

At the Nexus of Nationalism and Islamism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi and the  
Intellectual History of Conservative Nationalism

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**Abstract**

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This paper offers an analysis of the work of Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988); a highly influential yet understudied ultranationalist intellectual, whose synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Islamism provided the ideological framework for the current Islamist-nationalist ruling alliance in Turkish politics. A prolific author, poet, scholar, and propagandist, Arvasi's *Türk-İslam Ülküsü* (*Turkish-Islamic Ideal*) was integral to the formulation of conservative nationalism; a form of cultural and religious nationalism which frames national and religious identity as indivisible and mutually constitutive. However, despite Arvasi's significant contribution to the evolution of conservative nationalism, he remains a relatively obscure intellectual outside of ultranationalist circles, and his work is largely ignored in contemporary histories of political ideology. This study reexamines Ahmet Arvasi's work in tandem with the inception of conservative nationalism and the ascendancy of extremist politics, and concludes that his ideological legacy was fundamental to the consolidation of a right-wing bloc perennially represented by Islamists and nationalists.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper offers an analysis of the work of Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988); a highly influential yet understudied ultranationalist intellectual, whose synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Islamism provided the ideological framework for the current Islamist-nationalist ruling alliance in Turkish politics. A prolific author, poet, scholar, journalist, and propagandist, Arvasi's *Türk-İslam Ülküsü* (*Turkish-Islamic Ideal*) was integral to the formulation of conservative nationalism; a form of cultural and religious nationalism which frames national and religious identity as indivisible and mutually constitutive.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1960s-1980s, Arvasi served as a prominent theoretician and loyal cadre in ultranationalist circles, and was closely associated with both the leadership of the neo-fascist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (The Nationalist Movement Party, MHP) and with the rank-and-file of its notorious paramilitary youth wing, Ülkü Ocakları (Idealist Hearths), popularly known as Bozkurtlar (Grey Wolves). Arvasi is cited as "one of the most influential figures who defined the ideals of the Ülkücüs" and, significantly, is credited with facilitating the doctrinal and discursive shift toward an Islamically-oriented ultranationalist platform.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of Islamic narratives in *Milli Doktrin: Dokuz Işık* (*National Doctrine: Nine Lights*), the political treatise of the nascent MHP, considerably broadened the voter base of the far-right "by exploiting the fact that Turkish society was more receptive to an ideology imbued with religious elements."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 163-221.

<sup>2</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 372.

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları, "The Ultranationalist Right." in *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*. eds. Irvin Cemil Schick and Ertugrul Ahmet Tonak (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 198.

Despite Ahmet Arvasi's contributions to the trajectory of Ülkücü ideology and the evolution of conservative nationalism, he remains a relatively obscure intellectual outside of Ülkücü circles, and his work is largely ignored in political and intellectual histories of Turkish nationalism. During the 1980 coup, Arvasi was prosecuted and jailed for his affiliation with the Ülkücü youth in the famous MHP and Idealist Foundations Case, however, his influence in ultranationalist politics had already waned at the time of his incarceration, and his Turkish-Islamic Ideal was eclipsed by the ascendancy of the state-sanctioned conservative nationalist ideology, known as Türk-İslam Sentezi (Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, TIS).<sup>4</sup> Wary of the Islamic turn in party doctrine, the secular elite within the party had relegated Arvasi to the periphery of the movement, particularly in the wake of the 1977 elections, which witnessed both an uptick in votes for the MHP and a reassertion of the General Executive Board in shaping the strategic and ideological orientation of the party.<sup>5</sup>

In 1979, Arvasi was elected to the General Executive Board with the support of the Islamist-leaning faction within the party, however, his participation in the publication of *Nizam-ı Alem (Order of the Universe)*, a weekly journal which promulgated a heavily Islamist discourse in accordance with the radically religious and militant stance of the Ülkücüler movement, created discord between Arvasi, the General Executive Board, and the authoritarian leader of the party, Alparslan Türkeş.<sup>6</sup> The MHP Tribunal Commission closed the journal, and Arvasi attempted to resign from the party but was persuaded by Türkeş to retract his resignation. Arvasi continued to

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<sup>4</sup> Ömer Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988)," *Turkish Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2014): 521-522.

<sup>5</sup> Ali Erken, *The Construction of Nationalist Politics: The MHP, 1965-1980* (Oxford: The University of Oxford, 2013), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism," 522-523.

support the MHP while in prison, but curtailed his involvement with Ülkücü publications; opting instead to write for the conservative nationalist *Türkiye Gazetesi* (*Turkey Newspaper*) until his death in 1988.<sup>7</sup>

## IMPACT AND HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

While Ahmet Arvasi remains a marginal figure in the both the scholarly literature on the development of Turkish nationalisms and in the annals of the MHP, he was unquestionably one of the leading propagandists of conservative nationalist ideology and Ülkücü identity, and "his writings can be seen as the best expression Ülkücü mindset in the '70s."<sup>8</sup> Arvasi gained access to the highest echelons of the party during his tenure at İstanbul Atatürk Eğitim Enstitüsü (İstanbul Atatürk Institute of Education), an Ülkücü stronghold, and was purportedly involved in both the rebirth of the Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi (Republican Villager Nation Party, CKMP) and the MHP in 1969, and in the heated intra-party debate regarding the inclusion of the Islamic three crescents in the new party emblem<sup>9</sup>.

Arvasi's first book, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (*The Principles of Advanced Turkish Nationalism*), was published in *Milli Hareket* (*National Action*), a monthly journal and the first publication associated with the CKMP-MHP, in 1965. His most famous work, the three volume *Türk-İslam Ülküsü* (*Turkish-Islamic Ideal*), was published as a series of columns in the party's semi-official daily *Hergün* (*Everyday*), as well as in the party-affiliated *Ülkücü Kadro* (*Idealist Cadre*).<sup>10</sup> His memory is honored by the MHP party leadership, by ultranationalist

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 523.

<sup>8</sup> Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," 372.

<sup>9</sup> Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism," 521.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmet B. Karaback, *Üç Hilal'in Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2011), 89-90.

organizations, and by members of the Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Unity Party, BBP), a far-right Islamist-nationalist offshoot of the MHP formed in 1993 after Arvasi's death.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Arvasi's prodigious intellectual output on behalf of the MHP, and his intimate connection with Alparslan Türkeş and the party leadership, he was considered to be more influential at the grassroots level of the ultranationalist movement than within elite party circles.

<sup>12</sup> Historian Gökhan Çetinsaya identifies Arvasi as "a respected figure in the ranks of the movement,"<sup>13</sup> and Ömer Aslan, one of the few scholars to publish a monograph on Arvasi in English, observes that "Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi, nevertheless, was a modest teacher for many years in distant corners of the country, held in high esteem in the eyes of the grassroots. Arvasi allocated a great amount of time and space to spread Islamic morality and Islamic prayers among the Ülkücü youth."<sup>14</sup> Arvasi's biographers and interviews with former Ülkücü youth reveal that Arvasi was widely perceived as something of a demigod within the Ülkü Ocakları (Idealist Hearths, training centers for young nationalist militants) and within the larger Ülkücü movement, which, as will be addressed in the following pages, often eclipsed the party as a sociopolitical force in pursuit of its own ideology, strategy, and objectives.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding Arvasi's influence on the Ülkücü movement, Ali Erken argues: "It is evident that there was no single center of training in the party for the indoctrination of nationalist militants...this structure enabled some thinkers to preach their own views of nationalism and

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Hakkı Öznur, *Ahmet Arvasi* (İstanbul: Alternatif Yayınları, 2002); Mustafa Kuvancı, *Bir Gönül Dostu Seyit Ahmet Arvasi* (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları); Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, "Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi'yi anlatıyor," (2016, October 7) Retrieved from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_IHdypx3Uvl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IHdypx3Uvl).

<sup>12</sup> Aslan, 521.

<sup>13</sup> Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam," 372.

<sup>14</sup> Aslan, 525.

<sup>15</sup> Ali Erken, *The Construction of Nationalist Politics: The MHP, 1965-1980* (Oxford: The University of Oxford, 2013), 95.

nationalist politics to young nationalists and other nationalist militants. Such figures as Galip Erdem, Erol G ng r and Ahmet Arvasi wrote extensively on issues of practical relevance such as 'religion and nationalism' or 'state and nation'. It could be argued that some of these people had a greater influence on the nationalist mindset than Alparslan T rkeŐ, owing to the intimate relationships they forged with young militants."<sup>16</sup> In later interviews, former  lk c ler (-ler is a pluralizer) confirmed that Ahmet Arvasi would invite young nationalists to his house in Istanbul for training and indoctrination sessions, and in contemporary ultranationalist literature, Arvasi is still designated the title "Hoca" (teacher) by far-right parties and nationalist organizations.<sup>17</sup>

A teacher by profession, much of Arvasi's work is indeed addressed to Turkish nationalist youth. Some of his books, including *DoĐu Anadolu GerŐeĐi (The Truth About Eastern Anatolia)*, are highly anecdotal, and primarily consist of instructive encounters with friends and students interspersed with vitriolic lectures on imperialism, communism, Kurdism, and Zionism.<sup>18</sup>

Arvasi's magnum opus, *T rk-İslam  lk s *,<sup>19</sup> should be read as both an instruction manual and a manifesto "defining the ideals of the  lk c s" while teaching the young  lk c  to be both "an uncompromising Muslim and a conscious Turkish nationalist."<sup>20</sup> Ideologically, he appealed to the newly empowered  lk c ler who had developed a distinct (and superior) identity within the party due to their role in the escalating violence with leftist groups, and who, on the whole, were much more traditional, religious, and militant than the party leadership. Years of bloody clashes with socialist organizations on campuses, in the workforce, and in the streets; coupled with the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Mustafa Kuvancı, "T rk İslam  lk s  M tefekkeri: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi," (2012, April 28). Retrieved from: <http://ulkucubellek.com/turk-islam-ulkusu-mutefekkiri-seyyid-ahmet-arvasi/>.

<sup>18</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *DoĐu Anadolu GerŐeĐi* (İstanbul: T rk K lt r n  AraŐtırma Enstit s  Yayınları, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *T rk İslam  lk s *, v. I-II-III, 2. Baskı (İstanbul: BilgeoĐuz Yayınları, 2015).

<sup>20</sup>  etinsaya, 372.

rapid expansion of Ülkü Ocakları and other nationalist organizations into rural, religious central and eastern Anatolia after 1969 served to radicalize young nationalist recruits en masse; making them more receptive to the perpetration of a holy war against socialism, imperialism, and westernization in defense of national unity and Arvasi's Turkish-Islamic Ideal.<sup>21</sup> Erken suggests that "from the mid 1970s onward ... young nationalists started to employ a strikingly religious language, especially in the two years preceding the 1980 coup. It could be argued that the conservative nationalist interpretation of history and religion was able to ascribe a mission to young people coming from conservative backgrounds, in a process of enculturation that republican nationalism had not been able to achieve."<sup>22</sup>

Scholars of the MHP and conservative nationalism, including Tanıl Bora and Kemal Can, Umut Uzer, and Gökhan Çetinsaya, agree that Ahmet Arvasi was highly influential in the Islamization of MHP discourse, which galvanized the movement and fragmented the party.<sup>23</sup> However, many of his publications suggest a personal ambivalence regarding the relationship between Islam and nationalism, which he perceived as wholly integrated and "blended like body and soul,"<sup>24</sup> and regarding the role of Islam in the political sphere. He rebuked both his Islamist and Turkish nationalist contemporaries for excluding Islamic discourse in nationalist rhetoric and party ideology while excoriating Islamist figures such as Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Islamist Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party, MNP) and the Milli Selamet Partisi (National

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<sup>21</sup> Erken, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>23</sup> Tanıl Bora and Kemal Can, *Devlet, Ocak, Dergah: 12 Eylül'den 1990'lara Ülkücü Hareket* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009); Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016); Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 350-376.

<sup>24</sup> Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam," 372.

Salvation Party, MSP) for politicizing Islam. Arvasi condemned all Islamist politicians, calling them "the charlatans of religion" and "parasites who try to stay alive by sucking the religion's blood," as he perceived that they sought to exploit the appeal of Islam on the Turkish electorate.<sup>25</sup>

Arvasi was equally critical of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis proposed in 1970 by the Aydınlar Ocağı (Intellectuals' Hearth), a conservative nationalist think-tank tasked with generating a unifying national identity that combined Turkism with Islam to serve as a bulwark against socialism. He argued that Turkishness and Islam did not require a synthesis, since "in his view, the sole yardstick whereby the rest of the components of Turkish culture are either allowed or rejected can be Islam."<sup>26</sup> While the authors of the Synthesis, including İbrahim Kafesoğlu and Muharrem Ergin, asserted that Islam can satiate the necessity for religion as long as it remained a "matter of individual conscience", they maintained that the age of religion had past, giving way to a new age of cultures and nationalisms, which assuaged the burden of religion on other elements of culture and led to the enshrining of religion as one of the elements of culture (though not the dominant element).<sup>27</sup> According to İbrahim Kafesoğlu, the first president of the Aydınlar Ocağı: "Turkish nationalism is not racism but it's not about a religious cause either."<sup>28</sup> In short, while the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis promoted by the Aydınlar Ocağı made Islam complementary to Turkish nationalism (with Islam positioned slightly below Turkishness), Arvasi contended that Islam was "*the superior system.*"<sup>29</sup> He embraced Islam in totality, penned *İlm-i Hal (Scientific Condition)*, a Muslim's guide for correct behavior in everyday life, and

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<sup>25</sup> Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism," 527.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 524.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 524.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 525.

argued that "everything, secular and sacred, inherited from the pre-Islamic Turkish customs must go through the filter of Islam's higher commands and prohibitions."<sup>30</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, Arvasi ascribed a national mission to his Turkish-Islamic Ideal, by making the *raison-d'être* of the Turkish nation the defense Islam on earth, and by denigrating all non-Turkish Muslims as "religious perverts" with no understanding of Islam. Arvasi was also vehemently opposed to marriage between Turks and non-Turkish Muslims, and ardently rejected the inherent internationalism of Islam.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Arvasi's unique *Weltanschauung* defied the traditional paradigmatic division between Turkish nationalists and Islamists, and has complicated recent scholarly and partisan attempts to identify his work with a political party despite his longstanding affiliation with the MHP.

### **PROJECT OVERVIEW: AT THE NEXUS OF NATIONALISM AND ISLAMISM**

Ömer Aslan's article, aptly titled "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi [1932-1988]", assesses the complexity of situating Arvasi's ideological legacy within traditional Turkist or Islamist frameworks.<sup>32</sup> Aslan contends that Ahmet Arvasi was neither a pure Turkish nationalist nor a pure Islamist, but held dual loyalties to the nation and the ummah which fostered contradictory, and often competing, ideas regarding the interaction of identity, religion, and state. In accordance with Aslan's work, the current study will attempt to locate Ahmet Arvasi within a broader ideological framework, and concludes that his work does not fit neatly into one, or even two, paradigms. By reframing Arvasi as an

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>32</sup> Ömer Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988)," *Turkish Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2014): 519-535.

ideologue who represented a generation of intellectuals who blurred the boundaries between secular nationalist and Islamist paradigms, this project challenges the saliency of a nationalist-Islamist binary framework and the schism between secular nationalists and Islamists, which has plagued the Turkish Republic since its inception.

This study will further suggest that the contributions of ideologues like Arvasi, who held competing visions of the relationship between Islam and the nation, were integral to the formation of the Turkish Right through the development of conservative nationalism. Initially a cultural movement led by intellectuals who embraced Ottoman-Islamic history, and emphasized the importance of nationalism and Islamic values in Turkish identity, the movement gradually became a potent political ideology that represented the interests of the rural conservative electorate against both the Kemalist secular elite and the Leftists.<sup>33</sup> Conservative nationalism gained political traction in the 1960s-1980s, as the nascent parties of the center-right and right adopted both Islamist and nationalist narratives to expand their electoral base and to protect against the encroachment of communism. While the state-sanctioned version of conservative nationalism and its centerpiece, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, fell out of favor in the 1980s, conservative nationalist ideology provided a theoretical framework for the interaction between nationalism and Islam in contemporary right-wing Turkish politics.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, its blending of Turkishness and Islam has been adopted as the dominant marker of Turkish national identity in modern-day Turkey.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, this study provides a close reading of Ahmet Arvasi's work

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<sup>33</sup> Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam," 370.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

in order to trace the evolution of conservative nationalist ideology, to explore its contours, and to assess his impact.

Chapter One traces the genesis and evolution of conservative nationalism in conjunction with the development of Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi through the lens of his poetry. This chapter examines key sites of formation in cultivating the personality and ideology of Arvasi and the movement that he influenced. It includes discussions regarding the political dynamics of the early Republic, the alliance between Turkists and Islamists and the intellectual progenitors of conservative nationalism, Arvasi's early life and professional career until 1960, and covers three of his major works: *Şiirlerim (My Poems)*, *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği (The Truth About Eastern Anatolia)*, and *Eğitim Sosyolojisi (The Sociology of Education)*.<sup>36</sup> By contextualizing Arvasi within a unique set of sociopolitical and historical conditions, by situating him within a larger intellectual tradition, and by assessing the impact of his place of birth, childhood, and education, this chapter seeks to provide a richer analysis of Arvasi's psychology and the forces that shaped his world view.

Chapter Two investigates Arvasi's turbulent political career, from his early affiliation with the CKMP-MHP and his impact on its ideological trajectory, to his marginalization within the party and his decline after 1980. By examining Arvasi's significant influence on the Ülkücü movement and his discord with the party elite, this chapter explores the complex dynamics between the party leadership of the MHP and its young nationalist cadres, and identifies two underlying but intersecting divergences: first, the ideological chasm between the older, more

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<sup>36</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989); *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* (İstanbul: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1986); *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995).

secular party elite and the younger generation of religious youth trained in the Ülkü Ocakları; and second, the tactical differences between the party circles who sought electoral success, including the General Executive Board, and the Ülkücü movement, which prioritized a more violent and militant stance in their holy war against the socialists.

Chapter Two also examines Arvasi's highly prolific literary career. After gaining national recognition through the publication of his first book in 1965, Arvasi became a renowned conservative nationalist author, journalist, and ideologue; publishing seven books in 22 years (with an additional six published posthumously), and composing daily and weekly columns for prominent nationalist publications, including *Hergün (Everyday)* and *Milli Hareket (National Action)*. In his daily columns for *Hergün*, Arvasi developed his Turkish-Islamic Ideal; a paradigm that reframed the Turkish identity as inherently Turkish and Islamic and assigned a missionary role to the Turkish nation as the true standard-bearers of Islam. This chapter deconstructs his Turkish-Islamic Ideal through an analysis of his three volume *Türk-İslam Ülküsü*, and investigates his theories on nationalism through a close reading of *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri (Principles of Advanced Turkish Nationalism)*.<sup>37</sup>

This project concludes with a discussion of Arvasi's impact on the institutionalization of conservative nationalism in Turkish politics. While the MHP abandoned the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the 1990s, the reemergence of Islamic discourse between the 1950s-1970s catalyzed the reintroduction of Islam into the Turkish political sphere. The official cooptation of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis by the post-1980 military junta represented an attempt to cultivate a

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<sup>37</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Türk İslam Ülküsü*, v. I-II-III, 2. Baskı (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2015).; S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Güneş Yayınları, 1965).

new national identity that would unite Turks against communism and stabilize the country, arguably paved the way for the ascendancy of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Islamist Justice and Development Party, AKP), the party in power since 2002, and ensured the survival of the MHP as Turkey's second oldest political party (now in a parliamentary coalition with the AKP), thus proving that nationalism and Islam continue to dominate the ideological orientation of the Turkish Right.<sup>38</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study relies heavily on primary sources to assess Ahmet Arvasi's ideological contribution to the evolution of conservative nationalism. Specifically, it examines his three volume *Türk-İslam Ülküsü*, a collection of his articles published in party's semi-official daily *Hergün*, as well as in the party-affiliated *Ülkücü Kadro*.<sup>39</sup> This work centers on Arvasi's Turkish-Islamic Ideal; elucidating his vision of Islam, Turkish history, and national and identity, and defining the values of the *Ülkücü* movement in relation to socialism, westernization, imperialism, and modernization. His *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* emphasizes that Turkish nationalism is peaceful and supportive of all other nationalities, and rejects the notion that nation and religion are divisive. Significantly, he argues that scientific solutions, rather than religious dogma, should be implemented to resolve social and economic backwardness.<sup>40</sup> In *Eğitim Sosyolojisi*, he stresses the importance of transmitting the national experience to the next generation of Turkish youth, and argues in favor of the establishment of a "national education

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<sup>38</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 163-221.

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 20.

<sup>40</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (Doğan Güneş Yayınları, No. 18, 1965).

academy" to train teachers to promote Turkish nationalism in the classroom.<sup>41</sup> *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* undertakes a discussion of separatism and imperialism, as Arvasi, a native of Eastern Anatolia, provides a scathing critique of Kurdish identity, which he claims was created by imperialists seeking to destroy the unity of the Turkish Republic.<sup>42</sup> In *Şiirlerim*, a collection of Arvasi's poetry spanning from 1948-1985, Arvasi displays more than thirty years of ultranationalist, anti-communist, and Islamist sentiments.<sup>43</sup> Biographical information on Arvasi was further supplemented by Turkish language biographies by Hakkı Öznur and Mustafa Kuvancı, and by two English language monographs by Umut Uzer and Ömer Aslan.<sup>44</sup>

Literature on the MHP and the Ülkücü movement up to the 1980 coup can be divided into two categories: academic publications, mostly by political scientists and scholars of Turkish nationalism, and biographies or non-academic publications undertaken by journalists or partisan researchers (both nationalist and socialist). Examples of the first category include Jacob Landau's excellent study of extremist trends in the 1960s and early 1970s, titled *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*. First published in 1974, it offers a comprehensive analysis of the ideological, strategic, and organizational formation of the party in its earliest iterations, but remains limited by the researcher's access to sources and official documents in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları's article "The Ultranationalist Right" provides an excellent top-down assessment of the MHP, and crucially dedicates space to explore the history of Pan-Turkist ideology, however,

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<sup>41</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> See footnote 19.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 26.

<sup>44</sup> : Hakkı Öznur, *Ahmet Arvasi* (İstanbul: Alternatif Yayınları, 2002); Mustafa Kuvancı, *Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi Hayatı: Tefekkürü-Eserleri* (İstanbul: Burak Yayınları, 1997); Umut Uzer, "The Kurdish Identity of Turkish Nationalist Thinkers: Ziya Gökalp and Ahmet Arvasi between Turkish Identity and Kurdish Ethnicity," *Turkish Studies*, 14, no. 2 (2013): 394-409; Ömer Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988)," *Turkish Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2014): 521-522.

<sup>45</sup> See footnote 44.

the article lacks a deeper investigation of the dynamics between the party leadership, nationalist organizations, and the youth movement.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, Hugh Poulton and Burak Arıkan also offer insight into the ideology of the MHP with an emphasis on larger trends in extremist politics, but both fail to identify shifts in strategy in relation to the emerging authority of young nationalists and nationalist ideologues.<sup>47</sup>

Ali Erken's *The Construction of Nationalist Politics*, and Tanıl Bora and Kemal Can's *Devlet, Ocak, Dergah* provided thorough, balanced investigations of day-to-day party politics while delving into the relationships between the various actors.<sup>48</sup> In addition to scholarly work, this paper also relies on the autobiographies of former Ülkücüs, including Ahmet Er's *Hatıralarım ve Hayatım* and Ahmet Karabacak's *Üç Hilal'in Hikayesi*.<sup>49</sup> Finally, this project is heavily indebted to works by Gökhan Çetinsaya, Şerif Mardin, Binnaz Toprak, and Elizabeth Özdalga for their nuanced treatments of religion and politics.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları, "The Ultranationalist Right." in *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, eds. Irvin Schick and Ertuğrul Tonak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 177-217.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf, and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997); Burak Arıkan, "The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party of Turkey: An Iron Hand in a Velvet Glove," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, no. 4 (1998): 120-134; Burak Arıkan, "Turkish Ultra-Nationalists Under Review: A Study of the Nationalist Action Party," *Nations and Nationalism*, 8, no. 3 (2002): 357-376.

<sup>48</sup> See footnotes 16 and 24.

<sup>49</sup> Ahmet Er, *Hatıralarım ve Hayatım: 12 Mayıs'tan 12 Eylül, Ahmet Yesevi'den Yunus Emre'ye* (İstanbul: Pamuk Yayıncılık, 2007); Ahmet Karabacak, *Üç Hilal'in Hikayesi* (İstanbul: İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> See, for examples: Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 350-376; Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1989); Binnaz Toprak, "The Religious Right." in *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, eds. Irvin Schick and Ertuğrul Tonak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 218-235; Elizabeth Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab: A Critical reading of the Notion of Turkish Islam," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, no. 4 (2006): 551-570.



Kıbrıs'ın ayrılışı derdoldu içimizde,  
Barbaros'un sesini kaybettik Akdeniz'de,  
Adalar yabancıda, dinmez dertleri bizde,  
Balkan'ımız vatandan ayrıldı mı nihayet?

Losing Cyprus has been a trouble for us,  
We lost Barbaros' voice in the Mediterranean  
The islands belong to foreigners, trouble did not cease  
Are our Balkan lands lost to us in the end?

--Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi ("Özleyiş", 1949)<sup>51</sup>

## CHAPTER ONE

Shortly before his death in 1988, Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi published a collected volume of his poetry titled *Şiirlerim (My Poems)*. Spanning from 1948-1985, from adolescence to old age, *Şiirlerim* simultaneously represents Arvasi's earliest and most mature published work. It is also his most personal work; his poems are both intimate and political, and reveal the author's attachment to the mountainous Eastern provinces, his religiosity, his hatred of communism, and his reverence for Turkish history, myth, and culture.<sup>52</sup>

Arvasi's earliest poems, including "Özleyiş" ("Longing"), translated in the epigraph above, express the impassioned and devout sentiments of a deeply religious and nationalistic adolescent "longing" for the conquests of the imperial past. Composed in 1949, at the age of seventeen, "Özleyiş" celebrates the heroism and martial spirit of the Ottoman Islamic ghazis, and laments the loss of honor and territory to Christians and foreigners.<sup>53</sup> On a discursive level,

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<sup>51</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989), 15.

<sup>52</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Arvasi's glorification - and centering - of events and historical figures rooted in the Ottoman period of Turkish history, and his portrayal of the Empire's Islamic character, represent a significant departure from the state-sanctioned national discourse propagated by the ruling Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP), which framed both Islam and the Ottoman epoch as ignominious and shameful.

Arvasi's *Şiirlerim* is an invaluable resource for scholars seeking to trace the conception and evolution of his ideologies in tandem with the formation of the conservative nationalist movement. Always attuned to the zeitgeist of the Right, Arvasi's poetry offers a lens to illuminate the development of the author within the context of a broader historical, political, and intellectual framework; as his poems mirror the ascendancy and transformation of conservative nationalist ideology from the 1940s to the 1980s. "Özleyiş", for example, echoes the values of a generation of intellectuals that emerged in the late 1940s as the country began to democratize to challenge the policies and national narratives imposed by the CHP in the first two decades of the Turkish Republic.<sup>54</sup> They were primarily concerned with a perceived "religious amnesia" induced by more than two decades of imposed secularism, which they argued had thrust the country into a religious and national identity crisis and created a moral decline, particularly among youth.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in order to revitalize "the national conscience" and to rescue the morality of the youth, they believed that Islam and nationalism must be reconciled. According to Çetinsaya, "the activities of this group shaped an entire generation of Turkish right in Turkish

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<sup>54</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 350-376.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-369.

politics today. They account for the interaction between Islam and nationalism in modern-day Turkey."<sup>56</sup>

This chapter examines key sites of formation in cultivating the personality and ideology of Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi and the movement that he influenced. It includes discussions regarding the political dynamics of the early Republic, the alliance between Turkists and Islamists and the intellectual progenitors of conservative nationalism, Arvasi's early life and professional career until 1960, and covers three of his major works: *Şiirlerim (My Poems)*, *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği (The Truth About Eastern Anatolia)*, and *Eğitim Sosyolojisi (The Sociology of Education)*.<sup>57</sup> By contextualizing Arvasi within a unique set of sociopolitical and historical conditions, by situating him within a larger intellectual tradition, and by assessing the impact of his place of birth, childhood, and education, this chapter seeks to provide a richer analysis of Arvasi's psychology and the forces that shaped his world view.

### CONSERVATIVE NATIONALISM: ISLAMISM + TURKISM

From the advent of the Republic in 1923 until 1946, Turkey was a single-party state ruled by the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP); the party established by the founder of the Turkish nation-state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The early Republican period was dominated by the totalizing national vision of Atatürk, who believed that the Ottoman imperial system and its Islamic orientation were responsible for the demise of the Empire in 1918, and for the illiteracy and perceived backwardness of the populace.<sup>58</sup> Atatürk's top-down nation-building project,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>57</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989); *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* (İstanbul: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1986); *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016).

guided by his secularizing, modernizing, and westernizing policies (known as Atatürkism, or Kemalism), permeated every aspect of daily life, and included momentous social and cultural reforms aimed at constructing a homogenous, secular, "modern" nation-state with a distinctly Turkish national identity in the heartlands of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace.<sup>59</sup> Kemalist reforms and the draconian measures adopted to enforce the new Republican national paradigm alienated a diverse array of constituencies from the CHP urban ruling elite. Islamist groups, in particular, were widely persecuted and nearly eradicated as the State sought to eliminate Islamic life from the public sphere. Slightly less targeted, but still marginalized, were Pan-Turkist and Turkist groups whose ideologies deviated from the state-sanctioned version of history and nationhood.<sup>60</sup>

The beginning of the Cold War in 1945 ushered in a new international order and brought sweeping changes to the geopolitical and political landscape of Turkey. Fearful of reigniting a historical antagonism with the Russians and wary of communist encroachment on its borders, the CHP under İsmet İnönü allied with the Western democratic bloc against the communist Eastern bloc, and pursued admission to the United Nations through democratization.<sup>61</sup> In 1946, Turkey adopted a multiparty system after 22 years of single-party rule and held its first elections. Concomitant to this development, the Republican elite cautiously allowed the reinsertion of Islam into the political discourse to foster the development of a new nationalism based on history and religion that might counter the potential infiltration of communism; which was perceived as materialist and atheistic and could not be opposed by positivistic and materialistic types of

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<sup>59</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Çetinsaya, 369.

<sup>61</sup> Frank Tachau, "The Republican People's Party, 1945-1980." in *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*, eds. Metin Heper and Jacob M. Landau (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991): 98-118.

nationalism, such as Kemalism. The implementation of a multiparty system, and the defeat of the ruling CHP in the 1950 elections after more than two decades in power, weakened the hegemony of Kemalist nationalist discourse and created an opportunity for limited criticism of CHP leadership.<sup>62</sup> The 1950 victory of the Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party DP), a CHP offshoot that was less rigid in its stance toward secularism and religion, cultivated a new intellectual space for dissent. According to Gavin D. Brockett, political liberalization and the relaxation of restrictions on the press, particularly between 1946-1954, catalyzed the establishment and expansion of a national print culture in which provincial periodicals and the penetration of media culture into the periphery played a prominent role.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, a vibrant but subversive public debate about issues including national identity, secularization and Islamic values, westernization, and modernization briefly flourished through newspapers, journals, and books, leading to the rapid proliferation of religious publications, and ultimately to renewed restrictions against Islamist periodicals in 1954.<sup>64</sup>

While the concept of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis predates the establishment of the Republic, and can also be identified in the work of early Republican authors and intellectuals, including Ziya Gökalp, Peyami Safa, and Mustafa Şekip Tunç, the progenitors of the strand of conservative nationalism expressed in Ahmet Arvasi's poetry, and later in the political sphere, were members of two disparate ideological camps that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. The first, represented by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu, were Islamists who embraced a conservative approach to Islam and conflated Orthodox Sunnism with Sufi elements, which were

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<sup>62</sup> Çetinsaya, 370.

<sup>63</sup> Gavin D. Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

deeply ingrained in Turkish-Islamic culture.<sup>65</sup> However, unlike their predecessors, they were products of the deeply nationalist Kemalist educational system of the early Republic, and had not received any formal or informal Islamic training outside of an affiliation with various Sufi tariqats (brotherhoods).<sup>66</sup> They "represented neither the ulama nor the modernist-Islamist tradition" established by the previous generation of Islamist reformers, and their ideological trajectory reflected their nationalist sentiments as well as the trauma of imperialism and the penetration of foreign ideologies, forced secularization and westernization, and the chaotic geopolitical events of the early 20th century.<sup>67</sup> As is discussed later in this chapter, the work of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek had a profound impact on Ahmet Arvasi's poetic style and on his ideological trajectory.<sup>68</sup>

The second camp that contributed to the cultivation of Arvasi's conservative nationalism - the Turkists and Pan-Turkists - formed the ideological pith of Turkish ultranationalism and of the far-right party that Ahmet Arvasi would come to shape in the 1960s and 1970s; the Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (CKMP, MHP after 1969). In the late Ottoman period, Pan-Turkist and Pan-Turanist organizations, which perceived the Turkish nation as composed of ethnically Turkic and Turkic-speaking communities, and envisioned the unification of all Turkic communities in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe, flourished. In the 1920s

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<sup>65</sup> Çetinsaya, 366-368.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>68</sup> For a further discussion regarding the influence of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek on conservative nationalist ideology, see: Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın, "Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity," *The Muslim World*, 103, no. 4 (2014): 479-500; Michelangelo Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Stories of 'Conversion' and Activism in Republican Turkey," *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 34 (2014): 98-117; and Şerif Mardin, "Culture Change and the Intellectual: A Study of the Effects of Secularization in Modern Turkey - Necip Fazıl and the Nakşibendi." in *Cultural Transitions in the Middle East*, ed. Şerif Mardin (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1994): 189-214.

and 1930s, however, these organizations - which were inherently irredentist and ethnic nationalist in orientation - were targeted by the State for failing to conform to the territorial nationalist paradigm envisioned by the Republican elite.<sup>69</sup> In the 1930s, a highly influential "second generation" of Turkists emerged to challenge the official national and historical narratives of the Republic. Led by some of the most prominent and polemic ideologues in the modern history of Turkey; including Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, his brother, Nejdet Sançar, Zeki Velidi Togan, Reha Oğuz Türkkan, Rıza Nur, and the Başbuğ (Leader) of the MHP, Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, they propagated "racism, unification of all Turks, praise of the martial qualities of Turks, territorial expansion, and the establishment of an authoritarian regime."<sup>70</sup> As staunch nationalists, they were unperturbed by the imposition of secularism, and were primarily concerned with the implementation of more rigorous exclusionary measures against minority communities.<sup>71</sup>

Hailing from two disparate (and often diametrically opposed) ideological circles that were marginalized and suppressed by the CHP, Turkist and Islamist intellectuals in the 1950s-1960s found commonality in their virulent hatred of communism, in their rejection of capitalism and imperialism, and in their condemnation of Kemalist nationalism and CHP policies; which they argued had weakened the Turkish nation and made it susceptible to the influence of foreign ideologies.<sup>72</sup> Most significantly, Turkist and Islamist groups shared an intellectual lineage through the works of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Yahya Kemal, Ahmed Hamdi

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<sup>69</sup> Mehmet Ali Ağaoğulları, "The Ultranationalist Right." in *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, eds. Irvin Schick and Ertuğrul Tonak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 177-217.

<sup>70</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 126.

<sup>71</sup> Aslan, 521.

<sup>72</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 163-164.

Tanpınar, Peyami Safa, Ziya Gökalp, and Hüseyin Nihal Atsız that facilitated their convergence, and fostered the emergence of Ahmet Arvasi's generation of conservative nationalists, who easily combined Turkish nationalism with Islamic values<sup>73</sup>, and for whom "there was no contradiction between Islam and nationalism [as]...Both were indispensable for a 'correct' national culture/identity."<sup>74</sup>

The inclusion of both Turkist and Islamist narratives in his poetry suggests that Ahmet Arvasi was acutely influenced by the emerging alliance between two ideological camps that would ultimately coalesce to become the conservative nationalist movement. Featuring titles including "Nur'a Arzu" ("The Desire for Holy Light"), "Mevlana Celaleddin'in Dergahında" ("In Mevlana Celaleddin's Dervish Lodge"), and "Dava" ("Cause"), *Şiirlerim* emphasizes the glorious periods of Ottoman history rather than pre-Islamic culture, underscores the desire to be in the service of Islam with Turks leading the cause of the faithful "with sword in hand", mobilizes Sufi imagery and metaphor, and expresses a longing for the reemergence of "a religion that was loyal to state power."<sup>75</sup> The next section explores how Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi's origins, family history, and place of birth were integral to the formation of his personal identity and his ideological development.

## **FAMILY HISTORY: THE BIRTH OF A TURKISH NATIONALIST**

. Born in 1932 in Doğubeyazıt, Ağrı, a predominantly Kurdish region in far Eastern Anatolia that witnessed a series of uprisings against the Turkish Republic lasting until 1930,

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<sup>73</sup> Beşir Ayvazoğlu, "Türkiye'de Sağcı Olmak," *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 16 (Güz, 1991), 32-43.

<sup>74</sup> Çetinsaya, 370.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab: A Critical reading of the Notion of Turkish Islam," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, no. 4 (2006): 556.

Ahmet Arvasi hailed from a notable Nakşibendi shaikhly family with historical connections to the Ottoman/Republican state and to the Kurdish nationalist movement.<sup>76</sup> The ethnicity of the Arvasi family is still debated by scholars and biographers, with some arguing that the powerful family possessed Arab origins, and others suggesting that they were ethnically Kurdish.<sup>77</sup> The honorific title "Seyyid" denotes descent from the Prophet Muhammad, which some members of the Arvasi family claimed through a shared lineage with the Hashemite King Faysal I of Iraq. According to Hakan Özoğlu, branches of the Arvasi family lived in Mecca and Medina and were represented in Istanbul by Şeyh (Sheikh) Abdülhakim Arvasi (1864-1943), a highly influential Nakşibendi scholar, head imam of the Sultan Ahmet mosque, and spiritual teacher to the internationally renowned Islamist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek.<sup>78</sup> Abdülhakim Arvasi was a *halife* (representative) of the prominent Halidiye branch of the Nakşibendi Order, which was particularly dominant in the Kurdish Southeast, but which maintained invaluable connections to the political sphere of the Republic through its affiliations with conservative politicians and intellectuals.<sup>79</sup> Şeyh Abdülhakim Arvasi, for example, was credited with the conversion of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek to Islamism, and became the subject of several of his books while serving as the spiritual guide behind Kısakürek's ideological development.<sup>80</sup> The Arvasi family also

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<sup>76</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 184.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example: Ömer Aslan, "A Turkish Muslim Between Islamism and Turkish Nationalism: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi (1932-1988)," *Turkish Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2014): 519-535; Umut Uzer, "The Kurdish Identity of Turkish Nationalist Thinkers: Ziya Gökalp and Ahmet Arvasi between Turkish Identity and Kurdish Ethnicity," *Turkish Studies*, 14, no. 2 (2013): 394-409.

<sup>78</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>79</sup> Michelangelo Guida, "Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Stories of 'Conversion' and Activism in Republican Turkey," *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 34 (2014): 98-117.

<sup>80</sup> Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın, "Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity," *The Muslim World*, 103, no. 4 (2014): 479-500.

maintained close relationships with Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, a Kurdish theologian and one of the most important religious figures in Turkish history, and with the Şemdinan family of Hakkari, the most influential members of the Nakşibendi Order in the region.<sup>81</sup> Despite the intimate connection between the Arvasi family and the leading Sufi tariqas, Ahmet Arvasi received no formal religious training and did not speak Arabic, though his work reveals that he was proficient in at least one or more of the Kurdish dialects.<sup>82</sup>

Arvasi's nationalist biographers argue that the Arvasis were fervent Turkish nationalists despite their ethnic Arab origins; thus emphasizing a devotion to the Turkish nation while highlighting the connection between the family and the Ottoman-Islamic world and dismissing rumors regarding their Kurdish lineage.<sup>83</sup> One anecdote, from İbrahim Arvas, a family member and former deputy of Van, contends that Şeyh Abdülhakim Arvasi was so incensed by his followers suggestion that he remain in Syria to open schools while the Ottoman Empire disintegrated that he angrily declared that he was one of the last true Turks and stormed out of the meeting.<sup>84</sup> However, despite partisan accounts of a long-standing loyalty to Turkish nation, scholars of the Eastern provinces note that several members of the Arvasi family were also involved in Kurdish nationalist politics. Şeyh Şefik Arvasi, a nephew of Abdülhakim Arvasi, was a founding member of the Kürt Teali Cemiyeti (Kurdish Advancement Society, SAK/KAS) in 1918, and became the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kürdistan* in 1919.<sup>85</sup> His articles primarily advocated the awakening of Kurdish consciousness and promoted Kurdish

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<sup>81</sup> Özoğlu, 108-110.

<sup>82</sup> Uzer, 184.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example: Mustafa Kuvancı, Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi Hayatı: Tefekkür - Eserleri (İstanbul: Burak Yayınları, 1997).

<sup>84</sup> İbrahim Arvas, *Tarihi Hakikatler* (Ankara: HTS Yayıncılık, 2010), 89.

<sup>85</sup> Özoğlu, 109.

identity, though he was not a separatist. Instead, Şefik Arvasi supported the autonomists; the activists that demanded autonomy for the Kurdish regions during the late-Ottoman period. His position was in accordance with the official stance of the Kurdish Nakşibendi leadership, which remained reluctant to question the legitimacy of the caliphate or the sovereignty Ottoman sultan. Şeyh Şefik Arvasi later succeeded his uncle Abdülhakim as head imam of the Sultan Ahmet Mosque. Indeed, Özoğlu suggests that the Arvasis were one of the few Kurdish notable landowning families that flourished under the Kemalist regime. Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi's father, also called Abdülhakim, was the director of customs in Van, and they owned a large estate in the village of Arvas. The younger generations of the Arvasi family retained their political influence well into the Republican period, yielding at least one marriage to a nephew of former President Turgut Özal and access to the highest levels of administration.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, it can be deduced that the Arvasi family did not share a unified perception of their origins nor a common political vision, and thus cultivated loyalties to several different competing groups. It could be argued that the ambiguity surrounding Ahmet Arvasi's identity, coupled with his association with the predominantly Kurdish Eastern provinces, was critical to the consolidation of his ultranationalist values.

Ahmet Arvasi and his five siblings were raised in Arvas (Doğanyayla), a village administratively attached to Müküs (Bahçesaray) in Van, by his father, Abdülhakim Arvasi, a customs director, and his mother, Cevahir Hanım, a housewife. He attended elementary school in Van and Doğubeyazıt, middle school in Karaköse and Erzurum, and finished high school in Erzurum.<sup>87</sup> As a young student in the 1940s attending schools in the diverse and restive East, his

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>87</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* (İstanbul: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1986), 1.

early education would have been deeply steeped in Turkish nationalist discourse. After the ratification of the Law of Unification of Education in 1924; which nationalized the education system and subordinated all educational institutions to the Ministry of Education, the Kemalist regime pursued an aggressive campaign of modernization and Turkification through an array of cultural and educational policies intended to create "a new generation in the New Turkish Republic."<sup>88</sup> Reforms ranged from the Latinization of the Ottoman script and an overhaul of the Turkish language, to prohibitions on traditional dress, to a revision of Turkish history which framed 'the Turk' as the progenitor of all civilizations and cultures. The implementation of these policies gained a particular saliency in the East, which was perceived as backward, barbaric, and tribal, with a diverse population of non-Turkish and non-Muslim minorities. Consequently, nation-building at the provincial periphery was waged through the construction of a new educational infrastructure and through the proliferation of nationalist cultural organizations known as Halkevleri (People's Houses); a network of mass education and culture associations controlled by the ruling CHP, which expanded rapidly in the East from 14 in 1932 to 479 in 1950.<sup>89</sup> According to Uğur Ümit Üngör, cultivating Turkishness and propagating the superiority of the Turkish race, history, and culture while eradicating competing cultural and ethnic identities became the most important feature of primary education.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the ideal of a unified and glorious Turkish nation heroically combating a cowardly and divisive enemy, as represented in the poem "Özleyiş", would have been inculcated in Arvasi since early childhood.

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<sup>88</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 177.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-217.

In fact, little is known about Arvasi's youth aside from the anecdotes he provides in *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* (*The Truth About Eastern Anatolia*) which attest to his lifelong struggle with his own identity. An extraordinary little book sixty pages in length, *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* is simultaneously a political treatise, a regional history, a linguistic analysis, and an autobiography chronicling Arvasi's battle against "kürtlük kompleksi," defined by Arvasi as the prevailing misconception that the Eastern Anatolian provinces are populated by a distinct ethnic group known as the Kurds.<sup>91</sup> To briefly summarize Arvasi's argument, he posits that region is comprised of Oğuz Türkler (Pure Turks) from Central Asia whose native Turkish identity and language had been corrupted by the machinations of foreign imperialists, geographic isolation, tribalism, and the historical weakness of the state at the periphery.<sup>92</sup> As a result, the people of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia are erroneously ascribed a nonexistent Kurdish identity; which is not a distinct ethnicity, but a metonym for backwardness, corruption, and criminality.<sup>93</sup>

*Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* interweaves Arvasi's analysis of regional history, sociology, geopolitics, and linguistics, with reminiscences from his childhood and adolescence in Eastern Anatolia, and consequently provides a rare glimpse into the author's early youth. In one particularly poignant anecdote, young Arvasi visits a friend, a native of Istanbul, who refers to Arvasi as "Şark'lı arkadaşım" ("my friend from the East") when introducing him to his mother. The implication of this description, according to Arvasi, is that his eastern origins are incorrectly associated with ethnic impurity and Kurdish barbarism and backwardness, especially in the imaginary of modern western Turks. Arvasi returns to his parents, both loyal Turkish

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<sup>91</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* (İstanbul: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1986), 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

nationalists, who reassure him of the purity of his Turkish heritage.<sup>94</sup> In another anecdote from his adolescence, Arvasi reunites with childhood acquaintances from Van, only to discover with horror that his once devoted Turkish nationalist friends and classmates had abandoned Turkism for Kurdish nationalism. His friends had come to perceive themselves as Kurdish while living in the more cosmopolitan Western provinces because they were identified as Kurds and maligned as primitive and savage by Turks in the west; consequently, adopting the Kurdish nationalist cause to counter their exclusion. Horrified by their defection, the young Turkish nationalist Ahmet Arvasi broke with his friends and vowed to eradicate the deception of Kurdism, which he believed was created by enemies of the Republic seeking to infiltrate and divide the Turkish nation.<sup>95</sup> Thus, while there is little extant information regarding Arvasi's childhood, his reminiscences from *Doğu Anadolu Gerçeği* paint a murky picture of a highly nationalistic early youth plagued by questions about ethnicity and nationhood, and ultimately provide invaluable insight into the ideologue Arvasi would become.

In 1955, Ahmet Arvasi published the first edition of a collection of poems, which included "Özleyiş" and thirty-three short poems composed between the ages of 16 and 23 from 1948 to 1955.<sup>96</sup> His poetry reflects an admiration for Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's work, and his usage of organic motifs and bucolic landscapes paired with divine and Sufi mystical elements - such as autumnal changes in Van, or the reed flute as a Sufi symbol that represents the yearning of the flute for the root from which it has been cut - is derivative of Kısakürek's distinctive style. Thematically, both poets addressed a sense of personal and national despair at the perceived loss

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 5.

of identity, community, and spirituality through the machinations of external and internal enemies.<sup>97</sup> Most importantly, Kısakürek (a close friend of the Arvasi family) provided Ahmet Arvasi and his conservative contemporaries with an explicit vision of a Turkish-Islamic national and cultural ideal in which Turks, as the most authentic representatives of Islam in the Muslim world, would serve the Islamic cause by heroically leading a spiritual renaissance to bring justice, morality, and social order to the Turkish people.<sup>98</sup>

### TEACHING CAREER AND *EĞİTİM SOSYOLOJİSİ*

After the publication of Arvasi abandoned poetry and entered Ankara Gazi Institute of Education Pedagogy Department (Ankara Gazi Eğitim Enstitüsü Pedagoji Bölümü), which was considered a bastion of Turkist thinking.<sup>99</sup> Here again Arvasi proved his innate grasp of new ideological trends which positioned him at the forefront of an evolving conservative nationalist movement. At Ankara Gazi Institute of Education, he learned to perceive education as a deeply national experience that sought to mold children into ideal Turkish citizens by imbuing them with a national consciousness and an uncompromising love of the Fatherland.<sup>100</sup> Education served as a primary site of nation-building and Turkification under the CHP, and massive educational reforms had aimed at the overarching objective of "beginning our national existence strongly from the perspective of national education."<sup>101</sup> According to the Ministry of Education, whose budget more than quadrupled between 1927 and 1955, "the Turkish school is obliged to

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<sup>97</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Culture Change and the Intellectual: A Study of the Effects of Secularization in Modern Turkey - Necip Fazıl and the Nakşibendi." in *Cultural Transitions in the Middle East*, ed. Şerif Mardin (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1994): 189-214.

<sup>98</sup> Duran and Aydın, 487.

<sup>99</sup> Aslan, 522.

<sup>100</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995), 7.

<sup>101</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 187.

transform every Turkish child into a thoroughly useful Turkish citizen who has fully grasped the psychology and ideology of the Republic, the Turkish nation, and the Turkish Republic."<sup>102</sup>

Aspiring teachers should be missionaries of Turkishness: "Students need to be raised with fully republican and nationalist sentiments; Teachers need to pursue the aim of realizing the national ideals and purposes; Teachers need to consider the Turkish Nation as an indivisible whole and...work as a cultural agent for its development and progress."<sup>103</sup>

Despite the defeat of the CHP in the 1950 elections, schools and universities continued to function as key sites for ideological training and political contestation, and in the 1960s-1980s, all of the major political factions vied for domination over the educational infrastructure, and both the far-left and the far-right attempted to train and place young cadres in teaching positions all across the country. Erken notes that the ultranationalist MHP was particularly active in seeking to penetrate the national school system through the placement of Ülkücü teachers due to its strategic objective of training a new generation of ultranationalist youth.<sup>104</sup>

Arvasi's conception of education mirrored the Kemalist and ultranationalist paradigm; which envisaged the cultivation of a national consciousness and the transmission of the national experience to the next generation as its *raison d'etre*.<sup>105</sup> In all of his later books, articles, and speeches, Arvasi declared that the dissemination of Turkish nationalism and the Turkish-Islamic Ideal to the youth was both the objective of education and his primary purpose as an educator. He perceived himself as a teacher first and foremost, and claimed to be compelled to publish and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 176-180.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>104</sup> Ali Erken, *The Construction of Nationalist Politics: The MHP, 1965-1980* (Oxford: The University of Oxford, 2013).

<sup>105</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995), 1.

driven into politics by a desire to assuage the national and religious identity crisis his students faced at the dawn of the 1960s.<sup>106</sup> Arvasi was deeply troubled by the state of the Turkish youth he encountered during his teaching career, and in accordance with the views of the conservative nationalist movement, he believed that they lived in apparent confusion and chaos due to the erosion of morality and the loss of their true Turkish national culture. As a result, his professional career as a teacher, writer, and a public intellectual were committed to addressing and resolving the difficulties of a generation that he argued was lost and in need of training and guidance to save the nation.<sup>107</sup>

In 1976, Arvasi dedicated an entire book to the subject of nationalism in education, titled *Eğitim Sosyolojisi (The Sociology of Education)*.<sup>108</sup> His primary argument centers on the importance of fostering a national consciousness in educators and students, and emphasizes the essential role of education in determining the strength and vitality of a nation. In order to facilitate the transmission of the national experience, expressed in its culture and its spirit, a cadre of teachers must be trained to propagate the ideals of Turkish nationalism, which will ultimately generate a cadre of nationalist students who will apply their knowledge to the betterment of the nation.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, Arvasi contends that identifying and supporting talented teachers should be as integral to the state as training doctors and technocrats. Teachers should be chosen from among the most educated, intelligent, successful, and hard-working students; a process which should be aided by providing a good minimum wage, reorganizing

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<sup>106</sup> See, for example: S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989), 5.

<sup>107</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğın İlkeleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Güneş Yayınları, 1965), 1.

<sup>108</sup> See footnote 123.

<sup>109</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Eğitim Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Burak Yayıncılık, 1995), 27.

teaching schools, and increasing the social-standing of teachers in society.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, teachers should be specially trained at a national education academy, which he intended to establish.<sup>111</sup>

According to Arvasi, a good teacher must promote the Turkish language, traditions, cultural beliefs, and religious ceremonies that are unique to the Turkish nation and fundamental to its identity and its durability. As a result, he argues, Turkish history, geography, national culture, and material and spiritual values should form the pith of a national curricula and inform the organization of the educational infrastructure.<sup>112</sup> He notes that the implementation of a sound national education system is particularly salient in Eastern Anatolia, where Turkish identity and cultural norms are weakest, and states that teachers should insist on the observance of national religious ceremonies, anniversaries, and the transmission of nationalist broadcasts in the classroom to cultivate national pride and consciousness. Significantly, he posits that shared religious ceremonies and rituals reinforce the national bond.<sup>113</sup>

Regarding the educational system, Arvasi advocates the redistribution of the provision of services between local, provincial, and national bodies spearheaded by private institutions, foundations, and associations under the auspices of the state. Specifically, he favors the privatization of higher education and vocational schools, but only in conjunction with the careful oversight of national and local institutions.<sup>114</sup> He attaches great value to higher education and to vocational schools, which he believes should be supported and expanded to provide students with the necessary skills to ply a trade.<sup>115</sup> Higher education, he argues, should be funded by

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

wealthier students seeking entrance into academia, though poor students should not be rejected due to their financial status.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, women and students with disabilities should not be neglected by the education system because high literacy rates are the hallmark of civilizational development and progress. Private schools should be established throughout the country to reduce the gender gap in literacy.<sup>117</sup>

In terms of teaching methods, Arvasi advocates a transition from memorization-based learning to knowledge-generating education through the assignment of individual and group research projects rooted in the scientific method.<sup>118</sup> He suggests that such projects would teach students how to think independently and foster individuality, which should be cultivated.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, individual learning styles, skills, interests, and needs must be addressed by trained teachers and faculty members to improve education standards. In order to meet the individual, local, and national educational needs of the populace, schools should be studied and restructured to ensure that qualified teachers can cater to regional differences.<sup>120</sup>

Between 1958 and 1965, Arvasi dedicated himself almost entirely to teaching. As a graduate of the Ankara Gazi Institute of Education's Department of Pedagogy, Arvasi specialized in teaching pedagogical methodology to aspiring instructors. According to his biographers, former students, and Ülkücü disciples, he was an exceptionally gifted and charismatic teacher and orator who was universally regarded for his quick wit, sharp tongue, and expansive

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

knowledge of Turkish history, sociology, and religion.<sup>121</sup> Biographer Mustafa Kuvancı shares several anecdotes from former colleagues and students that describe Arvasi as the consummate scholar and mentor, whose erudite lectures on Turkish nationalism and Islamic values gained him a passionate and loyal following and intimidated leftist students and faculty members.<sup>122</sup>

Teaching in schools all over the country - first in the east, at Van Alparslan İlköğretmen Okulu (Van Alparslan Primary Teacher School); and later in the west, at Savaştepe İlköğretmen Okulu (Savaştepe Primary Teacher School) and Balıkesir Necati Eğitim Enstitüsü (Balıkesir Salvation Education Institute) in the Marmara region; and finally in Bursa and İstanbul, at Bursa Eğitim Enstitüsü (Bursa Education Institute) and İstanbul Atatürk Eğitim Enstitüsü (İstanbul Atatürk Education Institute) - Arvasi enjoyed a reputation as a learned scholar and talented educator with an intimate knowledge of the Anatolian people. He was tireless in his nationalist activism - both in the classroom and in the community, and often led discussion groups for students and colleagues, delivered speeches at meetings, and met with villagers and local notables to share his ideologies.<sup>123</sup> Beşir Ayvazoğlu, the prominent author and scholar of the Turkish Right, described Arvasi as his own school; possessing the learning of an educator, scholar, and doctor, and the charisma of an actor with an ability to hypnotize his followers.<sup>124</sup>

According to his biographers, Arvasi's illustrious teaching career was almost derailed on several occasions by "slandorous" attacks on his nationalist orientation or rumors about his

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example: Hakkı Öznur, *Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi* (Ankara: Alternatif Yayınları, 2002); Mustafa Kuvancı, *Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi Hayatı: Tefekkürü-Eserleri* (İstanbul: Burak Yayınları, 1997).

<sup>122</sup> Mustafa Kuvancı, "Türk İslam Ülküsü Mütefekkeri: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi," (2012, April 28). Retrieved from: <http://ulkucubellek.com/turk-islam-ulkusu-mutefekkiri-seyyid-ahmet-arvasi/>.

<sup>123</sup> Şuayip Özdemir, *Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi Hayatı: Eserleri ve Eğitim Üzerine Görüşleri* (İstanbul: Arı Sanat Yayınevi, 2006).

<sup>124</sup> Beşir Ayvazoğlu, "Türkiye'de Sağcı Olmak," *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 16 (Güz, 1991), 32-43.

ethnic identity. In 1958, he was fired from his first teaching job at the Van Alparslan Primary School and transferred to Savaştepe as the result of the machinations of "leftist instigators" and "Kurdish dictators" who complained about his ultranationalist lessons.<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, his final appointment to the İstanbul Atatürk Education Institute in 1975 was also marred by a controversy over the Kurdish question. Necdet Özkaya, a former colleague of Arvasi's and fellow nationalist educator, recalls that Arvasi's teaching appointment was almost rescinded after Ayvaz Gökdemir - then the Minister of Education in charge of teaching appointments - received a letter from the governor of Bursa suggesting that Arvasi was of Kurdish origin despite the fact that Arvasi had already achieved fame as a staunchly Turkish nationalist writer. Özkaya intervened on Arvasi's behalf, and his appointment to İstanbul Atatürk Education Institute, a key Idealist stronghold, propelled Arvasi into the top echelon of ultranationalist politics.<sup>126</sup> In 1979, Arvasi retired from teaching after 27 years of service due to poor health partially catalyzed by the increasing demands of his political role, his famously rigorous writing schedule, and his late night open door policy which allowed his students and followers to access him at any time of the day.<sup>127</sup>

This chapter has examined key sites of formation in shaping the personality and ideologies of Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi in tandem with the evolution of conservative nationalism, from a cultural movement rooted in the glorification of the Ottoman-Islamic past in the late 1940s, up to its emergence as a political ideology co-opted by the ultranationalist Turkist

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<sup>125</sup> Mustafa Kuvancı, "Türk İslam Ülküsü Mütefekkeri: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi," (2012, April 28). Retrieved from: <http://ulkucubellek.com/turk-islam-ulkusu-mutefekkiri-seyyid-ahmet-arvasi/>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ali Erken, *The Construction of Nationalist Politics: The MHP, 1965-1980* (Oxford: The University of Oxford, 2013), 131.

Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) in the 1960s. Significantly, the politicization of conservative nationalism and the deepening enmeshment between Turkish nationalism, Islamic values, and Cold War geopolitics is reflected in Arvasi's poetry. Between the years 1958 and 1965, he composed only one poem: the explicitly nationalist "İki Nisan: Van'ın düşman işgalinden kurtuluşu" ("April 2nd: Liberation from the occupation of Van's enemies").<sup>128</sup> "İki Nisan" is one of Arvasi's most militantly Turkist poems, and is notable for its heroic depiction of war, sacrifice, and martyrdom in battle, but is also conspicuous for its aggressive stance vis-a-vis the perceived enemies of the Turkish nation. The poem chronicles the historical expulsion of Russian and Armenian forces from Van in a joint Turkish-Kurdish military operation on April 2, 1918. In the midst of the First World War in 1915, the city of Van was invaded by Russian troops - the traditional enemy of the Ottoman Empire - in collusion with the powerful but beleaguered local Armenian population.

For the Young Turks who led the Empire to its demise in World War I, and for future Turkish nationalists like Arvasi, the occupation of Anatolia reinforced the archetype of the Russian as the eternal enemy and justified the genocide of the Armenians as separatists and collaborators.<sup>129</sup> The liberation of Van in 1918 is still celebrated by nationalists as a momentous victory against an invading army in collaboration with a troublesome and divisive minority population, and for Turkish nationalists in the early 1960s facing the perceived dual threat of communism and separatism, Arvasi's poem lauding the triumph of Turkish forces against the defeated "enemies of Van" was both historical and current. However, while the events presented in "İki Nisan" might have been familiar to a nationalist audience, the poem reveals an important

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<sup>128</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Şiirlerim* (İstanbul: Berekat Yayınevi, 1989), 63-64.

<sup>129</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Van Valiliği, "Van Tarihçesi," (2017) Retrieved from: <http://www.van.gov.tr/van-tarihcesi>.

discursive and tactical shift in conservative nationalist ideology and strategy. While "Özleyiş" expresses the movement's longing and nostalgia for the martial glories of the Ottoman Empire, and portrays the modern Islamic world as cowed and divided by foreigners, "İki Nisan" is distinctly hawkish in its treatment of the nation in relation to its adversaries. Unlike "Özleyiş", the poem does not glorify conquest or lament the loss of the Empire, rather it presents a military strategy for managing enemies of the Republic through expulsion and elimination by alluding to a historical event - the liberation of Van. By deconstructing and comparing "Özleyiş" and "İki Nisan", written ten years apart, a discernible transformation in Arvasi's ideology and in the character of the conservative nationalist movement itself becomes apparent. By the 1960s, as the threat of communist penetration loomed and the country descended into political and economic chaos, conservative nationalism, formerly a cultural movement, became a political ideology, while Arvasi and his conservative nationalist colleagues became both politicized and increasingly militant.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Çetinsaya, 371.

## CHAPTER TWO

At the dawn of the 1960's, Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi was an unknown teacher working at Balıkesir Savaştepe Öğretmen Okulu (Balıkesir Savaştepe Teacher School); a small college for educators in the Anatolian city of Balıkesir.<sup>131</sup> By the 1970's, he was a major figure in a far-right wing political movement that would nearly plunge the country into civil war. This chapter examines Ahmet Arvasi's political career from the 1960s-1980s, with a focus on his ideological impact on the formation of the Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (CKMP/MHP) and the Ülkücü youth movement. It will provide a close reading of his first book, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri (The Principles of Advanced Turkish Nationalism)*, which garnered the attention of the CKMP/MHP party leadership, and offers an analysis of his most influential work, the three volume *Türk-İslam Ülküsü (Turkish-Islamic Ideal)*.<sup>132</sup>

Despite his role as an influential ideologue and propagandist for the ultranationalist MHP, the relationship between Ahmet Arvasi and the MHP party leadership was deeply fraught. Wary of his Islamism and the party's Islamist turn, the party elite never fully embraced Arvasi; leading to a final break with the MHP in 1980 during his imprisonment<sup>133</sup>. Arvasi's tumultuous and often acrimonious affiliation with the MHP reflected the internal power struggle between the secular Turkist elite that formed the core of the party, and the Islamist-leaning conservative

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<sup>131</sup> Mustafa Kuvancı, "Türk İslam Ülküsü Mütefekkeri: Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi," (2012, April 28). Retrieved from: <http://ulkucubellek.com/turk-islam-ulkusu-mutefekkiri-seyyid-ahmet-arvasi/>.

<sup>132</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Güneş Yayınları, 1965); S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Türk İslam Ülküsü*, v. I-II-III, 2. Baskı (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2015).

<sup>133</sup> Aslan, 520.

nationalist ideologues who held sway over the nationalist organizations and Ülkücü youth movement the party controlled throughout the 1970s.<sup>134</sup> Guided by the generation of conservative nationalist intellectuals discussed at length in the previous chapter, the youth movement, centered around the Ülkü Ocakları, dominated intra-party politics after 1975 and grew increasingly conservative, religious, and militant, as they were radicalized by propagandists, including Ahmet Arvasi, and by the escalating violence of the street war against leftist groups.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, MHP scholars and former ülkücü youth argue that conservative nationalist intellectuals like Ahmet Arvasi, Galip Erdem, and Erol Güngör were far more influential in forging the trajectory of the movement than the party leadership, with the exception of the party's neo-fascist founder and dictator, Alparslan Türkeş.<sup>136</sup>

As in the previous chapter, Arvasi is situated within a broader historical and political context, and is portrayed as both a product of and a contributor to shifting political and geopolitical currents. In order to assess Arvasi's impact on the CKMP/MHP and the Ülkücü movement, this chapter traces the inception of the party, its struggle to find its ideological niche and capture an electoral base, and offers a close reading of Türkeş' *Dokuz Işık (Nine Lights)*, the MHP's official party treatise, to highlight Arvasi's contribution to the Islamization of party doctrine.<sup>137</sup> The Islamist turn in party discourse after 1969 was engineered by Türkeş and his closest associates to expand the party's voter base, and ultimately catalyzed an intra-party power struggle underscored the complex and shifting dynamics between the MHP party elite, and its

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<sup>134</sup> Ali Erken, *The Construction of Nationalist Politics: The MHP, 1965-1980* (Oxford: The University of Oxford, 2013), 131.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>137</sup> Ali Kuzu, *Alparslan Türkeş : Dokuz Işık : Ülkücü Hareketin Tarihi*. Birinci baskı. ed., (Kariyer Developer, 2014).

conservative national ideologues in alliance with its young nationalist cadres. This power struggle was shaped by two underlying but intersecting divergences: first, the ideological chasm between the older, secular party leadership and the younger generation of religious youth trained in the *ülkü ocakları* by conservative nationalists; and second, the tactical differences between the party circles who sought electoral success, and the *Ülkücü* movement, which prioritized a more violent and militant stance in their war against the socialists.<sup>138</sup>

### THE 1960 MILITARY COUP, ENTER TÜRKEŞ

In order to provide a thorough analysis of Ahmet Arvasi's first book, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (*The Principles of Advanced Turkish Nationalism*), published in 1965, and his subsequent affiliation with the CKMP/MHP and the *Ülkücü* movement, it is necessary to briefly outline the momentous political events that had thrown the country into turmoil five years earlier.<sup>139</sup> On May 27, 1960, a group of thirty-eight army officers launched a military coup against the democratically elected government headed by the Demokrat Parti (DP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. As noted in the previous chapter, the DP came to power in the 1950 elections, ending twenty-seven years of CHP rule. The party had campaigned on a platform that attacked Kemalist Westernism, reformism, elitism, statism, and secularism; as they sought to represent the interests of the rural, agrarian, and conservative electorate (particularly large landowners and the peasants they controlled) that felt excluded from the state-building process and alienated by CHP policies.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Erken, 181.

<sup>139</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Güneş Yayınları, 1965).

<sup>140</sup> Jacob Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 95.

The DP rolled back Kemalist statist economic reforms by promoting private investment through the implementation of generous subsidies to farmers and tax exemptions and "special treatment" to foreign capital, and adopted a less strident stance toward secularism. Notable DP religious reforms included lifting the ban on the recital of the ezan (the call to prayer in Arabic), permitting broadcasts of the Qur'an on state radio, building 15,000 new mosques between 1950-1960, expanding the budget of the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Presidency of Religious Affairs), and the re-opening of İmam-Hatip Okulları (Prayer Leaders' Schools). However, as the DP faced increasing opposition to its social and economic policies beginning in the mid-1950s as the country sank into an inflationary crisis, the DP curbed its liberal reforms, muzzled the press, and exhibited a growing intolerance for dissent. The party's authoritarian posture became evident after the DP lost their majority in the Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, TBMM) in 1957, as Menderes sought to consolidate and perpetuate his position by using the army to violently suppress all opposition.<sup>141</sup>

The May 27, 1960 coup was launched by middle-ranking officers grouped under the name Milli Birlik Komitesi (National Unity Committee, MBK) and led by General Cemal Gürsel, the Commander of Land Forces. Framed as a Neo-Kemalist revolution undertaken by a Turkish military that was perceived as the guardians of Atatürkism, Jacob M. Landau argues that the coup sought to prevent a further government appeal to the conservative religious electorate and to stem "what looked like vote-oriented uneconomic spending in rural areas [which] could

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

more profitably be directed to planned reform, to development geared to Turkey's modernization, and to improvements in the armed forces, including their own financial lot."<sup>142</sup>

According to Professor Kemal Karpat, the revolution was sparked by "group conflicts" rather than a shared national vision: "it represented the natural reaction of the traditional ruling groups around the state to the emergence of a diversified type of civilian order in which group interests dominated."<sup>143</sup> Indeed, an irreparable breach between two factions within the MBK regarding the role of the military in politics and the transfer of power back to civilian rule erupted shortly after the establishment of the military junta. The majority of the revolutionary officers favored a return to civilian rule after elections, while a minority of ambitious, radical junior officers, known as "The Fourteen" and led by Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, advocated the continuation of military governance. On November 13, 1960, "The Fourteen" were expelled from the MBK and sent into exile as military attaches to diplomatic missions abroad. Türkeş was posted to New Delhi, far from the epicenter of Turkish politics, but he continued to meet clandestinely with the other members of "The Fourteen" in exile. The group was allowed to return to Turkey in 1963.<sup>144</sup>

The military's management of the coup and its aftermath alienated many voters from the CHP; which, in collusion with the military, appeared to be waging a vindictive campaign of suppression against partisan rivals in order to perpetuate Republican power. The military

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>143</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, "The Military and Politics in Turkey, 1960-64: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of a Revolution", *The American Historical Review*, 75, no: 6 (Oct., 1970): 1654-1683.

<sup>144</sup> Landau, 99.

presumed the CHP would easily dominate the October 1961 elections, and expected the party to implement the social and economic reforms articulated in the new Constitution. However, the lifting of the ban on party activity on January 13, 1961 revealed an emboldened opposition that existed in everything but name. The DP was outlawed, but its powerful successor, the center-right Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP), was established in February 1961 with the express intent of redressing the wrongs done to the DP.

At the same time, a spate of new parties representing a diverse array of ideological currents emerged to seek a stake in the new order. According to Landau, six notable parties competed in parliamentary elections between 1961-1964, only two of which had existed before the 1960 coup: CHP and CKMP (Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi).<sup>145</sup> Between 1961-1964, three successive coalition governments were formed under the premiership of İsmet İnönü, as the results of the 1961 elections failed to give an absolute majority to one party for the first time in Turkish electoral history. However, despite the participation of multiple parties in national elections and governing coalitions, the political sphere during the 1960s was dominated by the highly acrimonious rivalry between the CHP and the AP, and smaller parties wielded little parliamentary influence in practice. The bipolarity between the CHP and the AP, the frustrated ambitions of the smaller parties, and the "confused ideological atmosphere" that prevailed after the 1960 coup generated the ideal conditions for the perpetration of extremist actions - such as the abortive coups in 1962 and 1963, which sought to implement a rightist dictatorship - and for the formation and proliferation of extremist political parties representing both the far-right and

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

the far-left, as the military warily refused to intervene in political activity in the wake of the revolution.<sup>146</sup>

### ***PRINCIPLES OF ADVANCED TURKISH NATIONALISM***

As the country began its long descent into political turmoil, Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi, then a teacher working at Balıkesir Savaştepe Öğretmen Okulu (Balıkesir Savaştepe Teacher School), published *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (*Principles of Advanced Turkish Nationalism*), a 15 page booklet outlining "with scientific and nationalist methods" his vision of Turkish nationalism in 1965.<sup>147</sup> Beginning with a series of research questions in the foreword of the booklet, he attempts to define what Turkish nationalism is and is not, seeks a remedy for the social and economic ills in the country, and presents the Turkish nationalist program as a panacea for the nation in its pursuit of stability and progress<sup>148</sup>. Consequently, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* reads as a political manifesto; representing a cogent articulation of nationalist ideology and an impassioned plea in favor of the national idea while revealing the prevailing milliyetçi mindset in the mid-1960s. With the intention of challenging "the accusations and abuse" leveled at Turkish nationalism by its opponents and presenting the nationalist program to the Turkish youth, Arvasi identifies 44 principles that he argues characterizes the movement and its ideology.<sup>149</sup> Each principle is numbered and expressed in three or four sentences using the "we" form of the verb to denote that he is speaking on behalf of the group.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>147</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Güneş Yayınları, 1965), 1.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., foreword.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 1-15.

Arvasi's first principle of nationalism simply states: "We want all mankind to be happy" ("Bütün insanlığın mes'ut olmasını istiyoruz").<sup>150</sup> Principles two through seven are dedicated to the defense of nations as a system that strengthens societies and frees human beings from the yoke of tyranny and oppression. He argues that the durability of humanity is contingent upon the cultivation of strong nations composed of powerful people, and that the higher ideals of humanity can only be achieved by fostering and advancing the system of nations and of nationalities. He further contends that nationalism represents the natural and legitimate desire of the nation to bolster itself politically, economically, socially, and culturally, and that "advanced and humanitarian nationalism" ("ileri ve insanı milliyetçilik") is supportive of all nations and nationalities in the shared pursuit of development, justice, and happiness.<sup>151</sup> According to Arvasi, imperialism, not nationalism, exploits both individuals and other nations through economic, social, and political pressure, and thus all imperialisms should be rooted out and eradicated. Principle eight considers the right of Turkish nationalists to liberate the country from imperialism and to defend the citizenry from the exploitation of foreign nations, while principle nine states that the primary objective of the nationalist is to modernize, strengthen, and protect the nation from malign influences. Principles 10 through 12 return to the concept of nationalism and religion, which he posits is not divisive nor a cause of war. He argues that war is not created by people, but is rather a law of existence ("bir var olma kanunudur")<sup>152</sup>, and suggests that religions and nations are born out of a need to defend, love, and protect each other. Moreover, philosophies can be as divisive as religion, doctrine, and nation, and can easily generate conflict and war. While nationalists should be wary of philosophies and doctrines, they shouldn't

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 2.

necessarily reject philosophy altogether. Nationalists should always consider the issues faced by their own societies first, and should not allow themselves to be derailed by opponents.

Principle 13 offers an interesting insight into Arvasi's personal views regarding the role of the intellectual in the nationalist project. He observes that the Turkish people live in a state of ignorance due to the backwardness of the State and its institutions, and notes that Turks need religion, art, a flourishing economy, healthcare, and an enlightened strata of nationalist intellectuals to assist the people in their progress. Thus, he reasons, Turkish nationalism should be reinforced and disseminated by a cadre of trained nationalist intellectuals, and concludes that Turkish nationalism should develop as a progressive movement led by intellectuals and not under the auspices of a group or a party. Principles 14-16 mirror his ambivalent stance on the impact of party politics on society. Principle 14 states that scientific methods rather than theological, doctrinal, or philosophical remedies should be applied to resolve the country's economic and social problems, and emphasizes that "no chief, party, or idea man is a substitute for knowledge" ("Hiçbir şef, parti veya fikir adamı ilmin yerini tutamaz").<sup>153</sup>

Principles 15 and 16 further warn that no person, party, opinion, or belief should be idolized nor escape the scrutiny of scientific investigation, and moreover, that no individual should be exploited by society, nor should society be exploited by an individual. In typical Arvasi fashion, Principle 17 muddies his previous assertions about the relationship of the individual vis-a-vis society, but retains the distinctive tone and outlook of an activist. He argues that compliance with social rules is necessary for stability, while the desire of the individual to change the social order is necessary for innovation and progress. Consequently, both sentiments

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 4.

should be given the opportunity to flourish, and the rights and freedoms of the individual in conflict with society should be protected. While Principle 17 appears to promote a humanistic approach to state-society relations, it should be read as an attack on the collectivism of communism, which Arvasi refutes as futile and impossible.<sup>154</sup>

Principles 18-21 turn to the role of the family in cultivating a strong society. His perception of family and of gender roles is decidedly conservative; as he argues that the family forms the backbone of the nation and bemoans the erosion of family life in the country, which he believes can be rectified through training and a return to traditional values. He writes that birth should be encouraged as a national imperative and never prevented, and suggests that certain social and economic woes, such as unemployment and overcrowding, are caused by a lack of infrastructure and not by overpopulation. On the contrary, he contends, the country is dangerously under-populated. Arvasi's position regarding family life would later be incorporated in the MHP party program, as would his unique stance on peasant life, which markedly diverged from the position of his nationalist predecessors.<sup>155</sup> While nationalist intellectuals like Ziya Gökalp, Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk romanticized the rural village and the Anatolian peasant, at least at the discursive level, Arvasi argues against the glorification of the peasantry.<sup>156</sup>

Principles 22-27 address land and population redistribution, with a reduction in the number of villages and reorientation of the peasantry away from agriculture and into industry. He proposes the amalgamation of scattered villages into larger units functioning as cooperatives

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Uzer, 98.

with a town at the center of each village to promote development and ward off backwardness. Villagers, meanwhile, should be relocated to industrial areas and channeled into various industries because Turkey possesses a surplus of farmers and a dearth of industrial workers. The number of towns in the country should proliferate, with one in every ten villages transformed into a town, because towns and cities are sites of civilizational development while villages are relegated to obscurity by history. Each town center should provide the necessary services and infrastructure to facilitate the growth of surrounding villages.<sup>157</sup>

Principles 28-36 consider how to cultivate the ideal citizen in conjunction with the trajectory of the educational system. He contends that the future of the nation depends upon the meticulous edification and training of children to generate skilled workers and productive citizens who are committed to national progress. In order to achieve this objective, the State should undertake a comprehensive program of educational reform and planning facilitated by the division of the country into smaller regional units to assess local, regional, and national educational needs, and to allow the Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education, MEB) to provide the necessary services and infrastructure to each region accordingly. Moreover, he argues, schools should seek purpose in attempting to address local and national issues through organization and curriculum, and should transfer decision-making to regional planning centers. The achievements and capabilities of each student should be scientifically tracked by regional centers, with professions allotted to students according to special regulations based on the interests of the nation. Faculties and schools should also be established in response to national interests with strict quotas for admission. In accordance with the Kemalist position regarding

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<sup>157</sup> Arvasi, 9.

education, Arvasi laments the fact that Turkish children from poor, rural communities lack access to training in Turkish language, culture, and history, and suggests that vocational schools and high schools should be established in every region, with the establishment of compulsory boarding high schools in rural villages. Ultimately, village youth should be admitted to universities. Regarding the general state of Turkish universities, Arvasi notes that political organizations (primarily leftist organizations in 1965) had infiltrated administrations, faculties, and student bodies causing universities to devour themselves. He ominously warns against allowing universities to become sub-states within the State, and argues in favor of a widespread academic purge.<sup>158</sup>

Principles 37-44 address the importance of propagating national culture. Arvasi envisions the establishment of an organized network of media outlets, printing presses, publishing houses, cinemas, and theaters run by nationalists to disseminate Turkish culture and to spread the ideology of Turkish nationalism. He frames Turkish nationalists as soldiers engaged in a war against insidious foreign influences, and argues that victory can only be achieved through a patient, methodical, and systematic campaign to elucidate the nationalist vision through cultural and artistic programming. According to Arvasi, the survival of nations depends on maintaining a strong and unique national culture, which he defines as the spiritual and material values that ultimately characterize the nation through its historical and social evolution. He further defines modernization as a process leading to the capacity of the nation to represent its national culture at the contemporary level of development, while civilization refers to the modernity of national culture. Arvasi sadly posits that Turkish national culture (identified by language, religion, art,

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-13.

law, morality, economy, folklore, belief systems, and spiritual values) is backward, powerless, and far below the level of civilizational development of other nations. He blames the underdevelopment of the country on the proliferation of dry and lifeless institutions which abandoned Turkish values and facilitated the penetration of foreign cultures, and the entrenchment of tribalism and provincial village life which prevented Turkey from achieving nationhood and kept the people in a state of ignorance. Thus, he concludes, Turkey's national culture remains at the level of the peasant, leading young, educated nationalists to lose hope and reject their culture in disgust. He argues that national culture needs to be reclaimed or renationalized by nationalist intellectuals using unspecified methods to raise the civilizational level by destroying stale institutions, eradicating tribalism and rural backwardness while reconciling the enmity between the urban intelligentsia and the Anatolian peasant, revitalizing the Turkish language and purging it of foreign influence, and returning to uniquely Turkish spiritual and moral values.<sup>159</sup>

### **BIRTH OF THE CKMP/MHP**

In 1965, Ahmet Arvasi's first book, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri*, was published by Doğan Güneş Yayınları, a small conservative nationalist publishing house in İstanbul owned by a milliyetçi author and publisher named Mümin Çevik.<sup>160</sup> In 1967, the thin, blue book caught the eye of Ahmet B. Karabacak, the highly influential founder of *Milli Hareket*, a monthly journal published between 1967-1971 that served as the first publication to be associated with the CKMP-MHP. Karabacak would later establish *Ülkücü Kadro*, another prominent nationalist

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

<sup>160</sup> Ahmet B. Karaback, *Üç Hilal'in Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2011), 90.

magazine; Türk Kültür Yayınevi, a leading nationalist publishing house; and was appointed as Ahmet Arvasi's successor as the Chairman of the Türk Gençlik Vakfı (Turkish Youth Foundation), founded by Arvasi in 1978.<sup>161</sup> Karabacak published *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* in the October 1967 edition of *Milli Hareket*; garnering instant national recognition for Arvasi and catapulting the relatively unknown teacher from the Eastern provinces into the spotlight. At present day, *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri* continues to serve as an inspiration for the nationalist movement and is widely considered a classic of nationalist literature. For Arvasi scholars, the work is notable for the absence of religious themes in the text, and thus represents a departure from his earlier and later writings.<sup>162</sup>

The year 1965 was also momentous for Alparslan Türkeş and the far-right movement. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Türkeş and his colleagues, known as "The Fourteen" were allowed to return to Turkey in February 1963 after spending three years in exile in the wake of the 1960 coup. According to Ali Erken, the exile of "The Fourteen" - a Pan-Turkist clique of reformist young officers effectively led by Türkeş - was catalyzed as much by a sense of anxiety regarding Türkeş' authoritarian political ambitions and his vast network of civilian and military connections among nationalist soldiers, students, and organizations as by the group's radical stance on civilian governance.<sup>163</sup> Rumors circulated that Türkeş was on the brink of seizing power in 1960 following the regional precedent set by Colonel Nasser in Egypt, and that he had secured the backing of young nationalists and Turkist sympathizers in the military academies and the army. This perception was partially confirmed by the enthusiastic support he received from

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>162</sup> See, for example: Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 131.

<sup>163</sup> Erken, 60.

young members of nationalist organizations such as Türk Ocakları (Turkish Hearth) and Üniversiteliler Kültür Derneği (University Student Cultural Organization, ÜKD) upon his return to Turkey on February 23, 1963, which revealed his popularity in nationalist circles, if not amongst the general electorate.<sup>164</sup>

Türkeş and "The Fourteen" were keen to translate his ideological appeal into executive political power, and to this end he attempted to cultivate new connections with the AP in 1963, and penned a short book, *Bazı Gereçekler (Some Truths)*, with Rıfat Baykal and Muzaffer Özdağ, two of his closest associates, to defend his role in the 1960 coup and to increase his appeal ahead of the imminent foundation of a new political party that he would lead. However, the new political party that Türkeş and his colleagues envisioned never came to fruition, as Türkeş was implicated in the abortive coup of May 21, 1963 and imprisoned for four months. Upon his release, Türkeş and four members of his clique adopted a novel strategy to obtain their political objective: on March 31, 1965, they joined the small, center-right CKMP.<sup>165</sup>

The CKMP was formed through the merging of two parties; Cumhuriyet Millet Partisi (Republican Nation Party, CMP) and Türkiye Köylü Partisi (Turkish Peasant Party, TKP) in 1958. The party (one of only two to survive the 1960 coup) was led by the charismatic Osman Bölükbaşı, and despite its relatively small size, it managed to represent itself as an alternative to the two main parties, CHP and AP. In the 1961 national elections, the CKMP garnered 14% of the total votes, and in 1962, the party joined the İnönü-led coalition government. The CKMP's success was short-lived, however, and in 1963 Bölükbaşı left the party to found the Millet Partisi

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

(The Nation Party, MP). The departure of the dynamic Bölükbaşı threw the CKMP into turmoil and decimated its voter base, resulting in an abysmal 2.2% of the vote in local elections in 1963. Türkeş and his clique concluded that the CKMP was ripe for a takeover; as the party offered an established organizational infrastructure with adequate funding, despite its diminished constituency, and thus they abandoned the idea of forming a new party and instead determined to appropriate an existing party.<sup>166</sup>

At the end of July 1965, the party held its national congress in Ankara at Türkeş' behest. The congress was packed with Türkeş sympathizers and with youths in red armbands who proclaimed Türkeş as their savior and who carried written orders to his delegates on how to vote. He delivered an impassioned speech that contrasted Turkey's poverty with its enormous potential, and called for sweeping reforms and strong leadership. He spoke on behalf of Pan-Turkism, claiming that the greater Turkish nation was as good as or superior to other nations. Significantly, for the benefit of the conservative Anatolian delegates, he declared that Islam was the religion of the Turkish nation - opportunistically adopting, for the first time, the religious posture in exchange for votes that would become his hallmark during the 1970s. On August 1, 1965, Türkeş was elected Party Chairman of the CKMP.<sup>167</sup>

### ***DOKUZ IŞIK AND THE ISLAMIST TURN***

With the exception of minor personnel changes, Türkeş did not introduce any major structural changes to the party immediately. Landau notes, however, that from the very beginning of his chairmanship Türkeş gave the party a more centralized and authoritarian

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<sup>166</sup> Landau, 150.

<sup>167</sup> Erken, 68.

character. Under his leadership, the party assumed a quasi-military structure; with a rigidly vertical chain of command that led directly to Türkeş himself, as Türkeş preferred to make all decisions regarding the party personally. Instead of imposing radical organizational changes at the outset, Türkeş composed and published a short, 16 page booklet outlining the party's new ideology.<sup>168</sup>

The first edition of *Dokuz Işık (Nine Lights)*; the official manifesto of the CKMP-MHP and "the vade mecum for party activities," was published in Istanbul in 1965, but its basic tenets were conceived at least two years earlier by Türkeş and "The Fourteen" upon return from exile. The formulation of the "Nine Lights" can be further traced to the ideologies of the "second generation" of Turkists discussed in the previous chapter, and reflect the clique's intimate involvement in milliyetçi circles in the 1940s, as well as the admiration for Kemalism (albeit in a more extreme, statist form) that had precipitated the 1960 coup. Modeled on Atatürk's "Six Arrows," which represent the six fundamental pillars of Kemalism, the "Nine Lights" elaborated in the 1965 edition of *Dokuz Işık* include, in order as listed: 1. Milliyetçilik (Nationalism); 2. Ülkücülük (Idealism); 3. Ahlakçılık (Morality); 4. Toplumculuk (Social-mindedness); 5. İlimcilik (Scientism); 6. Hürriyetçilik (The guaranteeing of freedoms); 7. Köycülük (Care for peasants, or being pro-peasant); 8. Gelişmecilik ve halkçılık (Development and populism); and 9. Endüstricilik ve teknikçilik (Industrialization and technology).<sup>169</sup>

To summarize briefly, *Dokuz Işık* prioritizes milliyetçilik, defined simply as serving the Turkish nation, and Türkçülük; or the nationalist's loyalty to the Turkish spirit, its traditions, and

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<sup>168</sup> Landau, 151.

<sup>169</sup> Ali Kuzu, *Alparslan Türkeş : Dokuz Işık : Ülkücü Hareketin Tarihi*. Birinci baskı. ed., (Kariyer Developer, 2014).

to assisting all Turks and the Turkish nation in everything. The remaining eight "Lights" can be interpreted and evaluated in terms of service to the Fatherland. Ülkücülük identifies the members of the party as idealists, who wish to serve mankind by serving the nation, and who wish to serve the nation by bringing Turkey to the highest level of civilization possible<sup>170</sup>. According to Türkeş, this objective can only be achieved by implementing the economic and social policies embodied by the principles of toplumculuk, ilimcilik, köycülük, and endüstricilik ve teknikçilik. Toplumculuk, or social-mindedness, is allotted a full four pages in *Dokuz Işık*, and subsequently became a linchpin of the party's rhetoric, and a controversial component of its image due to its linguistic and ideological proximity to National Socialism (Nazism) when combined with nationalism. Marked by its statist outlook, toplumculuk is defined by three characteristics: 1. Private enterprise should be promoted and encouraged, provided it does not ignite conflicts between employers and workers; 2. State support is essential for such enterprises, particularly if they are large, such as atomic and space research; 3. Welfare and social services should be organized and distributed by the state.<sup>171</sup> Like Arvasi's *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri*, *Dokuz Işık* advocates development and modernization "through a combination of scientific planning and revolutionary progress." İlimcilik (scientism) and endüstricilik ve teknikçilik (industrialization and technology) reflect the party's perception that rapid industrialization and modernization were essential to the country's economic future.

Türkeş further argues that Turkey should invest heavily in large industry and should implement sweeping agricultural reforms to rapidly develop rural areas and to reduce the number of villages. Under the principle of köycülük (roughly translated as pro-peasant), Türkeş presents

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<sup>170</sup> Landau, 205.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

a program that mirrors Arvasi's vision for rural development in *İleri Türk Milliyetçiliğinin İlkeleri*, but unlike Arvasi, Türkeş stops short of explicitly accusing the peasantry of preventing modernization. He proposes the coalescence of Turkey's 43,000 villages into 4,300 villages operating as cooperatives, which he contends would facilitate agricultural mechanization, eradicate unjust inheritance laws, and improve the distribution of services. He further suggests that peasants should be channeled into industry or other economic sectors if possible.<sup>172</sup>

The evolution of third "Light;" ahlakçılık, or morality, is crucial to understanding the profound personal impact and substantial ideological contribution that Ahmet Arvasi and his conservative nationalist colleagues made to the far-right movement in the 1960s-1980s, and to the party at its very inception. The 1965 edition of *Dokuz Işık* is famously vague in its articulation of morality; stating only that morals are the basis of a successful society and that morality will raise the level of development of the Turkish nation. Türkeş further evades identifying morality with a particular system of values by alluding to the pursuit of a moral code that aligns with the spirit, traditions, and culture of the Turkish nation, but conspicuously omits any reference to Islam in his treatise.<sup>173</sup>

A staunch nationalist, ardent Turkist, and radical Kemalist, Türkeş envisioned a *secular* Turkey shaped by the Turkish spirit and not the precepts of Islam, and guided by loyalty to the Turkish nation, not to the ummah. This vision began to change, however, after the general elections in October 1965, as the CKMP failed to distinguish itself ideologically by representing itself as the standard-bearers of nationalist interests, and thus suffered a humiliating defeat at the

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>173</sup> Aslan, 522.

polls; garnering only 208,696 votes or a mere 2.2%. Worse, the AP; a center-right party representing the broad-based electorate which Türkeş hoped to capture, and which Türkeş had accused of inciting religious fanaticism during the campaign, won a resounding victory with 52% of the vote. The Senate elections of 1966 produced nearly identical results, with Demirel's AP winning 56% of the vote, while the CKMP received only 2.2%.<sup>174</sup>

In response to his poor showing at the ballot box, and due to the budding influence of three conservative nationalist ideologues; Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi, Erol G ng r, and Ahmet B y k Karabacak, who argued that the principle of "Ahlak ılık" (Morality) needed to be emphasized and Islamicized for the betterment of the youth, Türkeş published a second edition of *Dokuz Işık*<sup>175</sup> in 1969 that greatly expanded the role of morality in party doctrine and explicitly defined the Turkish nation as Islamic in character and guided by Islamic values. The 1969 edition would serve as the first and only manifesto of the MHP, and was first unveiled at the historic 1969 Party Congress, discussed later in this chapter, in which the CKMP became the MHP.<sup>176</sup>

Throughout the mid to late 1960s, the CKMP struggled to find its ideological niche and its core constituency in an increasingly diverse and competitive political landscape that, nevertheless, continued to be dominated by the AP and the CHP. Meanwhile, the country was undergoing a seismic social and economic metamorphosis described by one anthropologist as "the most profound irreversible transformation in Anatolia since the Neolithic period."<sup>177</sup> Rapid but uneven economic development facilitated by the advent of industrialization and a reduction

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<sup>174</sup> Landau, 215.

<sup>175</sup> Alparslan T rkeş, *Millî Doktrin Dokuz Işık*, Genişletilmiş Birinci Baskı, İstanbul: Hamle Basın Yayın.

<sup>176</sup> Aslan, 522.

<sup>177</sup> Erken, 69.

of the share of agriculture in domestic production led to increased social mobility and, significantly, to rapid urbanization. Economic development outpaced social change, however, and sufficient employment, housing, infrastructure, and services could not be provided for the expanding urban population, while traditional urban and rural producers and small businessmen were rendered obsolete by the changing social structure.<sup>178</sup>

At the same time, the populace - newly politicized by the 1960 coup, the inception of pluralism, and the reestablishment of a vibrant civil society; in addition to the growth of mass media and the global rise of revolutionary ideologies like socialism - became increasingly active in challenging the existing order. The increase in political activism was particularly salient amongst the working class (even in rural areas), and amongst the youth - who were adversely affected by high living costs and a stagnant educational system, and who would ultimately spearhead a war of annihilation between the far-left and the far-right in universities and on the streets during the late 1960s and 1970s. Thus, despite the hegemony of the AP and the CHP in the political arena during the 1960s, the unique convergence of social, economic, and political turmoil generated the optimal conditions for the establishment of extremist parties on both sides of the spectrum.<sup>179</sup>

The CKMP's ideological centerpiece was unquestionably its staunchly anti-communist platform, but in the late 1960s the party was unable to translate the growing anti-communist sentiment in the country into a voter base, particularly as their center-right rivals, the AP, also adopted an anti-communist stance and held mass support and vast resources through its large and

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>179</sup> Landau, 220.

diverse constituency. Likewise, the CKMP failed to gain traction with voters during the ongoing Cyprus crisis, in which the Turkish Cypriot minority faced eradication in escalating communal violence between Turks and Greeks, despite the fact that Türkeş was a lifelong champion of Pan-Turkism and was himself a Turkish Cypriot. Unfortunately for the party leadership, the defense of Cyprus was a consensual issue among the larger parties, and again the CKMP lacked the resources and the reach to distinguish itself. Consequently, it became evident to Türkeş and his associates that the party would have to undergo a strategic, tactical, and ideological transformation in order to achieve its political objectives.<sup>180</sup>

In his sprawling study of the CKMP-MHP, Ali Erken suggests that Türkeş and some of his colleagues from "The Fourteen" planned to synthesize a modernist form of Islam with Turkish national culture during their tenure in the MBK. Erken stresses, however, that this project was intended to be confined to the realm of culture and represented a means of reforming a highly flawed network of religious faculties, schools, and organizations. It remains unclear when and how Türkeş and his closest associates decided to co-opt conservative nationalist ideology into party discourse, but it is interesting to note that the change in rhetoric was first recorded at the CKMP Party Congress in 1967, shortly before Türkeş first met Ahmet Arvasi in Balıkesir in June 1968. From 1965-1967, the CKMP leadership had resolutely refused to show any affinity with political Islam and shunned the usage of Islamic symbols and narratives in party propaganda, however, according to Erken, "it became clear that Ottoman history and Islam could generate a higher level of emotional impetus amongst young nationalist militants" and that an ideological reorientation from pure Turkism to conservative nationalism could both expand

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<sup>180</sup> Erken, 70.

the party's voting base and could facilitate the realization of Türkeş' long-term political objective to create a new generation of highly trained nationalist cadres operating within a broad, well-organized, and active nationalist movement.<sup>181</sup>

At the 1967 Party Congress, the early signs of an ideological and strategic shift began to emerge, as Türkeş called on his supporters to follow the principles of the Qur'an in daily life. Two additional members of "The Fourteen," Ahmet Er and Dündar Taşer, also adopted a conservative nationalist stance in the wake of the 1967 Party Congress, and began to recruit conservative nationalist ideologues to the party organization. In 1968-1969, a group of educated young conservative nationalists from the Üniversiteliler Kültür Derneği (The Organization of Culture for University Students, ÜKD) joined the party, as did several leading conservative nationalist intellectuals and historians; including Osman Turan; an internationally renowned Seljuk historian, and Galip Erdem and O. Yüksel Serdengeçti; two of the most prominent nationalist ideologues in the country at the time.<sup>182</sup>

In addition to bringing conservative nationalist intellectuals into the fold of the party, Türkeş, Taşer, and Er began to recruit conservative nationalist university students through the newly founded ülkü ocakları (idealist hearths); a vast network of nationalist student organizations originally established as social clubs in universities beginning in 1967. While the ülkü ocakları remained nominally independent of the CKMP, in practice they operated as ideological and military training camps for young nationalist cadres affiliated with the party, and served as the de facto loci of the party's paramilitary youth wing, later known as Bozkurtlar (The

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

Grey Wolves). Supported heavily by Türkeş, Taşer and the emerging conservative nationalist circle within the CKMP, ülkü ocakları branches rapidly opened and expanded in universities throughout the country, with many universities in Ankara and Istanbul housing more than one ülkü ocağı on campus from 1968 onwards.

The metastasization of the ülkü ocakları in 1968, and the subsuming of formerly independent nationalist youth organizations under the authority of the ülkü ocakları in 1969, further signaled the strategic and tactical shift undertaken by Türkeş and Taşer mentioned above. Frustrated at the ballot box by the broad-based appeal of the AP, they sought to gain power by investing in the cultivation of a hierarchical and militarized nationalist youth movement that was unwaveringly loyal to the "Başbuğ" ("Leader") Alparslan Türkeş. In order to obtain this objective, they needed conservative nationalist ideologues who could mobilize and radicalize a generation of conservative youth that was less beholden to Kemalist nationalism, less secular, and deeply suspicious of both the Kemalist ruling elite and the military which had perpetrated the 1960 coup in the name of Kemalist nationalism.

On June 11, 1968, Alparslan Türkeş met Ahmet Arvasi for the first time in Balıkesir; an event that purportedly altered the trajectory of the party and the course of Turkish politics. According to Efendi Barutcu, a former colleague and biographer of Arvasi, Türkeş successfully recruited Arvasi to the CKMP before consulting him on an issue that would ultimately serve as an enduring testament to the party's conservative nationalist turn in the late 1960s: the party emblem. The CKMP party leadership, increasingly divided into Turkist and conservative nationalist camps, engaged in a heated and divisive intra-party debate regarding the emblem at the "extraordinary" Adana Congress in 1969; in which the CKMP was officially reborn as the

MHP, but in June 1968, the contours of the new party had not yet taken shape. Ülkücü researchers Efendi Barutcu and Hakkı Öznur both claim that it was Ahmet Arvasi who suggested to Alparslan Türkeş that the party should adopt the three crescents from the Ottoman flag instead of the pre-Islamic Turkist bozkurt (wolf) as the party emblem, and MHP scholars such as Ömer Aslan confirm that Arvasi was, at the very least, highly influential in the decision to use the Ottoman-Islamic crescents to represent the party and its political objectives.

As noted above, the intra-party debate regarding the party emblem would not erupt until the Party Congress in 1969, but the recruitment of Ahmet Arvasi and the rapid proliferation of ülkü ocakları comprised of young nationalists brought the CKMP closer to a conservative nationalist position in 1968. Disparagingly referred to by the Turkists as "gerici" ("regressive people"), the inclusion of conservative youths in the party ranks, and the shift in discourse away from secular Kemalism and towards a more religious conservative nationalism, led to a mass Turkist exodus from the CKMP in 1968 - including five members of the former MBK; who stated that they could no longer support a political party that was leaning to "the regressive right."

The Islamist turn in party discourse spearheaded by Ahmet Arvasi and his conservative nationalist colleagues fractured the MHP; as the radical Turkists who formed the party's core in its formative years and represented its true ideological essence, such as Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, broke with the party leadership in 1974 over the inclusion of Islamic narratives in party rhetoric. However, despite the departure of Atsız and his Turkist constituency, the adoption of conservative nationalist discourse was largely successful in facilitating party expansion and recruitment, and helped the MHP to achieve one of its primary strategic objectives: to subsume

all nationalist organizations under the auspices of the party while establishing new *ülkü ocakları* branches to train the next generation of loyal nationalist cadres to lead the state. By 1976, the number of *ülkü ocakları* totaled more than 1000, and at the time of the coup in September 1980, more than 1200 branches operated throughout the country. The party elite attempted to exert control over the ideological and political activity of these organizations through the implementation of a vertical command structure that ensured the absolute authority of Alparslan Türkeş in decision-making, but the rapid proliferation of *ülkü ocakları* in remote locations, a lack of material resources, and the highly vertical nature of the party itself meant that the party leadership (with the exception of Türkeş and his closest ally, Dündar Taşer, a conservative nationalist who died in 1972) maintained little contact with the *ülkü ocakları* and wielded almost no power over the *Ülkücü* movement.

### ***TÜRK-İSLAM ÜLKÜSÜ AND DECLINE***

Ahmet Arvasi spent the 1970s teaching at İstanbul Atatürk Eğitim Enstitüsü and writing columns for the MHP-affiliated *Milli Hareket (National Action)*, *Ülkücü Kadro (Idealist Cadre)*, and for the official publication of the party, *Hergün (Everyday)*. It was through his column in *Hergün*, titled "Türk-İslam Ülküsü", that Arvasi developed his Turkish-Islamic Ideal; his totalizing vision for the ideal Turkish nation comprised of loyal and martial Turkish nationalists and pious Sunni Muslims ready to sacrifice their lives for national unity and progress while "protecting and expanding the Islamic realm." Arvasi's three volume *Türk-İslam Ülküsü*, a collection of his columns for *Hergün*, was first published in 1982 and is widely considered a classic of nationalist literature the ideological pillar of the *Ülkücü* movement. It is outside of the purview of this project to provide a close reading of the *Türk-İslam Ülküsü*; as each volume

numbers several hundred pages, but this section will attempt to offer a brief analysis of its major themes.

As a political and economic treatise, the *Ülküsü* is anti-communist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist, and frames communism and capitalism as imperialist systems seeking to enslave the Turkish nation and to corrupt the youth by supplanting Islamic values with atheism, humanism, and materialism. Arvasi is particularly scathing in his discussion of positivism and of Enlightenment philosophy, which he perceives as effeminate, libertine, and godless, despite the fact that he dedicates several columns to benefits of the scientific method, particularly in regard to the implementation of educational reforms. This fundamental contradiction is repeated ad nauseum in his columns, as the *Ülküsü* reflects the true ethos of the party and of the Ülkücü movement; specifically Turkism, ultranationalism, racism, and a deep-seated xenophobia.<sup>183</sup>

At least two-thirds of the *Ülküsü* is dedicated to Arvasi's fear of the penetration of foreign ideologies and their impact on the religious mission he ascribes to the Turkish nation. Most frequently targeted are the Jews as the origin of evil, bolshevism, and according to Arvasi, the perpetrators of the Treaty of Sevres, which sought to divide the Turkish nation; the heterodox Shia, who are represented as heretics, apostates, and agents of Persian imperialism; the Kurds, who are also framed as representatives of Persian imperialism seeking to fracture the Turkish nation by claiming a separate ethnic identity; the Europeans and Americans, who are capitalist or communist imperialists; and all non-Turkish Muslims, who are "religious perverts" with little understanding of the religion. However, in typically contradictory fashion, Arvasi also contends that Turkish nationalism included "no racism or regionalism," and coined the term "social race"

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<sup>183</sup> S. Ahmet Arvasi, *Türk İslam Ülküsü*, v. I-II-III, 2. Baskı (İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2015).

(içtimai ırk) to replace biological race as the cumulative sum of hereditary and cultural elements.

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The locus of Ahmet Arvasi's synthesis of nationalism and Islam is his belief in the superiority of the Turkish nation. He maintains a primordialist concept of nationalism and nations, and argues that "history is a history of nations." He posits that nations are not constructed, but are "objective realities," which is proven by history, ethnology, and sociology. He traces the origins of the Turkish nation to the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian Steppes, where he states that a nation with "small bodies and wide foreheads were riding horses around 2500 or 1700 BC." Regarding the pre-Islamic traditions of the Turkish nation, Arvasi argues that they must be filtered through the "üst-sistem" (superior system) of Islam. He contends that the *raison-d'etre* of the Turkish nation is to propagate and defend the true Islam (Turkish-Islam) on earth. He does not further define his Turkish-Islamic ideal, but suggests that Turks have two interrelated religious and historical missions: 1. *İ'lay-ı Kelimetillah*, or the defense of the superiority of the Qur'an, and 2. *Nizam-ı Alem*, or making God's commands and standards supreme law in the physical world. Arvasi concludes that the Turks are a chosen people who should not dilute their racial purity by mixing or intermarrying with other nations.<sup>185</sup>

In 1979, Ahmet Arvasi was forced to quit the General Executive Board in defense of "Nizam-ı Alem", an Islamist journal founded by his young conservative nationalist protégés within the *Ülkücü* youth. Alarmed by the electoral and legal liability posed by the party's implication in violence perpetrated by religious *Ülkücü* youth radicalized by the escalating

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-258.

brutality of the street war, the party elite began an internal purge of suspected Islamists and began shutting down its Islamist-leaning publications in 1979. While Arvasi was encouraged to return to the party by Türkeş personally, his relationship with the MHP never fully recovered. He was arrested in the aftermath of the September 12, 1980 coup, tried with the party leadership, and imprisoned in Mamak prison in Ankara, where he suffered his first heart attack under torture. Ahmet Arvasi died of heart failure on December 31, 1988.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary Turkish politics continue to reflect the historical, if not always harmonious, rightist alliance between Turkish nationalists and Islamists. At present writing in 2020, the ruling governing coalition is formed by a rightist-bloc dominated by the Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) and the ultranationalist MHP. While the MHP abandoned its Islamist discursive turn in the 1980s, and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis fell out of favor after its institutionalization by the military junta of the 1980 coup, scholars of the consolidation of the Turkish Right argue that the emergence and ascendancy of conservative nationalist ideology formulated by Seyyid Ahmet Arvasi and his colleagues established a framework that facilitated the interaction of nationalism and Islamism in the political sphere and in the cultural imaginary. Most significantly, they contend, the blending of Turkishness and Sunni Islam represented by Arvasi's Turkish-Islamic Ideal currently serves as the primary marker of Turkish identity.<sup>186</sup>

Ahmet Arvasi's political career and ideological trajectory was profoundly shaped by a Turkist-Islamist rapprochement that began to coalesce in the late 1940s. Guided by a new generation of conservative ideologues who challenged the hegemony of the CHP by critiquing Kemalist nationalist narratives and secularizing reforms, these two marginalized camps found convergence in their virulent hatred of communism and imperialism, and in a shared intellectual heritage.<sup>187</sup> The conservative nationalist paradigm cultivated by Arvasi and his contemporaries gradually became a potent political ideology that represented the interests of the rural conservative electorate against both the Kemalist secular elite and the surging Left. In the

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<sup>186</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 350-376.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

1950s-1970s, the new parties of the center-right and far-right adopted both Islamist and nationalist narratives in their political programs as an electoral and defensive strategy against socialism. Molded by propagandists like Ahmet Arvasi, who held competing visions of nationalism and Islam, these parties lack genuine distinction regarding the position of nation and religion in constructing a Turkish identity.<sup>188</sup> Consequently, none of these issues have been resolved definitively, and in modern-day Turkey, the definition of Turkishness, Turkish nationalism, and the role of Islam in society remain hotly contested.

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<sup>188</sup> Erken, 198-240.

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