics and data analysis tutor as part of his assistantship at the Instructional Technologies and Research Support Department. Under the supervision of Dr. Rhys H. Williams, he completed his dissertation entitled "The Dialectics of Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: The Case of the Said Nursi." Zubeyir has accepted a faculty position as an Assistant Professor in Sociology at Istanbul Şehir University, where he will start teaching in the Fall of 2015.