

## *Introduction*

Turkey held its first democratic elections in 1950 and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952. These dramatic domestic and international developments facilitated an equally dramatic reinterpretation of the country's imagined past and its anticipated future. Under the influence of electoral politics and Cold War competition, Turkish politicians, intellectuals, and voters articulated a distinct vision of mid-century modernity, at once aspirationally liberal, proudly nationalistic, rationally pious, and appropriately prosperous. They optimistically asserted, with the enthusiastic agreement of many foreign observers, that Turkey was on the verge of transcending its notorious clichés by finally reconciling religion and secularism, tradition and modernity, and, of course, East and West.

In exploring Turkey's transformation between 1945 and 1960, I argue that present-day thinkers intent on transcending these same purported binaries have misunderstood what was so unique about the country's mid-century politics. Moreover, recognizing the ease with which authors in this era reworked narratives about history and modernity in order to advance their rival agendas reveals the profound malleability of such narratives, and should make modern scholars more aware of how we politicize them in our own work today.

During the 1950s, Turkey's first democratically elected prime minister, Adnan Menderes, became perhaps the only twentieth-century leader to have both camels sacrificed in his honor and an affair with an opera singer. For critics, each was problematic. For some admirers, it was all part of a thoroughly modern persona. In these years, Turkish politicians sent troops to Korea to defend the liberal ideals of the Ottoman sultans and encouraged Arab leaders to emulate Atatürk's anti-imperial struggle. As future Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit told an American audience, "Turks are more conscious and prouder than ever

of their Asiatic heritage, now that they find themselves regarded as a European as well as an Asiatic nation.”<sup>1</sup>

At the start of the Cold War, Turkish and American commentators shared a belief that Turkey had successfully progressed from the authoritarian modernization of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to a superior form of democratic modernity. The country, they believed, had advanced to the point where pluralistic politics would replace one-party rule and the emergence of a more modern form of Islam would make heavy-handed secularism unnecessary. It was a time when even Bernard Lewis was cautiously optimistic about the resurgence of religious piety: “[T]he Turkish people,” he declared “may yet find a workable compromise between Islam and modernism that will enable them, without conflict, to follow both their fathers’ path to freedom and progress and their grandfathers’ path to God.”<sup>2</sup>

Current scholarship has often presented contemporary Turkish political debates as the continuation of those in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras. Where once scholars were inclined to see Republican history as the gradual realization of Atatürk’s vision, recent work has instead described a mounting popular reaction against it. In this new narrative, the 1950s often appear as little more than an initial step toward the triumph of popular Islamism, as embodied today by the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Approaching mid-century Turkey on its own terms reveals a more complex story. The Democratic Party (DP) was both a realization and repudiation of Kemalist reforms, as well as something else entirely. Turkey’s imperfect but very real democratization between 1945 and 1960 also facilitated a partial reassessment of the sweeping cultural changes the country experienced during the previous decades. In this context, some proposed reforms such as the Turkish language call to prayer were quietly abandoned, while others, such as the widespread translation of the Quran into Turkish, achieved unexpected success. Appreciating the specificity of mid-century cultural politics helps us understand how they shaped – and failed to shape – contemporary views on subjects as diverse as geography, art, sexuality, Ottoman history, urban planning, foreign policy, and Islamic piety.

<sup>1</sup> Draft speech for the Washington International Center, Personal Papers of Bülent and Raḥşan Ecevit, Bülent Ecevit Bilim Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, “Islamic Revival in Turkey,” *International Affairs* Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1952), 48.

The early Cold War era also saw a surge of optimism about Turkey's ability to transcend its long-running identity debates. Rather than describe Turkey as torn between East and West or between tradition and modernity, mid-century politicians, artists, and intellectuals capitalized on a rich history of seizing the middle ground. Believing that the West had already abandoned positivist ideas of modernity as crude and outdated, figures from across the ideological spectrum proclaimed their unique ability to harmonize rival elements of Turkish identity. Through popular history magazines, diplomatic visits, architectural renovations, and religious travelogues, they sought to reconcile Turkey's contradictions in order to achieve some form of authentic civilizational synthesis. In claiming that Turkey could only be fully Western by becoming more Eastern or fully modern by embracing its traditions, individuals regularly used their rivals as foils, accusing them of being either reactionaries or blindly aping the West. These thinkers also made complex use of the United States as a model, identifying diverse aspects of America's political, economic, and cultural development that could justify their conflicting visions for Turkey. The intensity of their efforts was particular to the 1950s, but their rhetorical desire to privilege the often-paradoxical middle ground has proved enduring.

The debates of this period should make us more aware of how, throughout the twentieth century, Kemalist ideologues, American high-modernists, and Islamist reactionaries alike – the very people, that is, who supposedly embraced civilizational binaries – all claimed that Turkey's true destiny lay in overcoming them. Becoming modern, many insisted, meant rejecting oriental backwardness and hyper-Westernization alike. If we do not appreciate the caveats, contradictions, and criticism of the West that accompanied twentieth-century Westernization campaigns, we risk reducing a previous generation of often sophisticated thinkers to foils in our own critiques of hyper-Westernization. This book argues that almost every Turkish modernity was, to some extent, intended as an alternative one. Participants in Turkey's long-standing Westernization debates consistently claimed to be moving beyond them, and transcending Turkey's famous clichés has been a cliché for almost as long as they existed.

Mid-century geopolitical developments added an additional layer of complexity to these debates. In 1952, Turkey decisively ended several decades of foreign policy neutrality by joining NATO. This realignment was a pragmatic response to the strategic threat posed by the Soviet Union,

but it has often been presented in more symbolic terms, as the foreign policy expression of Atatürk's commitment to Westernization. If joining NATO ratified Turkey's European identity, it also brought the country into an alliance with the very European powers against which Atatürk fought. Compounding the contradictions this raised, many Western diplomats were convinced that becoming a part of the anti-Communist West also required Turkey's renewed engagement with the Middle East. And as Turkish politicians unanimously decided to ally with America in order to preserve their country's independence, some began to worry that this new alliance might threaten their independence and national identity as well.

As a result, the foreign and domestic politics of mid-century Turkey prove a particularly poor fit for accounts of Republican history too caught up in criticizing Atatürk's excessive embrace of the West – what İlker Aytürk has called the “post-Kemalist paradigm.”<sup>3</sup> In *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, Şükrü Hanioglu argues that Turkey's founder “rejected the very possibility of a non-Western modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher offers a similar verdict: like other thinkers who advocated “blind submission to Western civilization,” Atatürk believed that European modernity “had to be accepted lock, stock and barrel if Turkey was to survive in the modern world.”<sup>5</sup> The result, according to Cemil Aydın, was that following decades of late-Ottoman experimentation with anti-Western, Pan-Asian, and Pan-Islamic ideologies, Turkey decided to “leave the Muslim World” after concluding that “Eastern-Islamic civilization was dead and could not be modern.”<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the domestic, cultural, and international politics of the 1950s does not require completely rejecting this narrative, but it does require a renewed focus on the exceptions. A number of authors have recently taken a newfound interest in the conflicting attitudes toward the West that persisted in the Kemalist tradition. In discussing

<sup>3</sup> İlker Aytürk, “Post-Post-Kemalizm: Yeni Bir Paradigmayı Beklerken.” *Birikim* (319), 2015, 34–48.

<sup>4</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2013), 204.

<sup>5</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher and Taraj Atabaki, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 201. Tellingly, one of the Pan-Asian thinkers Aydın discusses in his account of anti-Westernism is Rabindranath Tagore, whose poetry was first translated into Turkish by a young Bülent Ecevit.

how the early nationalist thinker Ziya Gökalp influenced Atatürk, for example, Orhan Koçak emphasizes his goal of synthesizing national essence [*has*] and global values [*medeniyet*] so Turks could “be like the West and still be [themselves].”<sup>7</sup> This ambition, Koçak writes, led Gökalp to criticize the “imitative nature of late Ottoman Westernizers,” who sought to borrow too extensively from the West.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, Perin Gürel has explored how early Kemalists deployed accusations of “hyper-westernization” and “westoxication” against their rivals.<sup>9</sup> Atatürk’s attacks against the liberal feminist Halide Edip Adıvar, she argues, were echoed by Republican-era writers who condemned inappropriate Westernization through novels about “over-sexualized” and “treacherous” women engaged in illicit relationships with Western men. Mehmet Döşemeci, in turn, traces this legacy into the 1970s via Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s left-wing nationalism. In opposing Turkey’s membership in the European Economic Community, Döşemeci maintains, Ecevit sought “a return to Atatürk’s original position,” one he claimed had displayed “a profound ambivalence toward the West.”<sup>10</sup>

Ideally, a more nuanced understanding of how Turkey articulated its relationship with Western modernity can help explain how so many observers misunderstood Turkish politics over the past two decades. For Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the meaning of the Menderes era was always clear. In Erdoğan’s view, Turkey’s initial decade-long experiment with democracy represented the first step in a long struggle against authoritarian modernization and hyper-

<sup>7</sup> Orhan Koçak, “1920’lerden 1970’lere Kültür Politikaları,” in Ahmet İnel’s ed., *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasal Düşünce vol. 2, Kemalizm*. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Ziya Gökalp, quoted in Koçak’s “1920’lerden 1970’lere Kültür Politikaları.” Gökalp specifically criticized the Servet-i Fünun literary movement, which he claimed borrowed not only styles and methods from Europe but also its “lyricism and taste,” that is “things which should not be transferred from one society to another.” Koçak argues that from the 1920s through the 1970s Gökalp’s idea of a “synthesis of National Essence and Western Civilization” maintained its influence in cultural politics. This synthesis, he claims, proved far more popular among the Republican cultural elite than Ahmet Ağaoğlu’s assertion, expressed in the 1927 *Üç Medeniyet*, that anything short of complete Westernization was impossible.

<sup>9</sup> Perin Gürel, *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Döşemeci, *Debating Turkish Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 177, 188.

Westernization, one that he himself would ultimately bring to its triumphant conclusion. After carrying his party to victory in 2011, Erdoğan declared that the democracy for which Menderes had given his life was now secure. Then, after being elected president in 2014, he declared that the parenthesis opened by Turkey's 1960 coup had finally been closed.

By 2014, of course, very few Western or Turkish academics saw Erdoğan's victory as a triumph for democracy. But by this point, their work had already helped facilitate Erdoğan's rise to power. In response to Turkey's 1980 coup, a growing body of literature presented authoritarian modernization and hyper-Westernization as defining features of the Republican project, beginning under Atatürk and continuing up through the twenty-first century under the tutelage of Turkey's military and secular bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the AKP's Islamist ideology and politicized embrace of a pious Ottoman past were often presented as Turkey's authentic and perhaps predestined form of alternate modernity. Hyper-Westernized high modernism, associated with the Kemalist elite and American development experts, served as a perfect foil for the AKP's vision of Turkey at peace with its history, its faith, and its role in the Middle East.

Scholars of modern Middle Eastern history have been astute in demonstrating how their predecessors' work, beholden to outdated ideologies like modernization theory, served to justify authoritarianism and advance US geopolitical interests. And yet in the case of contemporary Turkey, these very scholarly critiques, while made with the best of intentions, served equally troubling ends. If reexamining the relationship between ideas and politics in early Cold War Turkey casts that era's thinkers and statesmen in a more complex light, the goal is not to absolve them but rather to become more self-critical about the politics of our own scholarship. Now that the AKP has so thoroughly appropriated scholarly critiques of Kemalism and high modernism, how will our understanding of Turkish history be recalibrated moving forward? We may well see a growing focus on the continuity of conservative or religious nationalism in Turkish politics. And perhaps with it, a renewed search for strands of liberal modernity in the late Ottoman

<sup>11</sup> For a pointed assessment of this trend and its political pitfalls, see Aytürk's "Post-Post-Kemalizm."

and Republican past, examples that can offer an alternative to both Kemalist and AKP authoritarianism.

Each chapter of this book examines an aspect of mid-century modernity that has been misunderstood: democracy, American influence, Westernization, Ottoman history, Orientalism, regional diplomacy, and religious reform. In each case, I argue that an overly simplistic or binary approach to these topics has blinded us to the creative and contradictory ways that people at the time approached them. As a result, recognizing the incoherence of mid-century discourses about history and modernity is a prerequisite for discussing any of them coherently. In working within prevailing narratives of history and modernization, politicians and writers consistently reached surprisingly diverse, and consistently self-interested, conclusions about Turkey's place in time and space – making the East West or the past modern as needed. Understanding how Turkish historians secularized and nationalized the Ottoman Empire, like understanding how American diplomats convinced themselves that successive Turkish regimes were all democratic, helps reveal how easily ideology can be made to accommodate more pressing practical needs.

Chapter 1 examines the immediate aftermath of Turkey's 1950 election, tracing the way both the country's major political parties incorporated democracy into their historical narratives and modernizing ambitions. The DP, for its part, sought to convince voters that democracy would enable them to more effectively realize the populist and materialist promise of Kemalist modernization. Finding itself in opposition for the first time since the country's founding, the Republican People's Party (CHP) sought to take credit for the advent of democracy, while also embracing democratic ideals in their criticism of the DP. In the process, both parties opened an ongoing debate about which of the many Kemalist-era reforms Turkish voters had truly accepted.

Chapter 2 addresses the diverse ways American diplomats employed their ideas of modernization when crafting policy and propaganda for Turkey. While Americans' general understanding of what it meant to be modern remained consistently democratic, it was sufficiently malleable that it could accommodate contradictory conclusions about Turkish democracy as US interests shifted. State Department documents also reveal how American ideas about modernity were, with the cooperation of the Turkish government, consciously transformed

into propaganda aimed both at encouraging Turkish modernization and advertising America's modernity.

Chapter 3 explores the ways mid-century writers used art, history, travel, and gender to articulate a vision of Turkish identity that claimed to synthesize Western modernity and Eastern tradition or transcend this division entirely. While writers from rival ideological backgrounds promoted different versions of Turkish modernity, they nonetheless shared the belief that this modernity should be a synthetic one, combining the best of East and West. In citing American examples to critique European modernity or putting a modern imprimatur on radically different ideas about women's role in society, these authors demonstrated how creatively Turkey's clichés could be employed.

Chapter 4 traces the Kemalist appropriation of Ottoman history, beginning at the moment the empire itself ceased to exist and building up to the 1953 quinquennial of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul. From the 1930s, Turkish historians used a narrative of fatal decline to not only justify Kemalist reforms but also facilitate the selective incorporation of the empire's triumphs into Turkish nationalist history. By 1953, the Kemalist appropriation of the Ottoman past had reached a point where it was possible to celebrate Fatih Sultan Mehmet II as a secular, pro-Western sultan who laid the groundwork for Turkey's membership in NATO.

Chapter 5 analyzes the visual and rhetorical styles through which Ottoman history was modernized. Faced with enduring Western Orientalism, Turkish authors, architects, and illustrators took a number of distinct stylistic steps to celebrate their history while presenting their relationship to it as an unequivocally modern one. The explosion of popular history magazines and historical novels during the 1950s provided a forum in which the act of reading about the past could itself become a performance of modernity. Whether blending popular history with pulp fiction or encouraging Turkish citizens to approach their country from the perspective of Western tourists, Turkish authors pioneered approaches to reappropriating their own past that remain popular today.

Chapter 6 examines how ideas about history and geography shaped Turkey's relations with NATO and the Arab world. After joining NATO by de-emphasizing the alliance's geographic character, Turkey went on to embrace NATO membership as proof of its European identity. Subsequently, Turkish and American officials clashed over



what it meant for Turkey to be a “bridge between East and West.” During the 1950s, Turkey’s initial sympathy toward the Arab world quickly transformed into hostility as Arab nationalism took a pro-Soviet turn. As a result, Arabs who were previously seen as victims of British imperialism suddenly, in a Cold War context, became agents of Soviet imperialism instead.

Chapter 7 addresses the self-consciously modern religious revival of the 1940s and 1950s. It investigates the way government officials and conservative magazine editors promoted this revival as a part of a broader return to faith that encompassed the Christian West and offered a necessary corrective to the limits of positivist modernity. Across the ideological spectrum, they insisted Islam was fully compatible with modern thought and science, while holding very different ideas of what this meant. Their reform efforts won praise from many Western observers, who saw in the advent of modern religiosity proof that Turkey no longer needed the rigid secularism of the Kemalist era.

All of these chapters draw on a range of published and archival sources. The complexity of 1950s modernity can be seen in the print culture of the period. Following World War II, a combination of press freedom, foreign aid, and increased prosperity led to an explosion of publishing in Turkey. Colorful, abundant, and diverse magazines spanned topics from popular history to politics and religion, employing many of the period’s best-known writers and artists and attracting the attention of many influential readers.<sup>12</sup> There was also a vibrant newspaper industry at the time, with papers representing both political parties and a number of more or less independent outlets as well. Finally, several scholarly journals begun in the Republican period continued and expanded their activities during these years. Many of the contributors to Turkey’s mid-century magazines remain famous for their enduring literary and artistic talents. Other contributors, in their eccentricity or earnestness, still contributed something remarkable to the country’s cultural history. If the beauty of their images does not always come through in reproduction or the eloquence of their writing

<sup>12</sup> Even in this era, many publications still fared poorly. Searching in libraries and used bookstores, it is often possible to trace the fortunes of a magazine or its owner as, issue by issue, page tallies shrink, paper grows courser, black-and-white photos replace color, and then, finally, publication ceases altogether, after perhaps a few last-minute appeals for readers to pay their outstanding subscription fees.

in my translation, this book nonetheless seeks to convey the richness of their work alongside its historical significance.

The early Cold War era is uniquely well represented in US government archives. The material in Turkey's Republican Archive (*Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi*) is sparse by comparison, and, while occasionally fascinating, offers only intermittent glimpses into official Turkish thinking during this period. However, close contact between the Turkish and American governments has at times created the odd situation where confidential Turkish documents unavailable in Ankara appear in translation in the United States instead. Conspiracy theories abound about the many ways Washington supposedly influenced Turkish politics during the Cold War. Largely declassified US records offer an excellent source for disproving most of them – and confirming a few as well.

In bringing together intellectual, cultural, political, and diplomatic history, this book explores the relationship between ideas and politics in twentieth-century Turkey. Ideas about modernization theory or the Ottoman legacy were intimately bound up in foreign and domestic policymaking, but consistently proved too malleable to play the causal role historians sometimes assign them. Diplomats, politicians, and writers were adept at interpreting dominant discourses in remarkably creative ways in order to accommodate their immediate interests. This book tells the story of individuals exploiting ideologies, creating and deploying both democratic and authoritarian versions of modernity just as they created secular and pious versions of the Ottoman past.

Moreover, though all these arguments are specific to Turkey, they can help us better appreciate how nations and states across the world position themselves within space and time. Among the many countries that have been described as the meeting point of East and West, Turkey certainly has a unique relationship with this cliché. But every identity is, to an extent, built from paradoxical and flexible components in accordance with the confines and possibilities of the world around it. This book, then, seeks to create a synthesis of its own, reconciling the near-infinite malleability of ideas with the reality of the past, of technological advancement, and of physical location.

In highlighting this malleability, I argue that we have always been too clever to let ideas influence our thinking. For better or worse, agile minds can draw pragmatic conclusions from within the most inhospitable ideological paradigms. On rare occasions, we may prove clear-