# Instituting Religion and Nation:
# The Foundation of Ankara University Divinity School

by

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**Instituting Religion and Nation: The Foundation of Ankara University Divinity School**

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This study examines the controversial character of higher religious education in Turkey by tracing back and problematizing the *mektep-madrasa* /secular-religious education conflict in the late Ottoman Empire and the historicopolitical developments in the early republican era that led to the foundation of the first theology faculty, Ankara University Divinity School in 1949. I argue that A.U. Divinity School developed Turkish-Islamic Theology that prevailed for many years as an academic and public paradigm of Islam which is now being contested by the AKP rule. The recent interest of the AKP in developing its own intellectual milieu and academia called attention to the origin of debates which this study does by textually analyzing the historical and governmental documents, speeches, academic works, and the institutional organization of A.U. Divinity School.

**Keywords**

Higher education, religion, ideology, hegemony, Turkish Islamic thought

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## Instituting Religion and Nation

On October 19, 2020, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the current President of Turkey and the leader of the AKP[1] (Justice and Development Party), honored the opening of the new university campus of Ibn Haldun University, famously known for its School of Islamic Studies, and shared his concerns about the system of education in Turkey as follows:

> Turkey has been exposed to direct Westernism and its poisonous ideologies. We lost our intellectual power to a civilization that does not belong to us in root and spirit due to actions and policies supporting perverse currents in our country. Against this invasion, we need to raise generations in line with our own civilization and goal. We must transform higher education – from undergraduate to postgraduate – into the production center of our nation's national power in every phase. (Ibn Haldun University 2020)

(Higher) education has always been a war zone for clashing political ideologies, one of which the quote points out. The transformation of the education system, in general, was a big part of the modernization process in the late Ottoman period, began in the 18th century (Berkes 1998), and continued to be the center of political struggles in the early years of the Turkish Republic as it is now a terrain for the AKP's political program.

The educational policies executed by the AKP were studied widely as an attempt to Islamization –sometimes Erdoganism – of the education system, considering the increase in the number of religious vocational high schools, theology faculties, and mandatory religion (Islamic)

[1] AKP was founded under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2001 after its predecessor, Welfare Party was closed by the Constitutional Court for violating the Laicism (separation of religion and state) section of the Turkish Constitution. AKP came to power in 2002 and has won every election until today. Erdoğan became the president after Turkey's first presidential election in 2014 and currently, serves the same position.

courses along with the sweeping changes executed in the national education curriculum starting in 2012 (Yilmaz 2018; Cornell 2015; Ozgur 2015). In addition, some studies focus on the privatization of schools along with Islamization, mainly witnessed among universities as proof of the close relationship between Islam and neoliberalism under the AKP rule (Akkaymak & Inal: 2012). A common interpretation among these studies is that the AKP's ideological agenda is constructed on and against the Kemalist modernization project.

Sharing the same interpretation, this study builds its analysis on the argument that the ideological clash between Kemalism and AKP and its manifestation in (higher) religious education cannot be understood without understanding the genesis of this clash that started in the late Ottoman Empire, reflected through the *mektep-madrasa* divide. The duality of education was both a part of and the result of the conflictual sociopolitical trajectories in the late Ottoman period, which was tried to be overcome in the newly founded Turkish Republic by establishing one and only higher education institution to develop the academic study of Islam:

> The struggle between *mektep* (school) and madrasa (Muslim religious school) and the conflict between science and religion have caused bloody stages of history not only in the history of our country but also in the history of humankind… I want the ministry of national education to bear this in mind while making this decision. (T.B.M.M. 1949: 279-280)

The quote shows a representative warning the minister of education about the decision of founding the first theology faculty, Ankara University Divinity School (*Ankara İlahiyat*), in the Grand National Assembly (TGNA) in 1949. The *mektep-madrasa* divide is imagined encapsulating a centuries-old struggle between the religious and the secular, which was also conceived as a conflict between modernity and Islam and included other binaries such as science/religion, modern/traditional, reason/faith. Restructuring higher education in line with

AKP's political agenda, an emerging vision of continuity of the Islamic civilization as well as claims about its inherent 'modernity,' and Islam's increasing presence in sociopolitical discourse in contemporary Turkey all call attention to the need to reconsider the history of these debates.

This study examines the controversial character of higher religious education in Turkey by tracing back and problematizing the *mektep-madrasa* /secular-religious education conflict in the late Ottoman Empire and the historicopolitical developments in the early republican era that led to the foundation of the first theology faculty, Ankara University Divinity School in 1949. I examine the role of *Ankara İlahiyat* in shaping the academic and public understanding and practice of Islam in Turkey and its significance in understanding the current educational policies under the AKP rule. My study is based on a textual analysis of historical and governmental documents, speeches, academic texts by members of that school and an examination of the institutional organization of the *Ankara İlahiyat*.

Tracing back to the origin of the binaries of secular-religious in the context of the claims made about the *mektep-madrasa* controversy and higher religious education will contribute to debates on the history of Islam, modernity, and secularism in Turkish politics and the social foundations of the politics of higher education.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Caveats

This study benefits from and intervenes multiple sociological works of literature from sociology and politics of education to the issues in Islam secularism modernity in Turkey. Due to this multiplex character of the theoretical and conceptual framework, I strictly tried to limit myself to the empirical material and avoid conceptual discussions in the analysis. This study aims to make the empirical materials available and speak for themselves as they are neglected in the contemporary analyses. Having said that, I make use of certain concepts such as ideology and hegemony and will explain under this section in which ways and based on what approach I am using them.

The recent rise of far right-wing parties, authoritarianism, and revival of religion in public and political domains around the world have transformed the field of education from being policy-oriented statistical research to a more interdisciplinary and critical scholarship as the 70's political and ideological crisis questioned the crucial role of schools in incorporating, preserving, and reproducing what counts as legitimate and/or official knowledge (Apple 2012). The first contribution of this scholarship was to elucidate the economic interests in educational policies, which then paved the way for the problematization of the taken-for-granted political, social, and ethical interests and commitments in the system of education. A complementary analysis that leans more heavily on a cultural and ideological orientation is needed to fully illuminate the mechanisms of domination and how they work in education (Apple 2019). The term ideology interpreted in the Marxist approach is the dominant aspect of the superstructure, used by the ruling class to control the means and relations of production and justify the organization of the society. Within the dialectical relationship between superstructure and base, ideology has a critical role in justifying

the prevailing societal structure. Accordingly, I use the term ideology in this analysis as the set of organizational means, discourses, institutional formations, organization of daily life, and such, which is created by Kemalism in the early republican era and by the AKP rule in contemporary Turkey since 2012.

Althusser explains the term "ideological interpellation and reproduction (hailing)" as the reproduction of subjects who believe their identities are naturally constituted within the social structure by the regimes or states to control and maintain power over the existing social stratification (1970). The said process of interpellation is, according to Althusser, carried out through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), which are the tools/means of the existing political and ideological hegemony to reproduce the prevailing relations of production in the society. Like other institutions such as family and church, education is one of the tools of this reproduction and has elements of both ISA and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) (military, police enforcement) in reproducing the existing relations of production (Mayo 2014).

Gramsci sheds light on this process by changing the focus from "economic class" to "social class" with the term cultural hegemony, which brings forth the social construction of the hegemonic set of relations in the society imposed by the ruling class. The way Gramsci perceives and explains cultural hegemony is an important step in understanding its complex and heterogeneous form. For him, cultural hegemony is reproduced through institutions, group valuations, practices, beliefs, and even on a personal level of conforming to the status quo by taking the hegemonic set of organization as self-evident (Williams 2020). The concept of hegemony negates the simplified understanding of "reproduction" as an ahistorical and mechanical way of society reproducing itself and stresses the involvement of constant conscious and

unconscious practices changing through time and dependent on the historicity and the sociopolitical and economic conditions (Apple 2019:4-5).

This study incorporates a two-level analysis through which the relationship between the system of education and sociopolitical and economic dynamics can be captured (Apple 2019:15). The first level is the examination of the schools as an institution meaning the exploration of the education policies in the particular country, the history and transformation of the education system or the respective part of it, and the organizational structure of the educational institutions. In this study, I am doing this by closely examining the transformation of (higher) religious education in Turkey, beginning from the 18$^{th}$ century late Ottoman Empire to today, based on the key political and historical breakthroughs. This examination gives background to the study by shedding light on the historicity and particularity of the case. The second level is to textually and structurally analyze the organization and the curricula of the institution and related works produced in the institution. When the existing and absent knowledge is questioned on the basis of the historical, political, and cultural context, it will shed light on the power-knowledge relationship, such as whose knowledge is existent or absent, how, and for what purposes (Foucault 2003). This problematization questions what is normally unquestioned, considered official, legitimate, and scientifically objectified, meaning it claims neutrality and the justified body of knowledge (Bourdieu and Passeron 1994). Apple uses the term "selective tradition," which he adopts from Williams, to explain "the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded" (2019:5). Gramsci also discusses the concept of "powerful knowledge," which is a term that can be read with Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledge" to explain the relationship between power and the process of knowledge production, such as how some

knowledge is oppressed, forbidden, or forgotten while some easily establish their validity and reliability. The textual examination of the scholarly works, documents, faculty organization, and curricula of Ankara University Divinity School corresponds to this second level of analysis.

I think a Marxist intervention and rethinking of the concepts of ideology, hegemony, and reproduction would be fruitful in theoretical and empirical studies on the relationship between politics and higher education. However, I want to stress that, and which will be discussed in the following sections, the ideological or hegemonic practices in relation to higher education institutions do not necessarily mean that the intellectual milieu in these institutions or the academic knowledge production processes are homogenously part of the ideological reproduction. On the contrary, the complex dynamics within the institutions, the agency of the scholars, changing contexts, and historical transformations are all effective in the mentioned processes.

I avoided discussions on modernity, secularism, and Islam in this section because I do not think the related theoretical and conceptual dialogues would be helpful in understanding this subject matter. Instead, I tried to show the relevant points and debates made within the empirical material I am examining in the analysis. In this way, I tried to minimize my own interpretation of these concepts (which is not the purpose of this study in the first place) and stress how these concepts are touched upon in the material.

## The Fall of Madrasa

To understand the transformation of higher religious education and the changing historical conjunctures that shape the relationship between politics and education in Turkey, one needs to blow the dust off the archives and historical analyses, which is the purpose of this section. The problematization of higher religious education from the late Ottoman Empire to today's Turkey unravels the lines of history and its relation to what is happening now.

The history of the Ottoman *madrasa* can be traced back to 1331 when a *madrasa* was established in then capital Nicaea of the Ottoman Emirate to teach Sunni Islamic doctrine, which improved and increased in numbers with the expansion of the empire until their abolition in 1924 (Inalcik 2001). *Madrasa* was considered the self-governing, common-traditional school, usually funded by waqfs, where students learn mathematics, medicine, philosophy, and astronomy alongside Islamic teachings such as *fiqh* (Islamic law) and *kalam,* Islamic philosophy at different levels. *Madrasa* was not a religious school per se, but a traditional school where various subjects were taught alongside Islamic teachings by scholars gathered from the Islamic world in the campuses called Külliye[2], a complex located near mosques, where the classes were given, and some of the teachers and students permanently live (Sakaoglu 2003).

[2] Külliye was also a place for socialization and charitable services for the public organized by the waqfs.

İlmiye[3] was one of the four institutions[4] – sometimes called class or group – in the state organization of the Ottoman Empire whose function was to spread Islamic knowledge and ensure its proper enforcement in law and interpretation in schools (Bein 2011). When someone successfully passes the advanced level of education at a *madrasa*, they could become an Ulema[5] and be awarded the highest rank, Shaykh al-Islam, a powerful administrative position in the social and political affairs of the empire. The understanding and practice of Islam were under the monopoly of Ulema and Shaykh al-Islam both through the *madrasa* education and the sociopolitical position they hold. Being religious authorities and intellectuals, the Ottoman Ulema had the power over the perception of Islam in public and in politics (Sakaoglu 2003:23). They were the producers of Islamic knowledge (public use and law), responsible for the teaching, proliferation, and legitimacy of that knowledge, which gave them the power of being the sole sovereign of this process of knowledge production. This intellectual stratum, the Ulema, and *madrasa*s were highly influential in establishing the ideological discourse for their time until a sturdier one displaced it.

Starting in the late 18th century, a secular, technical type of school, *mektep*[6], emerged in the empire as part of modernization reforms in international politics, bureaucracy, and military

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[3] *İlm* (sometimes *İlim*) is an Arabic word and used as an Islamic term for knowledge. It is interesting that in Turkish, there is a word *bilim*, which means "science," but with the AKP government, the word *ilim* began to be used frequently in synonym with the word *bilim*. For instance, some departments are named as *İslami İlimler* and translated in English as Islamic Sciences. The use of the word *ilim* Instead of *bilim* has a symbolic meaning in it, which points out that the knowledge produced is scientific, but the way it is done is Islamic, which is a position most of the time against the Western hegemony via science.

[4] Other three were *kalemiye* (administrative), *mülkiye* (imperial) and *seyfiye* (military).

[5] Ulema is an Arabic term with Islamic connotation, meaning "the learned ones," which is still used in some countries, referring to Islamic intellectuals, scholars, or *Alim*s (a religious knowledge authority that is not necessarily affiliated with an educational institution). Because of that, I use "the Ottoman" as an adjective indicating the Ulema I am talking about is specific to a particular region, time-period, and societal organization. To avoid repetitiveness, I will use Ulema without stressing "the Ottoman," but this still refers to the Ottoman Ulema.

[6] This schools should not be mistaken for the *sibyan mektep* which existed in the empire for years where children learn basic Islamic doctrines in primary-elementary level.

technics. A French model was used in these secular schools, and European instructors were hired to improve knowledge in the areas that the empire was considered weak at, like political and military science (Ergin 1977; Kazamias 1966). The education system was being restructured, *mektep* seizing the legitimate position formerly *madrasa* held and its graduates disqualifying the sociopolitical power of Ulema and Shaykh al-Islam. The Ottoman Ulema was an obstacle for the "secularizers" in educating the Turkish nation "in the path of positive science and of opening a door for the grounding of civil liberties" (Mardin 1991:127).

A conflictual duality emerged between *mektep* and *madrasa* not as a mere educational problem but as one of the causes and the results of other binaries in the late Ottoman Empire such as west/east, traditional/modern, secular/religious, religion and science, and many more. It was a reform and reordering not only of the education system but of the already established social values, Islam, tradition, religion with the new ones, secularism, modernity, and science; it was a "revolution of values" (Mardin 1971:209). This conflictual situation had increased over time and came to the point where it was simply irredeemable when Islamic education became a part of the higher education curriculum in a modern secular institution, Istanbul *Darülfünûnu*, the first officially recognized university in the empire, founded in 1845 (Berkes 1998:178).

Having Islamic education within the body of a modern-secular educational institution galvanized the already deep-rooted binaries and created the conflict between the study of Islam as a religion and the study of Islam as a part of social science under a modern-secular institution, making Islam an object of science. Scientific-secular education opened the path for a social scientific study and understanding of Islam. At the same time, teachers in these institutions were given the legitimacy about saying what Islam is in this process which was previously only owned by the Ulema and Shaykh al-Islam. Against this 'invasion,' Ulema condemned the use of

blackboard and scientific experiments as witchcraft while accusing teachers at these institutions. A famous instance was the accusation of Hasan Tahsini and Al-Afghani, two renowned scholars, as being nonbelievers[7], which was only one of the reasons that led to the shutting down of Istanbul *Darülfünûnu* (Sakaoglu 2003:81).

There were attempts to solve this conflict between *mektep* and *madrasa* by executing many educational policies before the republic's foundation, and the problem was attracting politicians and intellectuals in the whole country. As a renowned critical thinker in Turkish history, sociologist Ziya Gokalp addressed this duality in the education system as a reflection of the sociopolitical transformation in the empire. Besides being a sociologist, writer, and poet, Gokalp was a political activist, an advocate of the Turkification of the Ottoman Empire, theorized and popularized Pan-Turkism, and was highly influential in the development of Kemalism and its heritage in the modern Republic of Turkey (Parla 1985:7). The positivist understanding of the world Gokalp built on the thought of Emile Durkheim, who is known as the principal architect of modern social science, is visible in his works and his poem about the *mektep-madrasa* conflict. The poem is as follows:

Science has one truth

And cannot contain paradoxes

Education should not have two separate paths.

The old and the new, by merging

Should dissolve each other

That is when exists a Kulliye! (Tansel 1989:138)

[7] There is a quote by Hasan Tahsini he made after these allegations: “Ignorance is a must, learning and maturing is a crime. Oh God, I repent for learning science”.

In his poem, Gokalp represents his political ideal of one science, one nation, one civilization in a cosmopolitan setting to the system of education as one. Gökalp's interest in this issue is significant not only because he was a contemporary thinker at the time but because his political ideals occurred to be similar to the values of the Republic of Turkey and the educational policies executed, which are manifested in *Ankara İlahiyat*. Therefore, it is essential to understand that Islam was not replaced by new values, which were assumed for the other binaries such as modern versus traditional. Rather another understanding and practice of Islam were constructed academically and publicly through *Ankara İlahiyat*. Yet the alternatives, the 'old' ones, must have been eliminated first.

With the rise of secular, modern curricula in *mektep* and higher education, the power of Ulema and *madrasa* had rapidly decreased until they were abolished one year after the foundation of the Turkish Republic along with the Caliphate and Shaykh al-Islam in 1924.[8] Schools were unified and institutionalized under the Ministry of Education, building the national educational system, while Islam became institutionalized and regulated by the Directorate of Religious Affairs[9].

In 1933 *Dâru'l Fünûn,* the first attempt at a modern and secular university that included a theology faculty, was transformed into Istanbul University, and the theology faculty in *Dâru'l Fünûn* was replaced by the Islam Research Institute, which was closed down three years later and replaced by just one course named "Islam and its Philosophy" under the Faculty of Arts (Reed 1956:296). Not only the extent of higher religious education was being narrowed down, but the

[8] See; https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.430.pdf

[9] Idiosyncrasy of Turkish laicism is apparent here. It is not the separation of religion and state but state being the one and only to regulate religion and religious education through the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education.

curriculum also had been altered to establish the study of Islam as a part of social science or humanities discipline (Ergin 1977). The twofold education system *mektep-madrasa* was tried to be unified with the unification of education law, and the dual mindset associated with it was also attempted to be eliminated by limiting the borders of Islamic knowledge production or simply reframing its boundaries. Finally, in 1941, because of the lack of interest among youth, the course was removed from the curriculum altogether (Ocal 1986:115). For sixteen years, there was no higher education institution for the academic study of Islam in Turkey besides a few Islamic Institutes raising religious functionaries to fulfill the need across the country until the situation changed with the foundation of *Ankara İlahiyat* in 1949 (Pacaci & Aktay:1999).

## Instituting Turkish-Islamic Theology: Ankara University Divinity School

After years of absence of an official higher religious education institution, in 1949, Ankara University School of Divinity, the first theology faculty in Turkey, was founded after long discussion sessions in the TGNA (Reed 1956:296). In these debates, the first thing was to prove that this school would be completely different from the *madrasa* in terms of its purpose and organization:

> I ask myself the purpose of founding a theology faculty and immediately answer my own question as it is not to resurrect the *madrasa* for sure! There is a fundamental difference between these schools: *Madrasa* indoctrinates Nass and the a priori while faculties as scientific institutions try to observe, compare, and, if possible, explain the phenomena. That is, the former is subjective while the second is objective. So, the government's request, which is worth paying attention to, is: To create a faculty with the dignity and character of science in all its sense. (T.B.M.M. 1949:280)

The pioneer of the Turkish education reform, Baltacıoğlu stresses not only the importance of the scientific study of Islam but also the study of it in a secular, modern, Western institution. We know that *madrasa* was not a religious school per se since it offered courses in astronomy, medicine, and mathematics alongside the Islamic doctrine (Ergin 1977:15). We witness two binaries in conflict here: science and religion on the one hand, secular and religious on the other. The new faculty was supposed to overcome these dualities by creating the scientific study of Islam under a modern-secular higher education institution that would unify and legitimize this in public as well. The popular academic approach at the time in Turkey was positivism, taken as the methodological and epistemological basis for studying Islam. Objectifying Islam was a critical

step not only in academia but also in public. Since this program and the graduates were considered the only means to produce and spread Islamic knowledge, this unique position gave them the power and means of legitimizing the knowledge they would produce with the government's support.

This new institution should have been in line with the values of the newly founded republic, unified on the principles of Western, secular, modern education, which will overcome the *mektep-madrasa* conflict, the duality predominant in the country for years now. So, this educational reform was supposed to reframe the borders of Islamic thought and package its knowledge production:

> It has been decided to establish a faculty of theology in our country, similar to the examples in the West, to enable the study of religions based on scientific principles and provide the necessary conditions for the training of clergy with strong professional knowledge and thoughtful thinking… There were times when we asked for a fatwa for the printing press to enter the country. We all know examples of these in history. This is the result of the struggle of religion and science, the struggle of mektep and *madrasa*. (T.B.M.M. 1949: 279)

"To provide the necessary conditions" shows that the foundation of a theology faculty was not only an issue of educational policy but precisely a political matter in the country. Higher religious education was controlled and regulated for years, since the early years of the Republic of Turkey, to avoid any religiously motivated unrest in the country, which was emphasized repeatedly in the meeting:

> I ask our Minister of National Education not to forget how much we have been struggling for 25 years to eradicate the evil done to this country by those who misunderstood the religion (Islam) and abused it for personal interests. I ask the Minister of National Education to prevent such a mentality in this country. This institution is necessary to raise

> clergymen to fill our great mosques. However, there are two concerns I wanted to point out. What will be the curriculum of this faculty? Why is that decided to create a new faculty instead of reopening the former one at Istanbul University? (T.B.M.M. 1949:281)

The fear of religious rebellion in the country made them question not only the role of the theology faculty but also the content of its education. This notable political intervention suggests a salient fear and hesitation about the development of alternative Islamic thoughts and/or rebellions against the government.

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the power of newly founded nation-states was successfully maintained with comprehensive national educational reforms. In fact, it was Mussolini's 1923 educational reform (Gentile Reform) in Italy through which Gramsci examines the role of education in maintaining the prevailing cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971:26-43). Similarly, in Turkey, abolishing the old education system was not enough; a new institution was necessary to create and maintain a particular understanding and practice of Islam and national values:

> During the last years, we saw that various reactionary atmosphere was blowing in the country, and we made preventive speeches and interviews with criticism of their attempts. Our concern was not of any irreligiousness or the issues that this would reveal but was that the bloody events that we have seen in history in the country, just in this mask, would not recur. Otherwise, CHP (the Republican People's Party), never kept the true believers, true religious companions, and those institutions under lock and did not intend to do so. We considered the principle of secularism only as not interfering with religious affairs with world affairs and showed this faithfully. With the decision to establish the Faculty of Theology, which will raise the highest clergy, and by bringing its law to the High Council,

> we have proved personally that these sheer calumnies are completely unwarranted. We have always respected true religious scholars and have appreciated true religious people. What will be the program of these institutions what will be the content of their curriculum must be known indeed. I am confident that the university students and young people who will graduate from this faculty will be dispersed to all four corners of the country and give correct information to our Muslim citizens by explaining the true aims of religion. (T.B.M.M. :281)

The quote furthers that establishing a theology faculty was put in the context of the predicament of modernity, secularism, and Islam and the dichotomous relationship it has created. As the ruling party, CHP is positioned with its values of secularism laicism against the religious reactionaries who are "falsely" accusing CHP of being oppressive toward the visibility of Islam in public. Once again, the theology faculty and the content of its curriculum became o political matter placed in the middle of an ideological struggle established between the values of the founder party; modernism, secularism, laicism, science, and the values of the mindset against them; tradition, religion, faith. The foundation of the Republic of Turkey was read by many as a coup d' é tat and an acute revolution (Gole 2015). On the contrary, rather than a gap or a discontinuity as argued in these readings, a continuity of the same struggle of the binary mindsets of dichotomous values is seen in the debates in TGNA. In "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," Mardin defines the Turkish Revolution as the "revolution of values," emphasizing how revolutionaries were still showing the influence of the Ottoman-Islamic background in the sense that it replaced the old values with the new ones, but the system of organization stayed the same, which can be shown as the artificial character and idiosyncrasy of Turkish modernization (Mardin 1971:209). He problematizes Islam's significance as a value that brings together the ruler and the ruled,

arguing that Islam was one of the important values in society by its constant presence and role in regulating social relations. It had a double function: for the ruler, it was the linkage between the ruler and the ruled, and for the ruled, it was an alternative to the polity and a buffer against the authority (Mardin 1991). I think this interpretation captures the ideological struggle represented through the TGNA debates on the foundation of the first theology faculty, as the struggle between the values of different ideologies is self-evident. Even though the new ideology embraces different values, the conflictual relationship prevails. The last speech in the debate, which aimed to clarify the purpose of the theology faculty – still ambiguous in the content but very sharp on the explanation of what this theology faculty is not – belonged to the minister of the Ministry of National Education:

> Today, this institution that we want to establish within our university community - the scientific community - will be an institution in line with the conditions of the new civilized and modern social life that Atatürk's revolution has brought us and will be worthy of the identity of our new society. This is why we are planning to establish an institution that provides theology within a higher education institution, as in all Western countries. We do not intend to revive the old *madrasa* style of education in our country and to educate people accordingly. The *mektep* and the *madrasa* have worked side by side for a hundred years since the Tanzimat and raised people with two antagonistic mentalities in our country. These two-minded people have been rounded up in an internal mentality struggle that lasted for a century. The theology faculty we are attempting to establish will not be an institution that will work with this mentality. We are determined to never let our country and our intellectuals fall into this kind of struggle again. The high clergy to be trained by this institution, which will be formed within this scientific community, will be people with the

> same mentality and aspirations as all our intellectuals, civil and military. As we paid attention to this matter in its establishment, we will always pay attention to the operation and continuation of this institution. In this respect, the faculty of theology will be established in a positive scientific light ground, let alone encourage some reactionary movements. It will perform the function of prohibiting them, losing them, and destroying them. Like all scientific institutions established since the Tanzimat, the Faculty of Theology will also be a torch, and superstitioners will escape from this torch just like bats. You light a torch of science, and only a benefit will come from this torch. (T.B.M.M. 1949:281-2)

These remarks and cautious explanations stress the relationship between the political ideology of the era and higher religious education. The Ministry of Education strongly noted that this establishment is not a continuation but an intervention to the old conflicting twofold mentality and will be the ground for theological knowledge production in line with the other scientific disciplines. This explicit and evidential ideological discourse has received many criticisms pointing out that the consequences of the Kemalist modernization project were disastrous for Islamic knowledge production in Turkey academically and publicly (Kara 2017:361-367). It was very difficult to find Islamic intellectuals or officials to inquire about basic religious knowledge or demand Islamic practices, especially in rural areas (Kara 2017:368-369). It was also claimed that as a result of this ideological discourse, the academic study of Islam, higher religious education, in general, could not find itself a ground on which it would come out as an academic discipline in the university organization and stayed as a "refugee of science" for years (Duzgun 2017: 11).

After the establishment of *Ankara İlahiyat* was agreed upon, the next problem was to answer the question of how. Turkey never has had different programs like divinity school, religious

studies, and theology faculties seen in European countries, which can be differentiated by their purpose of education. The plan was to create a program having the purposes of all these different programs; creating a cosmopolitan Islamic intellectual milieu, raising Islamic scholars who objectify Islam as a social scientific inquiry while also being devoted Muslims themselves. Islam should have been studied as an academic discipline itself, not under other faculties as it happened at Istanbul *Darülfünûnu* (T.B.M.M. 1949:283). In this way, Islam itself would become a scientific study object rather than a subcategory of another scientific discipline. Besides, it had to offer a broad range of classes on other world religions languages like French and Arabic and be supplemented by other social science disciplines such as sociology, history, and philosophy (Reed 1956; Reed 1957). The students had to be raised as religious practitioners, being devoted Muslims themselves who also hold the values of the republic supposedly in conflict with the former one.

Table 1 shows the curriculum of the school of divinity for the first two academic years. The first thing that stands out is the lack of specific courses on fiqh and kalam, which constitute the main parts of Islamic doctrine which used to be taught in *madrasa*. The repetition of the term "history" almost makes the program look like a history department with elective courses on religion. The language courses in Arabic, Persian, English, French, and German signify how this program positioned itself in the middle of the two supposedly clashing worlds: the West and the East and aimed at raising scholars who can read and understand the languages of both worlds. The abbreviation F.L.H.G. stands for the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography, established, and delegated by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk himself in 1935 to raise scholars who will develop and spread national consciousness. The faculty's mission was to create a corpus of Turkish history and culture supported by courses on Turkic history, Sumerian and Hittite languages, and Latin and modern languages (Anon 2022). Having lecturers from this faculty give classes at *Ankara İlahiyat*

was neither a random choice nor a mere logistical solution. This decision reflects how *Ankara İlahiyat* was imagined to be, neither a Western nor an Eastern type of theology; this school was planned to develop and institutionalize the Turkish-Islamic theology.

***Table 1*** **Ankara University Divinity School, Curriculum 1949-1950. Retrieved from İlahiyat Fakültesi Tarihçe Münir Koştaş, 1989.**

| COURSES | HOURS/WEEK | LECTURER |
|---|---|---|
| Arabic | 6 | Lugal at the F.L.H.G. |
| Persian | 2 | Prof. Necati Lugal at the F.L.H.G. |
| Foreign Language (Eng. French. Germ.) | 4 | Foreign Language Dept. of F.L.H.G. |
| Sociology | 2 | Mehmet Karasan at F.L.H.G. |
| Logic and Philosophy of Sciences | 4 | Hamdi Ragip Atademir at F.L.H.G. |
| Islam and History of Sects | 4 | Prof. Yusuf Ziya Yorukan |
| History of Islamic Art | 2 | Prof. Remzi Oguz Arik |
| Comparative History of Religion | 2 | Prof. Hilmi Ziya Budda |

Like any other institution in the country, *Ankara İlahiyat* has changed and transformed in seventy-three years of its academic life. Table 2 shows the recent organization of the school, divided into three departments with different areas of interest.[10] Compared to its first curriculum, the number of classes on Islamic doctrines seemed to be added to the curriculum, while other social sciences and humanities courses increased in number and varied greatly.

[10] For a more detailed information about the curriculum of Ankara University Divinity School please see; http://www.divinity.ankara.edu.tr/en/divinity-in-english/

***Table 2*** **Academic Departments, Ankara University Divinity School in 2019. Retrieved from http://divinity.en.ankara.edu.tr/.**

| ANKARA UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL | | |
|---|---|---|
| BASIC ISLAMIC STUDIES | RELIGIOUS STUDIES | ISLAMIC HISTORY AND ARTS |
| Quranic Exegesis | Logic | Islamic History |
| Hadith | History of Philosophy | History of Turkish-Islamic Arts |
| Islamic Jurisprudence | Islamic Philosophy | Turkish-Islamic Literature |
| History of Islamic Sects | Philosophy of Religions | Turkish Religious Music |
| Sufism | History of Religions | |
| Arabic Language and Rhetoric | Sociology of Religion | |
| | Psychology of Religion | |
| | Religious Education | |

The recent organization of *Ankara İlahiyat* shows that the study of Islam, based on social scientific premises, is still being conducted today with a less positivistic and more liberal orientation. Being the first attempt at the academization of religious –Islamic – knowledge in Turkey, *Ankara İlahiyat* has been the object of studies that try to describe the academic approach and Islamic thought produced among the scholars of the program as *yenilikçi, akılcı,* and *Kur'ancı,* which could be merged under the name Ankara Okulu[11] or Ankara Paradigm (Dorroll 2014).

*Yenilikçi* is translated to English as modernist or reformist. The reason *yenilikçi* is used for *Ankara İlahiyat* is mainly related to the political history of its establishment discussed above. Establishing a divinity school within the structure of modern higher education after years of absence was an educational reform at the time. Guler, one of the renowned scholars and representative of the Ankara Paradigm, explains the so-called conflict between modernity and Islam as the problem of Islamic thought, denying the dynamism and change in societies and any

[11] The scholars at A.U. Divinity School and their approaches are widely referred as Ankara Okulu since the scholars established a publishing company by the same name. In years some scholars have left the organization and opened their own press called OTTO. Both organizations publish books on Islamic Studies.

kind of analysis or Islamic thought that deals with the problems of today should be considered as "modern" (2014:62). Kirbasoglu, another acclaimed scholar at *Ankara İlahiyat*, defines *yenilikçi* approach as a realistic approach through which scholars are encouraged to make self-reflexivity and critically address their object of studies in Islamic theology to solve the problems of today (Kirbasoglu 2015B:9). This is why describing the works of the scholars in *Ankara İlahiyat* as "Modern Islamic Studies," "Modern Theology," or "Islamic Modernity" (Dorroll 2021) does not quite capture the characteristics of this paradigm since the same concepts could be used to describe the new Islamic Sciences Programs supported by the AKP as a mean to develop its political ideology – which is in conflict with the Kemalist ideology – intellectually and institutionally.

In Ankara Paradigm, the reason is considered a common quality for all human beings, and science is the ability to use reason in a systematic and methodical way is a force that makes us human (Duzgun 2018:128-129). Kirbasoglu criticizes the Islamic thought and movements today as they are ruminating the knowledge of the past, while they should follow the developments in the world – especially scientific ones –, to have a critical and inquisitive mentality and use reasoning in their works (Kirbasoglu 2015:22-23). This approach is known as *Akılcı*[12], prioritizing reason without abandoning the faith. *Kur'ancı* means Quranist, a person who bases their knowledge and practice of Islam on the Quran instead of on hadith, which necessities chain of hierarchy or "experiential knowledge" learned through dervishes in cults (Cinar 2022). Two essential properties make a person Quranist; using reason to analyze, understand and explain the Quran with an empirical and historical approach. Duzgun, a scholar of the Ankara Paradigm, argues that

[12] The dictionary translation of the term *akılcı* is rationalist which is not how it is used by the scholars of Ankara Paradigm.

> every science has a rational attitude to its own research area and constantly revises its research data under changing historical circumstances. The sciences constitute their theories under these constantly changing historical conditions. Human reason is the common denominator of knowledge and scientific thought. (Duzgun 2018:196-197)

As the quote sets forth, the understanding of science and scientific study of Islam under *Ankara İlahiyat* means employing reason, historicity, empiricism, and criticality as tools to create a social scientific analysis of Islam or related issues. Besides the significance of scientific premises, another vital point is touched upon by Duzgun as follows:

> The claim that knowledge is monopolized or that whether the knowledge is 'Eastern' or 'Western' does not matter. The value of knowledge is not sought by its geographic affiliation but by whether it is accompanied by *hikmet*[13] , which determines the field and method of using knowledge. (Duzgun 2018:135)

This quote identifies an interesting point related to faith/reason problematization: reason and knowledge become useful by being accompanied by faith. It is not about the imminent importance of science but about using science and scientific tools for the good of humanity, nature, and such, which the scholar decides through their reason and faith. This approach eliminates any hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, religion, and geographic affiliation, as Duzgun contends. Despite or because of the sociopolitical conjuncture this program is established on, the Ankara Paradigm scholars exhibit a rather critical position on such binaries and hold a postcolonial understanding in their approaches (Kirbasoglu, 2015B:16-18).

[13] Hikmet can be translated into English as wisdom. The term itself has an religious connotation which makes it difficult to translate its exact meaning into English. For a more detailed discussion of Duzgun on the concept of *hikmet* see: Ankara Üniversitesi Hür İlahiyatçılar Topluluğu. (2014, November 10). Retrieved April 04, 2019, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITWHJqcZSIs

Against the dogmatic *madrasa* and conformism of the Ottoman Ulema (Duzgun 2013:136-137), *Ankara İlahiyat* was founded on and for the values of the newly founded republic. This historicopolitical background of its establishment, *Ankara İlahiyat*, has created and developed a particular understanding of Islam based on social scientific premises, known as Ankara School or Ankara Paradigm. Although the academic approaches among the scholars of this paradigm varied, the common propositions discussed in this section have made this paradigm peculiar in creating the Turkish-Islamic Theology, which spread throughout the country, going beyond academia.

It is already covered how the creation of Turkish Islamic theology was not only an academic issue but a sociopolitical matter in terms of expanding this paradigm, this understanding of Islam to the whole country, which was also a global matter. But how did this happen? Being professors in universities, teachers in schools, and religious officers and practitioners around the country, graduates of *Ankara İlahiyat* had the power to shape the public understanding of Islam for a long time in Turkey. However, the most effective medium was the Directorate of Religious Affairs, whose almost half of the presidents were chosen from the graduates of *Ankara İlahiyat* (Journal of Diyanet; n.d.).

Founded in 1924, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was to carry out the religious and administrative duties previously performed by Shaykh al-Islam (Diyanet 2013). It is a sign of peculiarity of Turkish laicism: Islam as a religion was neither eliminated nor separated from the government. Instead, Turkish understanding of Islam is institutionalized academically through *Ankara İlahiyat* and publicly through the Directorate of Religious Affairs, commonly referred to as *Diyanet*. Graduates of *Ankara İlahiyat* were considered the ones who officially got higher religious education and a valid diploma in the country, followingly the ones who were qualified enough to work at *Diyanet*. In the absence of any alternative entity to spread Islamic thought,

*Diyanet* had the monopoly over the production of Islamic thought with *Ankara İlahiyat*. *Diyanet* has been accountable for every religious formation and practice, every mosque and mufti, and religious manuals (catechism) on family relations, citizenship, wife-husband relationship, education, hygiene, and such (Mutluer 2018). Like these manuals, there were and still are Friday Sermons conducted every week by the muftis recruited by *Diyanet* to preach to men after Friday prayer. These preaches alone are influential in spreading a particular understanding of Islam which consists of other concepts such as how to be a good father, a desired citizen, a *persona grata* according to the prevailing sociopolitical discourse (Ustel 2008).

The former president of *Diyanet* Mehmet Gormez was the last *Ankara İlahiyat* graduate who worked at the Presidency of the Religious Affairs, legally being the highest level of Islamic scholar in Turkey. He retired (some argue he was forced to retire) from his position in 2017 without any explanation (there was an ongoing media censorship at the time). Ali Erbas[14] , who applied to the Directorate for the Assistant President position and was rejected so many times by Mehmet Gormez, was appointed by President Erdogan as the new president of *Diyanet* (Bianet 2017; Altaylı). Ali Erbas has always been present at symbolically significant political events with the president Erdogan such as the conversion of Hagia Sofia from a museum to a mosque in 2020, where President Erdogan recited the Quran while Erbaş was holding a sword (Adal 2020).

What *Ankara İlahiyat* represents is being contested by newly founded Islamic Sciences Programs in contemporary Turkey as the Kemalist ideology is being contested by the AKP rule. The understanding of Islam in the Turkish Republic that was maintained and proliferated via *Ankara İlahiyat*, and *Diyanet* was based on Turkish nationalism and civilizationalism, which are

[14] In one of the Friday Sermons, Erbaş claimed that homosexuality causes diseases (even caused the pandemic), corrupts people, and is condemned in Islamic teaching. His public claims are supported by the president Erdoğan. See; https://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-defends-turkey-religious-chiefs-anti-gay-sermon/

being replaced by the Islamic open-multiple civilization idea (Senturk 2014) via new universities and programs such as Islamic Sciences at Ibn Haldun University. The ideological transformation academic and public paradigm shift signify a structural change in the dynamics of the whole country. The education system, particularly higher education, is the touchstone in understanding such social change and examining the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic role of universities.

## Conclusion

In Turkey, the recent transformation and construction of the ideological agenda by the AKP rule and the education policies called for a genealogical understanding of the relationship between politics and education. The social change, ideological transformation, and the role of education within these processes go unnoticed among the studies that focus on the marketization and Islamization of the education system.

This is why this study turns its face to the past to understand today. Ankara University Divinity School was established in 1949 after years of absence of an academic study of religion and was the first official educational institution in which Islam would be social scientifically studied. The manifestation and, later on, the reconciliation of the deep-rooted *mektep-madrasa* controversy in Ankara Divinity School developed an academic paradigm on which Islam was objectified and studied with the social scientific tools and the priority of the reason to analyze and solve the problems of today. This academic paradigm was expanded throughout the country with the graduates of *Ankara İlahiyat*, particularly through *Diyanet* as the institution responsible for religious activities and organizations in Turkey. While the Turkish-Islamic Theology was being institutionalized through *Ankara İlahiyat* as a social scientific study, the idea of the "proper" Sunni Muslim citizen was also being enforced and maintained by *Diyanet*.

The academic and public understanding of Islam was shaped by these institutions for years and stayed as the prevailing one until alternative voices became apparent. The triumph of the modern and secular political agenda on higher religious education began to change in the late 80s when more liberal educational policies were implemented and paved the way for a conservative step in. Starting with RP (Welfare Party) and now with the AKP rule (Coskun and Senturk 2012),

particularly around 2012, higher religious education became an arena for the AKP's ideological agenda. These universities do not consider themselves traditional or conservative but 'modern' and act accordingly by developing international networks, modern curricula, buildings, and campuses while even reconstructing the meaning of a university[15].

This study argues that the educational policies executed by the AKP rule and the transformation of higher religious education should be analyzed compared to *Ankara İlahiyat* and the paradigm it represents. The role of this program in instituting Islam, nationalism, and public memory in the early years of the Republic is significant for understanding the history of higher religious education, its sociopolitical role, and the transformation of Islam thought in Turkey. Unless we know the transformation of higher religious education, we cannot understand the ideological project of the AKP, the changing Islamic thought through these institutions, and the relationship between them.

[15] For the works of Recep Senturk, the former dean of Ibn Haldun University called "What is a university?" and "Is University Education A Means of Westernization?" please see; https://www.recepsenturk.com/

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