Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic

Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition

Amit Bein



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Contents

Acknowledgments, vii

Note on Transliteration, Names, and Dates, ix

1. The Ulema Matter, 1

2. Branding and Rebranding the Religious Establishment, 11

3. Contesting Visions of Reform, 35

4. The Remaking and Unmaking of Religious Education, 51

5. Political Activism and Its Discontents, 77

6. Trials of the Early Republic, 105

7. Ottoman Memories, Republican Realities, 136

8. Past Legacies, Future Prospects, 154

Notes, 169

Bibliography, 197

Index, 209

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Note on Transliteration, Names, and Dates

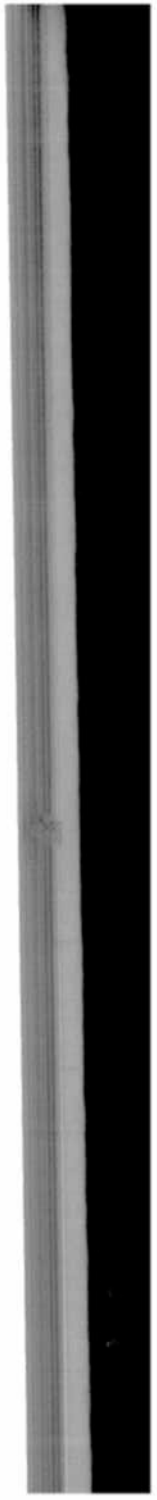
For the sake of simplicity, names and terms that are well-known to the average English speaker (most of them included in the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary) are rendered in conventional English spelling rather than strict transliteration. Therefore, *Sharia* and not *şeriat*, *fatwa* and not *fetva*, and *Sheikh ul-Islam* and not *Şeyhülislam* are used.

Names and terms in Ottoman-Turkish are generally transliterated in their modern Turkish form, except for one notable exception. I have left the *d* and *b* as rendered in their original Ottoman-Turkish, even in cases in which they tend to be replaced in modern Turkish with *t* and *p*. Therefore *Ahmed* and not *Ahmet* is used.

Muslim citizens of Turkey only rarely used surnames before they were required to do so following the adoption of the Surname Law in 1934. Thus, Hüseyin Cahid became Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın and Mehmed Şemseddin became Mehmed Şemseddin Günaltay. I have added these adopted surnames in brackets when referring to the activities and publications that preceded the adoption of surnames in 1934.

The Ottoman bureaucracy and private publications made use of three calendars during the closing decades of the empire. One was the Islamic *Hijri* calendar (AH), which counted the lunar years since the emigration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. Another was the *Rumi* calendar, which was based on the solar Julian calendar, but with the emigration of Prophet Muhammad also serving as the starting point. The third calendar was the Gregorian calendar, which prior to 1908 was used primarily by the Ottoman Foreign Ministry. A reform in early 1917 effectively eliminated the difference between the Rumi and Gregorian calendars, with the exception of the year counter. In 1926, the republican government did away with the Rumi calendar. In the body of the book I have converted all dates to the Gregorian calendar. In the notes I have applied the original dating system used in specific documents and publications, followed by the Gregorian equivalent in brackets.

Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic



CHAPTER ONE

The Ulema Matter

The ulema of the late Ottoman period did not fare particularly well in the historiography of modern Turkey. Only a handful of books and articles in European languages have concentrated on the intellectual production, actions, and institutions of ulema. Perhaps this relative lack of interest should not come as a surprise considering that ulema wound up getting the short end of the stick in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. In a matter of a few years after the establishment of the new regime in late 1923, the religious establishment was downsized and peripheralized, most of its institutions were abolished, its jurisdiction was severely curtailed, and even the appellation ulema was virtually purged from the Turkish language. When discussed in the historiography of the period, the ulema have often been described, at times dismissively or even derisively, as the essential "other" to a modernized and Westernized new elite that came to dominate the empire and the republic from the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 to the mid-twentieth century. Often they have been presented as a rather uniform socioreligious group that had run its course by the early twentieth century and was thus tossed into the dustbin of history. As such, they did not appear to merit much interest in academic studies until quite recently.[1]

Enter any Islamic bookstore in Turkey or visit the Web sites of Turkish booksellers and a very different picture emerges. Late-Ottoman ulema and the institutions associated with them are the subjects of dozens of books published in recent years. In some cases, these are new translations or revised renditions of texts originally published either in Arabic or in Ottoman script by late-Ottoman ulema. In many other instances, the publications consist of new studies about the late-Ottoman religious establishment, mostly by graduates and faculty of divinity schools that have mushroomed in Turkey in recent decades. These compilations are diverse: some are distinctly academic in tone whereas many

others are aimed at reaching a wider audience. The thriving market of Islamic journals and Islam-oriented dailies contributes to the trend with frequent articles, editorials, and book reviews. The general tone of these publications is appreciative of the ulema and their institutions. Quite often they are clearly aimed at producing a counternarrative to the negative assessments that have dominated historiography and the hegemonic discourse in Turkey since the early years of the republic. Coming on the backdrop of the increasing visibility and influence of Islamic movements in Turkey, particularly since the 1990s, these efforts at reassessment and rehabilitation of the image of Ottoman ulema and their institutions are unnerving and even foreboding for many self-ascribed guardians of the secular republic.

A recent public spat put on full display the sensitivity still attached to the topic more than eighty years after the establishment of the republic. The ulema reached the headlines in November 2005 following a decision by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to uphold the legality of the ban on women's headscarves in Turkish universities. Reacting to the verdict, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized the ruling of the judges, explaining that "in this matter, the ulema, not the courts, should have the final say." His remarks sparked a firestorm of controversy. His censuring of the ruling was perhaps predictable, considering his party's Islamic roots and his previously stated views on the matter of headscarves. But what really ticked off his critics was what they described as his advocacy of "the ulema" as an alternative and preferable authority.

Critics accused the Prime Minister of revealing his true Islamist stripes even as he and his supporters dismissed his detractors as plainly ignorant. Opposition spokespersons and sympathetic commentators argued that Erdoğan harbored secret antisecularist designs to restore power to the religious scholars, power such as they enjoyed in Ottoman times and still do in Islamic regimes like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Erdoğan and his supporters rejected these allegations out of hand as hysterical, insincere, and uninformed. The Prime Minister and his backers insisted that all he meant was that on such questions the court should have consulted with knowledgeable experts. They argued that even a glance in the dictionary will prove that the term ulema simply stands for "learned men," and thus it should not have aroused such indignation and criticism. And yet, rather than concentrating on the ECHR's controversial ruling itself, for several days some of the most prominent Turkish politicians, academics, and pundits debated and clashed in all available media venues over the exact meaning and implications of the Prime Minister's reference to "the ulema." For a time there were even discussions of an impending legal action against the Prime Minister.[2] The action did not pass at the time and

Erdoğan survived this short-lived crisis unscathed. The whole affair and the passions that arose from it nevertheless demonstrated that he touched a raw nerve by alluding to "the ulema."

Erdoğan's supporters and critics had very little in common on the subject, save for mutual deployment of dissembling arguments and ahistorical assertions. The Prime Minister could not have been unaware that the mere mention of the term ulema in the context of such a controversial issue as the ban on headscarves would be construed by the opposition as a provocative antisecularist statement. A seasoned politician like Erdoğan could have easily used a neutral term from daily speech rather than a loaded word that might strike a chord with his political base but also unavoidably trigger harsh backlash from his opponents. His critics, meanwhile, reacted as if the word ulema per se represents a one-dimensional and inherently negative designation across time and space.

The heated public debate surrounding his statement was reflective of current political cleavages in Turkey. At the same time, it was also indicative of unresolved issues dating back to the early days of the republic. Turkey is a secular state. This fact has been enshrined in its constitution since the late 1930s. Nevertheless, there is no complete separation between the government and religious institutions, and unsettled questions about the roles and jurisdiction of the official religious administration have remained a vexing topic. The early republican leadership, staunchly secularist as it was, did not completely disestablish the Islamic religious administration and Muslim institutions. Instead, it suppressed some, restricted the functions and diminished the importance of others, and endeavored to place all of them under stricter government control. A new state agency, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*), or *Diyanet*, was put in charge of a much smaller, leaner, and less autonomous religious administration than existed in late Ottoman times.[3] Like the republic itself, the new administration was expected to signify a break with the Ottoman past. It never really did, however, for several important reasons. For one thing, former Ottoman ulema continued to dominate the *Diyanet* for decades after the establishment of the republic. For another thing, the transition to democracy after World War II set in motion a process by which certain groups in society could more freely campaign for the rehabilitation of the tarnished legacies of the Ottoman ulema and their institutions. The harsh responses to Erdoğan's statement are in line with similar, almost knee-jerk hostile reactions in some Kemalist circles to almost any favorable mention of anything to do with the ulema since the early days of the republic. Similar simplified and essentialized depictions also affected and handicapped studies of the religious establishment in the late Ottoman period and the early

republic. Until not so long ago, the dominant historiography of these periods often reduced the ulema and their institutions to caricatures of backwardness, stagnation, traditionalism, and reaction. Islamist publications, meanwhile, frequently represented them as innocent victims of antireligious plots, persecutions, and slanders. As is often the case, such monochromatic depictions tended to be more illustrative of the observers than of the group and institutions they purport to observe. Ulema in fact responded to the challenges and opportunities of the late Ottoman period and the early republic in a variety of ways and forms.

Ulema had played important official roles in the Ottoman state since its formative period. The transformation of the state from an Anatolian principality into a world empire by the sixteenth century involved efforts to regulate and institutionalize their official position. A state-sponsored hierarchical religious establishment (*ilmiye*) was organized with the Sheikh ul-Islam (*Şeyhülislam*) at the helm. He was considered answerable directly to the Sultan and symbolically the equal of the Grand Vizier. The Ottoman religious establishment was a Sunni institution and dominated by practitioners of the Hanafi school of law. Shiites in general and Alevis in particular were not recognized or formally represented in it. They were considered to be deviators from the straight path of Islam and a politically unreliable element, particularly during the long wars with the Shiite Safavid dynasty of Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ottoman official religious establishment included primarily judges, professors in the important religious seminaries (*medreses*), and other senior religious functionaries, mainly in the major urban centers. Many other ulema, particularly in rural areas and frontier regions, had only tenuous ties, if any at all, with the official religious establishment and were considered "unofficial." Senior ulema were part and parcel of the Ottoman elites, perhaps more than in any other premodern Islamic empire, whereas many "unofficial" ulema were associated with the lower classes. Upward mobility within the religious establishment as the result of merit and good fortune was not rare, however. On the symbolic level the religious establishment was accorded a formal recognition as a major pillar of the Islamic empire, which in practical terms translated to perquisites, prestige, and political influence for those in important positions in the learned hierarchy.[4]

The retooling of the Ottoman government in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on the religious establishment. The expansion of the size and reach of the state apparatus, and efforts to centralize the administration and finances of the state, affected the ulema and their institutions in various ways. On the one hand, the religious establishment was increasingly bureaucratized, placed more firmly than before under

the authority of the central government, faced increasing encroachments into its traditional jurisdictions, and lost most of its financial autonomy. On the other hand, the size and reach of the official religious establishment grew in real terms as the government sought to integrate into it "unofficial" Sunni ulema and Sufi sheikhs and extend its activity beyond the major urban centers. The results of these policies were varied and mixed. New statutory courts and new-style schools under the authority of specialized ministries definitely encroached on the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam and the religious establishment. At the same time, many ulema were actually employed in the new courts, modern-style schools, institutions that were linked to the new Ministry of Islamic Endowments, and other government ministries. Administrative overlaps and institutional interweaving were evident. Still, because other government agencies grew much faster and were increasingly manned by graduates of the new-style schools by the late nineteenth century, the relative weight and importance of ulema within the state apparatus was on the decline by the turn of the twentieth century.[5]

These developments in the Ottoman Empire followed precedents set in Europe and were in line with similar developments in many other contemporary societies. The second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century witnessed in many lands similar rapid expansion in the size and functions of state apparatuses at the expense of religious establishments and institutions. In Roman Catholic countries in Europe and the Americas, governments' efforts to curtail the power and influence of the Church were particularly noticeable, though with varied and mixed results. New nations established in the Balkans in lands lost to the Ottoman Empire witnessed similar trends in connection with their Orthodox Christian churches. Confiscation of church properties and efforts to diminish the jurisdiction and roles of newly reorganized "national churches" and curtail their involvement in politics were often a notable feature of the formative periods of new nation states in the Balkans. The Ottomans were not the only Islamic government to pursue a similar if not identical path. In Egypt before and after the British occupation and in Iran there were also efforts to establish government-controlled institutions that supplanted traditional religious ones or competed with them, and to strengthen the state's hold over the administration and finances of Islamic institutions. In both cases, however, the results were mixed and the efforts mostly less effective than in the Ottoman Empire.[6]

In many countries, expediency considerations for strengthening central governments at the expense of religious establishments were supplemented by varying degrees of anticlericalism and antireligious sentiments. The spread of positivistic and materialistic ideas, popularized as progres-

sive and scientific, turned new middle classes, and in some places the masses, against traditional religious institutions. By the late nineteenth century, religious orthodoxies and the institutions associated with them became associated with backwardness and narrow-mindedness in the thought and writing of many an intellectual, official, and political leader. European countries were ahead of the curve in this respect. But emerging nationalist intelligentsias in some of the lands targeted by European imperialism were following suit. By the early years of the twentieth century, antireligious and secularist influences were becoming increasingly conspicuous and significant not only in many European countries but also in non-European societies that were under direct colonial control or informal modes of imperialism.[7] Similar developments were increasingly evident in the views of Muslim intellectuals in Iran, the Caucasus, Egypt, the Levant, and the Ottoman heartlands by the late nineteenth century. Some intellectuals embraced antireligious inclinations while many more took aim not at religion per se but rather at traditional norms and practices associated with established Islamic orthodoxies. The ulema and the institutions associated with them were a prime target in this respect. As the twentieth century was setting in, however, the changes their critics advocated had yet to be translated fully and in most cases even partially into official policies or dramatic changes in the position and characteristics of religious establishments in most Muslim societies, including the Ottoman Empire.

The responses of clerical and religious establishments to the real and perceived challenges they faced varied considerably in different societies. Specific nuances and divergences in state policies and political circumstances as well as the make-up of society and specific historical, geographic, and economic variables produced distinct variations on the theme of changing relations between religion, state, and society. Conflicts, severe crises, and violent clashes in some times and at some places contrasted with negotiated compromises in others. Continued predominance of traditional orthodoxies in some settings coincided with the spread of reformist influences in many others, oftentimes pitting reform-minded clerics against their more conservative peers and traditional religious authorities. Each case was unique, but the rapid spread of new modes of communication such as the steamship, the railway, and the printed word both created an impression of a surging global phenomenon and augmented multilateral influences across political, geographic, and cultural divides.[8] At the same time, developments in Europe were particularly significant because of European nations' outsized political, military, economic and, intellectual dominance throughout most of the world by the early twentieth century, and the belief of many an intellectual the world over that specific European precedents signified a universal path to modernity.

The Ottoman Empire and other Muslim societies and communities from British-controlled Egypt and India to Iran and Russian-ruled Central Asia and the Caucasus were no exception in this respect. Accusations hurled at ulema—such as that their traditionalism, obscurantism, and antiscientific tendencies were obstacles to progress and modernization of Muslim societies—were also aimed at contemporaneous clergy, priests, and rabbis in Islamic states such as the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, the responses of Muslim religious establishments to real and perceived challenges to their traditional jurisdictions and functions varied along a spectrum stretching from entrenched traditionalism at the one end to enthusiastic reformism at the other. Ulema in each society faced particular challenges that had to do with specific local circumstances. Their positions and actions, however, just like their challengers' stances and initiatives, were also influenced by acute awareness that the pressures and issues they faced were not unique and localized but rather common to many other contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim societies around the globe.

Ottoman ulema in Istanbul and other major urban centers were particularly aware of the new challenges and their potential cost to the ulema. By the early twentieth century most of them were affiliated with the state, many as salaried officials. The rapidly expanding government bureaucracy of the second half of the nineteenth century opened new employment opportunities and career paths for ulema. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, new secularist ideas and increasing competition from graduates of the rapidly expanding new-style schools, often disguised as demands for professionalism and merit-based appointments, appeared to increasingly threaten their employment prospects in government service. There are indeed clear indications that many senior ulema increasingly preferred to place their children in the new-style schools rather than in traditional medreses, which, despite some demands for substantial reforms, witnessed only minor curricular changes during the nineteenth century.[9] Subsequently, broad concerns about the potential political, societal, and cultural implications of demands for the curtailment of the roles and functions of the religious establishment and Islamic institutions were augmented by mundane concerns over livelihood. This was a particularly pressing concern for the tens of thousands of provincial young men who flocked to the medreses of Istanbul and a few other traditional centers of learning in search of both knowledge and future employment.

In the hegemonic discourse of the Ottoman elite, by the early twentieth century the ulema were increasingly described and perceived as a

distinct group. This was not a new phenomenon in itself. The Ottoman Empire went further than any other premodern Islamic state in institutionalizing the religious establishment. The reforms of the nineteenth century reaffirmed this distinction by gathering and reorganizing various institutions associated with the ulema as departments in the ministry-like office of the Sheikh ul-Islam (*Meşihat-i Islamiye*). External markers such as styles of facial hair, clothes, and headgear added another distinguishing aspect in a period of rapid changes in fashion and appearance among the Ottoman elites. The ulema were indeed very often referred to collectively as "men of the turban" (*sarıklılar*), as opposed to modern-educated Ottomans, who were referred to as "men of the fez" (*fesliler*). More than anything else, however, it was their educational background, forms of socialization, lifestyles, habits of leisure and entertainment, and conservative inclinations that increasingly distanced many of the ulema from a new generation of Ottoman intellectuals, officials, and army officers that came of age around the turn of the twentieth century. The lines of demarcation of the ulema could be quite soft in reality, but in the hegemonic discourse and public imagination they were real enough, for better or worse, to merit common allusions to the ulema as a collective with shared traits. The establishment of ulema associations and publications attest to the fact that a certain level of group identity, or at least a recognition of common interests, also existed among the ulema themselves.

Historical studies of the period often translated these facts into ideology-driven, one-dimensional generalizations about the ulema and their institutions. Kemalist commentators and scholars regularly associated the late Ottoman ulema with "extreme fanaticism and a crude interpretation of religion."[10] As a collective, they were thus linked to obstructionism and reactionary inclinations in the hegemonic historiography in Turkey, and charged with being a major obstacle to the modernization and regeneration of the Ottoman state.[11] They did not fare much better in Western historiography. One prominent historian opined that they "had delayed or frustrated the work of [Ottoman] reformers" during the last decades of the empire, and suggested that "in the sociological and political sense" they were "worthy of comparison with the Christian priesthoods."[12] Another important historian agreed that "as a class, the ulema were conservative and an obstacle to reform, [and that] though there were individual exceptions, [. . . they] knew no other way except that of defending established tradition, [and] thus they opposed innovation."[13] Islamist writers, though deprived of any foothold in academia until quite recently, developed a diametrically opposed narrative to the dominant historiography. In publications that were often crude and polemical they depicted the ulema mostly as helpless victims of antireligious forces that rose to dominance in the late Ottoman period and at the helm of the early republic.[14] In a few exceptional cases, Islamist authors did more serious historical work, uncovering archival documents and obscure publications, to buttress their presentation of the late Ottoman ulema as divided into a small group of Freemasons and collaborators and a much larger majority of decent men and principled activists who were targeted and victimized in the early decades of the twentieth century by powerful and oppressive antireligious forces.[15] However, the readership and influence of this type of publications were limited primarily to conservative audiences associated with Islamist movements in Turkey. They found very little traction in academic writings, which through the 1970s were dominated by Kemalist sensibilities and developmentalist assumptions.

More recent studies, particularly since the end of the Cold War, have explored new directions and opened new spaces for nondogmatic re-evaluation of late Ottoman times and the early republic. Earlier perceptions and founding myths of the republic have been challenged and prevailing historical narratives have been revised. For example, more nuanced analyses have replaced, at least in academic publications, formerly dominant dichotomous descriptions of a constant struggle between a progressive modernizing vanguard on the one hand and traditional reactionary forces on the other. This development is particularly pertinent to the ulema and their institutions. Important publications in the last two decades have thrown new light on the involvement of ulema in political activities, educational endeavors, and public life in the late Ottoman period.[16] For the most part, however, the religious establishment was only peripheral to the topic of these studies. In Turkey, meanwhile, dozens of books and articles that do concentrate on the ulema and their institutions have been published in recent years, primarily by graduates and faculty of divinity schools. Very few of these authors publish in any language other than Turkish and for the most part they produce works that are limited in their temporal and thematic scope.[17]

The late Ottoman ulema, their institutions, and their legacies merit a comprehensive study. Their multifaceted story is an important but underresearched part of the history of the late Ottoman Empire and the early decades of the republic. Their experiences and the challenges they faced have also escaped most general studies on ulema in the modern period.[18] The book concentrates primarily, though not exclusively, on the activities and institutions of ulema in Istanbul, the imperial capital and historical center of Islamic learning since the late fifteenth century. Going beyond dichotomous and moralizing classifications of reformists versus

traditionalists or progressives versus reactionaries, the book discusses how, despite many shared concerns, Ottoman ulema were divided on key issues regarding the future of the state in general and the roles and functions of Islamic institutions in the state in particular. The story of the ulema and their institutions is a tale of realignments and transformations, not of rapid demise, irrelevancy, and inconsequence. The manners in which ulema reacted to changing circumstances, and in turn helped to shape them, created important legacies that have left their mark on modern Turkish history in more than one way. Late Ottoman ulema generally viewed themselves as both agents of change and guardians of tradition. But whether their primary role should be the former or the latter became a major bone of contention among them. In some respects, their experiences and responses mirror similar developments in other contemporaneous Muslim and non-Muslim societies. In other respects, the challenges they faced and their reactions to them were distinct because of the specific political and sociocultural circumstances within which they operated. Their story is an integral part of the history of the formative period of modern Turkey, and its consequences and legacies have continued to inform views of and debates about the relations between religion and state in Turkey to this day.

CHAPTER TWO

Branding and Rebranding the Religious Establishment

The closing decades of the Ottoman Empire were a period of escalating challenges to the survival of the state and of urgent internal debates on how to save it. European imperialism was one major threat. New nation states and separatist movements in the Balkans and Anatolia, particularly among the Christian minorities, were another serious challenge. These multiple threats served as the backdrop against which state-led reforms were formulated and implemented since at least the early nineteenth century, to various degrees of success. As the century was coming to a close, however, the challenges facing the empire appeared increasingly daunting to many Ottoman officials and intellectuals. Many of them came to the conclusion that the survival of the empire necessitated more comprehensive reforms and profound social, educational, cultural, and political transformations, largely informed by purportedly successful European examples. The ulema and their institutions were perceived by many intellectuals and bureaucrats as a major cause of the empire's dire straits and, at least in their existing state, as a serious hindrance for its regeneration and future prosperity.

None of this was in itself unique to the late Ottoman Empire. The threat and experience of European imperialism and the challenges of ethnonationalism were faced to varying degrees by many contemporaneous societies and states all over the globe, including in neighboring lands such as Austro-Hungary and Iran. The crises that many of these societies faced prompted calls for reform, including in religious institutions and their jurisdictions and functions. In some Islamic lands, "progressive" or "firebrand" ulema led or supported demands for change. Many other critics were graduates of new-style schools or men who embraced European modernist and secularist thought. Some of them were outright

anticlerical or even antireligious, whereas many more envisioned a redefinition of the jurisdictions and functions of Islamic institutions, mostly in a diminished role and after comprehensive reforms in many aspects of religious life. Differing visions of required changes notwithstanding, critics in the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic lands shared strong reservations about the existing state of religious institutions and functionaries in their respective societies.

The situation in the Ottoman Empire differed in some important ways from many other contemporary societies in the Middle East and beyond. For one thing, the Ottoman Empire was both European and Middle Eastern at one and the same time. This meant it was tied to developments in Europe more intimately than most other societies in the non-West, even though it was still considered by Europeans, as well as many Ottomans, to be alien to European culture, history, and traditions. For another thing, the Ottoman Empire was both the target of European colonialist pressures and an imperialist power in its own right, and still considered an important power with which to contend. For yet another thing, although the Ottoman Empire sought to reemphasize its Islamic character in the late nineteenth century, its highly prized new-style state schools were producing bureaucrats, army officers, professionals, and intellectuals who were often imbued with positivist, materialist, and scientistic ideas. Many of them adopted instrumental attitudes toward Islam while detaching themselves socially, culturally, and intellectually from the religious establishment and often adopting a contemptuous disposition toward the ulema and their institutions.[1] In no other Islamic state were the ties between the religious establishment and the government as intimate, but in no other Muslim-majority land were so many upwardly mobile officials and intellectuals progressively alienated from the ulema. Indeed, negative terms such as *fanaticism*, *reactionism*, *medievalism*, and *scholasticism* became increasingly associated with them and their institutions in the minds of many in Ottoman officialdom and in the intelligentsia by the early twentieth century.

Ulema in Istanbul and other major urban centers were well aware of this development. Indeed, not a few of them lamented the fact that they might expect respect only from the common people, working classes, and rural populations while facing derision among the urban elites and upwardly mobile graduates of the new-style state schools. The causes for this development were a topic for heated debates. But ulema and intellectuals who commented on the subject accepted this much as all but self-evident: the image and reputation of the ulema and their institutions were undergoing an escalating process of negative branding that threatened their long-term viability. Virtually all commentators on the

issue of the position of the ulema in Ottoman society operated under this assumption and based their analyses of the phenomenon on it, as well as proposed strategies to cope with it. Concerned commentators often associated challenges to the reputation of the ulema and their institutions with the spread of secularist and antireligious ideas among the Ottoman elites. Indeed, they saw red flags all around them even before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and already decades before the adoption of secularism as an ideological dogma by the republic. There was a broad agreement within the religious establishment and among pious commentators that this ostensible trend should be contained and reversed, including through a positive rebranding of the ulema and their institutions. The printed word was the vehicle of choice for this image redo, in a period that witnessed a significant rise in literacy rates and the emergence of print capitalism in the Ottoman lands.

There was much less agreement among the ulema on the root causes of the purported declining reputation of the religious establishment. Nor was there consensus among them on the prerequisites for the rectification of this situation. Some were convinced that the image problem was symptomatic of serious shortcomings and anachronisms in the religious establishment. They therefore emphasized that a successful rebranding could be accomplished only as part of a profound overhaul of the Islamic institutions, at least partly following examples set by earlier state-led reforms. Many other ulema rejected these premises. They did not necessarily deny that some changes should be introduced. However, they insisted that any modification should be implemented only gradually and cautiously, and that the merits of the existing institutions should be defended vigorously against challengers. Thwarting hostile attitudes against the religious establishment, they reasoned, requires a tough stance and self-assurance rather than timidity and rapid and excessive changes in existing institutions, practices, and traditions. These two basic approaches defined a spectrum of views along which Ottoman ulema positioned themselves during the closing years of the empire. There was broad concern among the ulema over the prospect of a general decline in religiosity and the concurrent advance of secularization, but there were sharp divisions on how best to prevent the materialization of these menaces and safeguard the future viability of religion in general and of the religious establishment and its institutions in particular.

The issue had already become a topic of concern under the self-avowed pious regime of Abdülhamid II, and it turned into a subject of heated debates after the Young Turk Revolution. Anxieties and perceptions that were developed and embraced prior to the revolution impacted, in various ways, the ideological and political choices and attitudes of ulema

in the years that followed. Opinions and positions certainly continued to evolve after the revolution. But general perceptions, inclinations, and orientations that were already well in the making under the Hamidian regime remained remarkably intact in the years that followed its demise.

THE LONG SHADOW OF EUROPE

Late Ottoman intellectuals were fascinated with Europe, even as European imperialist designs and missionary activities remained major sources of concern. Ottoman reformists in general and Westernists (*Garbcilar*) in particular, impressed with manifestations of its power, wealth, and scientific achievements, have often looked to Europe for inspiration. European academics, intellectuals, and officials have often presented their interpretations of European history as illustrative of a unidirectional universal History, with other societies simply lagging behind. The West's military, technological, scientific, and economic dominance have lent credibility to such analyses. Many an Ottoman observer was indeed convinced that some keys to securing the long-term survival and prosperity of the empire should be sought in the history and current circumstances of Europe. "Catching up" with Europe thus appeared to necessitate the identification of the essential elements of its success and their implementation in modified forms that would befit the specific circumstances of the Ottoman Empire. Religious reforms and secularization were presented by dominant intellectual circles in Europe as important components in the continent's progress, a perspective that was subsequently adopted by many Ottoman observers as well. Oftentimes the rapid secularization observed in Europe was also linked by commentators to decline in religiosity. France served as the example par excellence for this purported continent-wide trend. Ottoman observers were familiar with the long-drawn-out battle over the position of organized religion in the Third Republic and with the 1905 law of separation between church and state. Such institutional changes were often understood to be driven largely by antireligious attitudes in the French elites. Their implementation was correspondingly seen as both a reflection of the increasing marginalization of religious institutions and a general decline in religiosity among the middle and upper classes. This much was all but consensually agreed upon by Ottoman commentators. They were deeply divided, however, on what implications, if any, these developments in Europe could or should have for the Ottoman lands. Many believed that the modernization of the Ottoman Empire at least necessitated the deemphasizing of the role of the ulema and Islamic institutions

in the official affairs of the state, including its judicial and educational systems, and in social and cultural life more generally.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the dominant view in Western academia and among the intelligentsia had likewise been that modernization of states and societies is inherently linked to processes of secularization, as both a requisite and a byproduct. In recent years, however, the meaning of the term itself and its applicability to societies in Europe and even more so beyond its confines has been increasingly contested. Some scholars believe that earlier theories of secularization should be modified or qualified to specific settings, but not discarded all together. Others insist that earlier theories of secularization have been indicators of a secularist ideological agenda rather than impartial observations, and thus have produced distorted and untenable conclusions. José Casanova has sought to salvage elements of the secularization thesis through the analysis and reformulation of some of its basic assumptions and tenets. He points out that proponents of the theory often invoke three separate propositions: "(1) secularization as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, (2) secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and (3) secularization as a marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere." Casanova argues that these separate aspects have often been erroneously conflated. He explains that the second proposition is not viable and should be dismissed. The third is applicable only to some societies, whereas the first reflects developments in all modernized societies.[2] Talal Asad takes issue with these conclusions. He argues that on a closer look all these propositions, not only the second one, are undermined. He insists that the secularization thesis, like the concept of the "secular" itself, "is part of a doctrine called secularism," which was formulated in nineteenth-century Europe. He therefore sees the secularization thesis as an ideological construct imbued with specific aims and purposes and not at all as a viable theory with at least some analytical or explanatory value.[3]

The two scholars might find it hard to agree on the merits, or lack of merits, of the secularization thesis, but they both agree that its various propositions were assumed by many commentators, in Europe and beyond, to be valid from at least the second half of the nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth.[4] Thus, during the closing decades of the Ottoman Empire, intellectual elites in Europe and elsewhere often assumed a certain linkage between modernity and secularization, even as the precise definition and meaning of the term remained in many instances vague indeed.

Ottoman observers, including ulema, in fact regularly conflated the three propositions of the secularization thesis. By the early twentieth

century, ulema who reflected on the prospect of further delimitation and contraction of the functions and jurisdiction of the religious establishment almost invariably linked it to decline in religiosity among the elites and to the danger that they and the institutions associated with them might be emasculated and marginalized. Such anxieties were fueled by harsh criticisms directed at the ulema by Ottoman intellectuals. In and of itself, criticism directed at the ulema as a collective was certainly nothing novel. In previous centuries, several precedents were established by well-placed critics and popular movements that censured the religious establishment and its leadership. In the past, however, critics mostly defined their agenda in religious terms and did not seek the demotion of religious institutions. During the closing years of the empire, in contrast, the harshest criticism was leveled by intellectuals who were taken by positivist, materialist, and antireligious ideas. Furthermore, exposure to a certain narrative of the history of secularism in Europe made even other critics of the religious establishment appear to many ulema to be part of a dangerous trend toward the marginalization of Islamic institutions and a corresponding decline in religious life.

As early as the 1880s the Hamidian press helped disseminate the idea that organized religion in Europe was on a course of decline. This was presented as a continent-wide phenomenon that was intimately linked to advancements in the physical and life sciences, progress, and modernity itself. In 1887, for example, popular journalist Mizancı Murad Bey described the misfortunes of the French clergymen as epitomizing the decline of the priesthood in all "the advanced countries."[5] This was a common assumption in Hamidian publications. Ahmed Midhat Efendi, the most prominent Ottoman litterateur of the day, offered a similar analysis in the mid-1880s. In his popular *Mufassal Tarih-i Kurun-i Cedide* (A detailed history of the modern period), for example, he explains that "the priests lost their former power and strength, and are now being banished and expelled from some European countries." He adds that even where they are allowed to stay, their activities are limited primarily to religious ceremonies—so much so, he concludes, that "nowadays, a person may live in Europe as a declared atheist (*dinsiz*), . . . [and] if a priest would object to such an individual, he would be accused of overstepping his duty and be put in jail."[6] Such observations, as well as regular conflation of developments in France with ostensible European-wide processes, helped establish one-dimensional perceptions about religious trends in Europe. These included the assumption, not unfounded in many instances, that the declining fortunes of "the Church" in Europe mirrored an ongoing and rapidly spreading decline in religiosity.

Reports on the topic were accompanied by analyses of the causes of

the phenomenon and assessments of its possible implications for the Ottoman Empire. Two main sets of explanations were offered to account for the purported decline of Christianity in Europe. The first type emphasized distinctive shortcomings in the Christian faith, particularly in Catholicism. According to such analyses, specific deficiencies in Christianity, and the corruption and misdeeds of the clergy, prompted an inevitable backlash against religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular. The implication of such explanations was that these developments were European or Catholic specific and should have no relevancy to Muslim societies. The second type of explanation was universal, rather than culture or faith specific. It located the purported marginalization of religious institutions and decline in religiosity within the context of tensions between modern life and the influence of scientific thought on the one hand and long-established religious dogmas and traditions on the other. This explanation was presented as a general phenomenon with potential ramifications for every modernizing society.

Ulema who commented on this topic were prone to uphold the first type. They almost invariably emphasized the alleged deficiencies of the Christian clergy as the major cause for secularization in Europe.[7] In late 1908, for instance, Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı, sheikh of the imperial mosque of Ayasofya (*Hagia Sophia*), included a harsh assessment of the European clergy in a Friday sermon, later reproduced in the popular Islamic journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim*. Addressing the worshipers, he commented in some detail on how "the priests became accustomed to live by way of corruption. They employed every vile deed to ensure their personal interests. . . . They forbade and allowed things at their whim. . . . Later, the Europeans were rescued from their influence by separating the temporal sphere [*umur-i cismaniye*] from the spiritual [*umur-i ruhaniye*]."[8] The implication was that this was a European-specific solution to a Christian-specific problem and thus should not be seen as applicable to Muslim lands. At most, it could only serve as a cautionary tale about abuse of religious office. This became the standard approach of virtually all the ulema who commented on the topic.

Ulema at times addressed the universalist type of explanations but only in order to establish their flaws and underscore their inapplicability to Muslim societies. Musa Kâzım Efendi, a senior scholar and a future Sheikh ul-Islam, touched on these issues in a series of articles he published in 1898. In them he shows familiarity with the impression that "the present period is a time in which there appears to be a complete contradiction between religion and science, as a result of significant scientific advances." He comments, however, that Muslims should reject this trend because in Islam, in contrast to Christianity, there has never

been any opposition to science.[9] His argument that Islam is fully compatible with modern sciences and new technological advances whereas Christianity is not became a staple in Islamic publications in the years that followed. Their argument was that although progress and modernization might have necessitated the marginalization of religious institutions in Christendom, and perhaps even the decline in religiosity, the Islamic world does not require commensurate measures of secularization because Islam and its qualified interpreters have never hindered scientific and civilizational progress.

At the same time, ulema were painfully aware that increasing numbers of Ottoman intellectuals and officials did not share this conviction. This was already evident before the Young Turk Revolution. Take, for instance, the remarks of Ali Vehbi Efendi in a book published in 1892. Ali Vehbi was a judge in the Islamic law courts and a future member of parliament after the revolution. In his *Medeniyet-i İslamiye Hakkında Birkaç Söz* (A few words about the Islamic civilization), he emphasizes that Islam has no inherent deficiencies that invite decline in religiosity, whereas Christianity does. He believes this should be clear and all but self-evident for every Ottoman observer. He therefore lashes out at Muslims who purportedly insist that religious decline is an inescapable universal phenomenon that is intimately linked to modernity and thus was bound to affect the Islamic lands just as it did Europe.[10] Musa Kâzım Efendi, the future Sheikh ul-Islam, similarly cautioned against the misleading assumption that every religion is inherently detrimental to progress and opposed to science.[11] Such warnings and admonitions appeared on a regular basis in Islamic publications, particularly after the Young Turk Revolution.[12] They sought to counter an intellectual climate in which perceptions of inherent opposition between religion, on the one hand, and progress, scientific thought, and modernity, on the other hand, had increasingly gained pride of place, even if such perceptions were not universally accepted.

Ulema and other devout observers were particularly concerned because of the ubiquity of antireligious influences among a new generation of young and upwardly mobile intellectuals, bureaucrats, and army officers. Their overall numbers were relatively small. However, they were overrepresented among graduates of the new-style schools, the group of men that were trained and expected to become the empire's bureaucratic, military, and professional elites. Positivist, materialist, and scientistic ideas that were either explicitly atheist or at the least agnostic became fashionable within this group. This situation was unnerving to pious observers, not least because it was widely believed that in Europe the spread of secularist ideas and movement followed a similar trajectory. Respected commentators informed Ottoman audiences that the freethinking intelligentsia in Europe had also been a small minority in the past but were still able to have their way and spearhead the spread of secularist influences and policies because "they are all intellectuals who are enlightened in sciences and education."[13] Concern over the plausibility of a similar dissemination of antireligious influences in the new-style schools, civil and military officialdom, and the press were already evident to some extent during the Hamidian period but became much more serious after the Young Turk Revolution.

Such concerns were often linked to suspicions regarding suggestions for separation of "secular spheres" from "religious institutions." Proposals for formal institutional secularization of the state were floated by European observers in the late nineteenth century, just when the secularization thesis was gaining ground in their homelands. The proposal most well-known to Ottoman intellectuals and officials was made by French diplomat Édouard Engelhardt. In an influential book published in 1884 he argued that the "scientific emancipation" of all the inhabitants of the Ottoman lands necessitated the restructuring of the state apparatus by the secular authority (*l'autorité laïque*) in accordance with the principles of secularization (*secularization*). After the Young Turk Revolution, the book was republished in a Turkish translation.[14] It was considered so influential by conservatives that one prominent Islamist argued in 1923 that it had served since the Young Turk Revolution as a blueprint for the proponents of separation of religion and state and "the distancing of Turkey from Islam."[15] This conflation of "secularization as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms" with "secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices," in Casanova's terms, was not at all unusual in conservative circles.[16] They were well aware of several concrete examples close to home. In the Ottoman lands, a certain precedent was set in the 1860s when the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish communities each established a "temporal council" (*meclis-i cismani*) charged with authority over the "material" needs of its respective community, alongside the Armenian and Greek patriarchates and the Jewish chief-rabbinate.[17] In the Russian Empire, meanwhile, Muslim religious authorities were organized within the framework of an Islamic spiritual administration (*İdare-i Ruhani*) in each of the Muslim-majority regions. Similar arrangements were also instituted in Balkan territories effectively lost to the Ottomans during the nineteenth century, such as Romania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Muslim spiritual administrations in these lands enjoyed some measure of autonomy but were essentially under the authority of their respective governments.[18] All of these examples, as well as the French secularizing reforms of 1905, were

familiar to Ottoman observers either as cautionary tales or as possible templates for change in the Ottoman lands.

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 appeared to some supporters of secularizing policies as a golden opportunity to advocate for such policies publicly. This was impossible under the strict censorship of the Hamidian regime. Early calls for formal differentiation between "secular" government institutions and the religious establishment followed shortly after the revolution. Mizancı Murad Bey, a well-known intellectual and erstwhile Young Turk opposition activist, made a splash in early 1909 when he suggested steps toward the separation of executive and judicial functions from the religious establishment. In a newspaper article that prompted much criticism in ulema publications, he advocated the concentration of all judicial functions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and argued that the Sheikh ul-Islam should not be part of the cabinet because as the spiritual leader of the Muslim devout his status and functions should be on par with those of the spiritual leaders of the non-Muslim communities in the empire.[19] A similar mindset was displayed by Unionist activists in the capital in the early days of the new regime. During a meeting with the Sheikh ul-Islam, they reminded him that "in Europe there is only one judicial system. Even though the priesthood was once invested with [judicial] authority, they were stripped of it and of their educational functions, as is well known, once [the anticlerical premier Émile] Combes took office." Citing the French example, they thus urged him to accept the transfer of all judicial functions to the Ministry of Justice.[20] Such statements may have reflected the aspirations and convictions of many in the Ottoman intelligentsia and officialdom but the political circumstances of the time militated against such controversial reforms.

The Great War produced more conducive circumstances for such momentous changes. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which established an authoritarian single-party regime in 1913, vanquished any opposition by the war years. Under these circumstances, and as the increasingly desperate situation of the empire created openings for radical reforms, the ruling party implemented a series of secularizing reforms, including the separation of judicial functions from the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam. These reforms are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Here, suffice it to say that although it was no secret that supporters of the differentiation between "secular spheres" and religious institutions were influenced by contemporary European thought, there was a conscious Unionist effort to justify the changes in Islamic and utilitarian terms. For one thing, it was argued that the changes were in accordance with Islamic principles of government. For another thing, the ulema were reassured that the restructuring of the religious establishment was in the best interest of Islam in general and their group interests in particular. The Ottoman defeat in World War I ended the Unionist rule, but calls for formal secularization of the Ottoman state, based on either Islamic justifications or European precedents, remained very disturbing from the perspective of many within the religious establishment nevertheless.[21]

Ulema oftentimes associated efforts to restructure and diminish the roles and functions of Islamic institutions with covert antireligious intentions. Many of them viewed the invocation of Islamic justifications for moves toward the separation of "secular" and "religious" spheres as misleading and disingenuous. Muhammed Hamdi Efendi [Yazır], a prominent religious scholar-cum-politician, reflected this position in early 1919 when he accused the advocates of formal secularization of aspirations "to detach Islam from the constitution, the Sheikh ul-Islam from the cabinet, and the title of caliph from the ruler [*padişah*]."[22] He and like-minded concerned ulema suspected that advocates of secularization sought to weaken the religious establishment, diminish its status and importance, and marginalize the ulema as preliminary steps toward a European-like full-scale secularization, both in its institutional meaning and in terms of decline of religious beliefs and practices.[23] One should emphasize that these warnings and concerns were voiced only weeks after the end of Unionist rule, months before the beginning of the struggle over Anatolia, and years before the establishment of the republic. Secularism of the type that later came to be associated with Kemalism might still have been a marginal ideology at the time but it was already a matter of grave concern for many ulema nevertheless. This did not come about in reaction to an explicit secularist agenda set by any influential group or political party. Instead, ulema themselves connected the dots between a specific narrative of European secularization to which they were exposed, an intellectual climate in which Europe was perceived by many as an example for emulation, and recurring analogies between the Ottoman ulema and the clergy in European countries made by critics of the religious establishment. The specter of "European-like" state-led secularization hung over the religious establishment and influenced viewpoints and positions of Ottoman ulema years before it became a plausible political agenda and dominant ideology under the republic.

NEGATIVE BRANDING: THE ULEMA AS CLERGY

Analogies between the Ottoman ulema and clergy in Christianity were deployed often and effectively by critics of the religious establishment during the closing years of the empire. Advocates of European-style sec-

ularization of the Ottoman state expressed such claims most frequently and forcefully. If the designation stuck, one could slap onto the ulema negative traits long associated with the Christian clergy and implicitly or explicitly suggest that they should face a similar fate of social, political, and institutional marginalization. But devout and conservative critics of the religious establishment also took to berating the ulema with unflattering comparisons to Christian clergy. Their agenda was opposed to formal secularization. In fact, these critics often criticized the religious establishment for inadvertently strengthening the antireligious camp through the ulema's inaptitude, excessive traditionalism, and self-interest, just as the clergy in Europe helped bring about the spread of secularism and atheism. The combined effect of such analogies was that a negative branding of the ulema as being like Christian clergy became very prevalent in public discourse during the closing years of the empire, among Westernists, nationalists, and some conservatives alike. On this backdrop, Mustafa Kemal declared in 1923 that "we should remember that there is no special class of people in our religion. This religion rejects priesthood and its claims of monopoly. Take the ulema for example; the duty of enlightenment is not restricted to them, and our religion specifically forbids it."[24] He employed a type of rhetoric that was deployed time and again in late Ottoman times, and later under the republic,[25] to buttress demands for reforms in Islamic institutions, practices and norms in general and changes in the jurisdiction and functions of the religious establishment in particular.

Caricaturizations of the ulema as clergy became ubiquitous after the Young Turk Revolution but their earliest appearance is traceable to the preceding years. In licit publications of the Hamidian period, it is warnings against such analogies that indicate their currency in some circles of the intelligentsia. Thus, in the 1890s, Ahmed Midhat Efendi cautioned impressionable young Ottomans not to "attribute to the ulema things written by Europeans about the Church." His annotated translation of John William Draper's *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* is replete with such remarks, though it is not exactly clear if they are made out of deep conviction or rather used as a shield against potential suspicions regarding Ahmed Midhat's decision to translate a book on such a controversial topic.[26] Opposition publications of the Young Turk movement included more explicit analogies. In one instance, the ulema were depicted as "Turkey's spiritual class" (*Türkiye'nin sınıf-ı ruhanîsi*) and were collectively accused of abuse of their status and office similar to the transgressions of the Catholic priesthood.[27] In other cases their long-term impact on Muslim societies was equated with the negative influences of the clergy in European history. They were thus accused of fulfilling similar obscurantist roles in instituting and enforcing corrupt religious doctrines and practices, and in deliberately impeding the advance of freedom and prosperity through scientific progress.[28] Disturbing as such characterizations might have been to ulema who were exposed to them, they could have consoled themselves that these ideas remained very marginal in public discourse.

After the Young Turk Revolution, however, similar analogies and accusations achieved much greater levels of visibility and publicity. In 1909, Ömer Seyfeddin, an army officer and a well-known novelist, denounced the "medrese folks" as enemies of progress. He then went on to reassure his readers that these reactionaries have no chance, because "history has shown us that it is only the priests who had mobilized against every form of freedom and liberty, and that in the end they were defeated."[29] Ulema continued to complain about similar menacing messages in the years that followed. In 1912, for instance, the mouthpiece of the Ulema Association of Istanbul decried thinly veiled analogies made between the ulema and the priesthood in Europe, followed by calls on the Ottoman "forces of light" to follow the example of their European peers and vanquish the "powers of darkness" in Ottoman society.[30] This was not an isolated case. During the same year there were reports about ulema who faced accusations of being part of a "clerical priesthood" (*klerikal papaslık*). Some even testified that they were "very frequently forced [to hear] with much horror threats such as: 'France expelled, banished, killed, and slaughtered the priests, [and consequently] progressed and fulfilled its potential. We too have no remedy but to slaughter our ulema!'"[31] These might have been extreme cases that were linked to political tensions at the time. However, they reflected a certain discursive climate, and their wide circulation in print and by word of mouth aggravated a sense of vulnerability and victimization felt by growing numbers of ulema during the closing years of the empire. Some ulema invested much effort in discounting the analytical merit of "the portrayal of the ulema as spiritual officials, a spiritual class" or as a "spiritual leadership."[32] They emphasized time and again that the ulema and Christian priests were fundamentally incomparable in their status and roles, not least because the former have been beneficial to Islam whereas the latter had been detrimental to their faith.[33] The unflattering analogies continued to be made nevertheless.

The negative branding of the ulema as a priesthood-like group indeed made inroads even among some devout intellectuals and activists. Said Halim Pasha, often labeled an Islamist, opined in 1918 that the religious establishment had degenerated into an ecclesiastical organization (*kısm-ı ruhban*). The former Grand Vizier charged that the ulema care

only for their personal and institutional prerogatives while impeding the progress of the Muslims as a whole.[34] Like-minded devout critics of the religious establishment invoked the clerical traits it purportedly assumed to support their advocacy of comprehensive religious reforms in disregard of objections by ulema and in favor of the unmaking and remaking of the religious establishment.[35] Devout critics thus, in effect, contributed to the negative branding of the ulema in Ottoman officialdom and among the intelligentsia, though not necessarily out of support for formal secularization. In fact, although some critics deployed the imagery of "ulema as clergy" in order to promote an agenda of European-like secularization, the criticism of devout intellectuals was informed by the dire need of the ulema to make serious accommodations in order to prevent this menace from materializing.

ISLAMIC INTELLECTUALS AND THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

Devout critics of the religious establishment, often labeled Islamists (*İslâmcılar*) retrospectively in Turkish historiography, were a diverse group with various theological and ideological orientations. Some of them had acquired a certain level of training in traditional Islamic sciences taught in Ottoman medreses. Most of them had not. For the most part, they were graduates of the new-style schools and were employed in the state bureaucracy as administrators, teachers, lawyers, and so on. After the Young Turk Revolution, some took to journalism as their primary occupation. Their educational and occupational profile was thus not necessarily different from that of most other men who came to dominate Ottoman intellectual life after the revolution. What did set the Islamic intellectuals apart from many others in the intelligentsia was their deep commitment to the Islamic character of the state and society. Ideological and political differences among them notwithstanding, virtually all of them came to view the religious establishment and its institutions as bastions of obsolete orthodoxy in need of comprehensive reforms. Their ideas about the form and pace of the required changes differed. Yet they all shared the conviction that the ulema, as a collective and with only a few exceptions, were a major impediment to the success of their respective reform agendas. They had their own concerns about possible ramifications of secularization *à la* Europe. They nevertheless argued, with various levels of vehemence, that the ulema would have to accept willy-nilly the need for wide-ranging reforms in Islamic institutions, practices, and traditions in order to help the Ottoman Empire fend

off the challenges to its sovereignty, become a technologically advanced and prosperous state, and escape the menace of religious decline.

Prior to the Young Turk Revolution, such critical views could be expressed publicly only abroad, with the exception of a short period in the 1870s. The fact that they did continue brewing under the surface may be gleaned from Ottoman publications that came to light in Egypt, away from the restrictions of the Hamidian censorship. In the 1890s, for instance, Mehmed Ârif Bey compiled a book of *hadith* (prophetic traditions) commentary that included scathing criticism of the religious establishment. The veteran Ottoman bureaucrat, who had a limited background of medrese education in his youth, opined disparagingly that "in our age those who are labeled the ulema (scholars) of Islam all appear as if they were manufactured in the same factory, have graduated from the same school, and had been educated in the same manner." He went on to suggest that these nondescript men cannot be respected as genuine ulema because they know only how to recite past traditions even as their ways and interpretations have strayed from the path laid down by the Prophet of Islam. He suggested that instead of this pernicious lot, "what we need are ulema that are learned in [modern] sciences that would help them examine the arguments and assertions of contemporary materialists, and then either refute them or adapt them to our religion."[36] Similar unrelenting criticism was aired by Ubeydullah Efendi, in a book published in Egypt in 1906. This colorful man, a former medrese student, future member of parliament, and well-known preacher after the revolution, took the ulema to task for their alleged narrow-minded, power-hungry, and generally harmful ways. He emphasized in particular their opposition to the translation of the Qur'an into the vernaculars of non-Arab Muslims. He alleged that their motivation was to keep the Muslims ignorant in order to maintain their own monopoly over the interpretation of the holy book.[37] Such accusations of self-interested misrepresentation and fabrication of Islamic doctrines in order to suit the petty interests of the religious establishment became a staple of critics of the ulema. Although such devastating critiques could not be expressed publicly under the Hamidian regime, they were nevertheless voiced in private settings in Istanbul and other major urban centers.[38]

Similar criticisms had been hurled at religious establishments by devout critics in virtually all major urban centers of the Islamic world since the late nineteenth century. Ottoman critics of the ulema were well aware of these grievances, and often influenced by them. The exact complaints and the remedies prescribed differed, but self-ascribed reformists shared the tendency to emphasize the destructive conservatism of the ulema and depict them and their institutions as "their Other, that foil against which

they defined themselves."[39] Their list of complaints was long and varied. It often concentrated on the ulema's rigidness of interpretation and jurisprudence, their unwillingness to reform religious education, their excessive defense of their authority and prerogatives, and their general narrow-mindedness and inability to grasp the challenges of the day and respond to them effectively. These kinds of essentialized characterizations of the ulema as a collective had become a staple of reform-minded intellectuals and activists, some of them ulema by training themselves. They often advocated reform programs that included hybridized European concepts of progress and modernity with Muslim terms and sensibilities. In the Ottoman Empire itself, after a short opening in the 1870s, the public articulation and advocacy of Islamic reformism was largely curtailed by the Hamidian regime. British-controlled Egypt and the Russian-ruled Caucasus and Central Asia were meanwhile particularly fertile grounds for the formulation and spread of such ideas, including into Ottoman lands. The reformist agenda of Muhammad Abduh was particularly influential in this respect, which not surprisingly made him a persona non grata in Istanbul during the Hamidian period.[40]

After the Young Turk Revolution the agenda of Islamic reform reemerged in force into the public sphere for the first time since the 1870s. Initially, the Islamic reformists found a common cause with fledgling nationalist currents both in the Turkish-speaking heartlands of the empire and in its Arabic-speaking periphery.[41] Both Islamic modernists and early nationalists deployed European-influenced perceptions of history, progress, and science hybridized with traditional Muslim vocabulary and symbolism. Both often projected onto the religious establishment almost any evil they identified in the Islamic world, from its weakness vis-à-vis Europe, through its economic difficulties, to its purported ignorance and backwardness. However, important differences in their ideological orientations became increasingly apparent by the eve of World War I. One area of disconnect was the place religion should have in a modern state and society. Nationalists embraced secularist perceptions that prescribed one of two options to religion: either confine itself to private forms of belief and worship or be restricted to public talk that makes negligible demands on life.[42] Some nationalists' assurances that "there is no element or institution of Turkish life that is not permeated by Islam and Islam may justly be called the national religion of the Turks,"[43] did little to allay the concerns of devout critics of nationalism that such pledges were mere rhetoric that disguised a desire to break away from Islamic tradition. Islamists, meanwhile, with all their criticism of the traditional ulema, still made every effort to remain within the broad confines of "a historical Islamic tradition" rather than trivialize it and marginalize

religious institutions, norms, and practices.[44] Divergences between, and among, Islamists and nationalists have evolved and transformed through time, with visible cracks appearing only after the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913. Earlier, and to some extent all the way to the early 1920s, the less-restrictive term *Islamic intellectuals* rather than the connotation-laden term *Islamists* may better denote the ideological orientation of modern-educated, reform-minded, and yet conservative-inclined men who were committed to the Islamic character of the state and society but often very critical of the religious establishment.

Islamic intellectuals were indeed often very harsh in their assessments of the ulema and their institutions. Said Halim Pasha expressed the view of many of them when he exclaimed that "the torpor of self-serving ulema was detrimental for Islamic society."[45] For one thing, Islamic intellectuals reiterated accusations that the ulema are holding the Muslims back in terms of social, economic, and technological progress, which in turn undermines Muslims' ability to withstand the pressures of European colonialism. For another thing, Islamic intellectuals stood out in their emphasis that it is the shortcomings of the religious establishment that augment the receptiveness to antireligious ideas, attitudes, and practices among the Ottoman intelligentsia and urban elites. Mehmed Âkif [Ersoy], a well-respected poet and devout intellectual, thus stated dejectedly in 1910 that "listening to what these folks say is sufficient to explain why irreligion became fashionable among the younger generation." Accusing them of disservice to the faith, he went on to remark that he too "would have become the greatest enemy of Islam had they been [his] source of knowledge on what religion really is."[46] Such harsh statements were often accompanied by disclaimers on the existence of some exceptions, but the generalizing tone of the criticism stood nevertheless. The crux of the critics' message was that the ulema and their institutions should undergo comprehensive reforms in order to regain their vitality and usefulness. Devout critics reasoned that although their charges might harm the image of the religious establishment in the short term, their well-intentioned critiques could, if taken seriously, benefit both the ulema and the Muslim faithful as a whole.

Many Islamic intellectuals sought to balance off their campaign against the encroachments of European imperialism and atheist influences with unyielding advocacy of comprehensive reforms in religion in general and in the religious establishment in particular. Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi gave voice to this stance in his popular newspaper articles and books. He did not shy away from very harsh assessments of the purported incompetence of the ulema and their institutions. Lashing out at the "thoughtless and formalistic fanaticism" of the ulema and accusing

them of becoming "a distinct social class" that had adopted "some of the damaging traits of the priests" in Europe, he observed in 1911:

"For centuries, those who profess religion [as a vocation] did all they could to implement their ideal of steering the Islamic community in opposition to history and the changing times. . . . The mentality of most ulema is still to oppose and resist the required reforms and ideas. . . . The knowledge of the ulema does not conform to the current time and circumstances. They are unconnected with and opposed to contemporary mentality and knowledge. Consequently, they force the Muslims to adopt one of two awkward and deplorable options: either the acceptance of naturalism, skepticism, and atheist philosophies and moving away from their religion and national attributes; or the development of distaste for science and knowledge, and a consequent persistence of ignorance."[47]

His conclusion is that reform-minded Islamic intellectuals and the few existing "enlightened" ulema should join forces in a struggle against the bastions of destructive traditionalism. He opines that the obscurantism and rants of the great majority of the ulema should be simply brushed aside because the Muslims "do not have priesthood and are not required to seek a license and permission from any particular authority if they wish to be of service to their faith or debate any of its aspects." Moreover, he suggests that, at least until the thorough reform of their institutions, the ulema should be deprived of any official, state-sanctioned authority, declaring that devout Muslims had no business leaving "the administration of religious affairs to those who possess nothing but the capacity to recite traditions."[48] His statements were particularly harsh, but many other Islamic intellectuals shared their basic premises.

Similar types of harsh criticisms of the alleged ultraconservatism of the ulema were voiced at the time in many urban centers around the Islamic world. Islamic intellectuals did not only define themselves in contrast to negative traits they attributed to the religious establishment. Often they also competed with ulema for religious authority, sometimes dismissing them as stooges of the central government, and almost always mocking their religious competence and their alleged immersion in anachronistic and pernicious traditions. The effects of such challenges to the authority of the ulema varied at different times and in different places. Often enough they contributed to the fragmentation of religious authority in Muslim societies, thus complicating and challenging the ulema's status not only in the intelligentsia but also among their traditional constituencies.[49]

Ottoman Islamic intellectuals supported state-led reforms in religious life and institutions, by coercive measures if need be. On the one hand, they pleaded with the ulema to cooperate with the implementation of necessary reforms. On the other hand, they suspected that their purported narrow-mindedness, excessive traditionalism, and destructive self-interest would prevent the ulema from ever endorsing comprehensive reforms. Many Islamic intellectuals therefore advocated that the government take the initiative in comprehensively restructuring the religious establishment whether the majority of ulema liked it or not. Advocacy of such a course of action became ubiquitous after the Young Turk Revolution.

The implementation of state-led reforms in the religious establishment was far from inevitable. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the shifting political landscapes and circumstances of the closing years of the empire had a direct bearing on the plausibility and effectiveness of government-led reforms in the religious establishment and its institutions. Islamic intellectuals mostly believed that, once reformed, the ulema and their institutions should continue to play central public roles in the Ottoman state and society. They had always found it necessary to emphasize that they bash the religious establishment not least out of conviction that it needs to be saved from itself, lest the ulema's ineptness facilitate the advance of European-like processes of secularization and religious decline. Saving the empire, securing its future prosperity, and ensuring its Islamic character were all intertwined in their view, and necessitated comprehensive changes in the religious establishment and its institutions and outlook. On these premises, the relations between Islamic intellectuals and ulema were not inherently conflictive. At certain junctures, on certain issues, and under certain circumstances they could also be interactive and cooperative. Although many ulema riled against the Islamic intellectuals' assertions and aspirations, some reform-minded ulema in fact shared their perspectives and agenda. These ulema, usually described by supporters as the "enlightened" or "progressive" minority among their peers, often found the Islamic intellectuals to be useful allies in their efforts to assume the role of a reforming vanguard—a vanguard on a quest to serve the genuine interests of the Muslims and salvage the declining reputation and quality of the religious establishment and its institutions.

POSITIVE REBRANDING: PROACTIVE AND DEFENSIVE ATTITUDES

The writings of ulema of all stripes in the closing years of the Ottoman Empire reveal acute concern with the declining reputation of the religious establishment in Ottoman intelligentsia and officialdom. This was worrisome on many accounts, not least because it was often associated with inroads made into these influential segments of society by secularist and

antireligious ideas. For years Ottoman audiences had been told that these types of influential and well-placed groups, limited in number but strategically placed in positions of influence on public opinion and government policies, initiated the drive toward secularization in Europe. For ulema of all stripes this was a menacing prospect indeed, considering the assumptions and anxieties that were tied to it. Such concerns became more acute after the Young Turk Revolution. None of the ulema considered the prospect of secularization to be inevitable, but they all agreed that the potential threat was serious enough to require effective actions in order to turn back what appeared to them all to be a rising tide of secularist and antireligious tendencies in Ottoman officialdom and intelligentsia. They also shared the view that a positive rebranding of the religious establishment was necessary if the ulema were to play an important role in guarding the Islamic character of the state and society for years to come. They could not agree, however, on what exactly needed to be done to achieve these goals and address the grave challenges of the time.

The ulema's aspiration to ensure the long-term viability of the religious establishment was interlaced with concerns about the future of the empire and its Islamic character. For the most part, they all saw these issues as interconnected and to a certain degree even as interdependent. However, there were divisions among them about the required path to secure these goals. The disagreements within their ranks became public and were accentuated after the Young Turk Revolution. They were particularly acute and visible in Istanbul, the empire's center of political and intellectual life, and the city that boasted by far the largest concentration of ulema and Islamic institutions in the Ottoman lands. Some ulema embraced a reformist agenda that called for radical reforms in the religious establishment, in Islamic institutions, and in religious life. Many other ulema opted for a more conservative approach that advocated only gradual, cautious, and carefully measured changes in existing institutions and traditions. The former agenda was a proactive inclination that suggested that if the ulema would not initiate reforms themselves, they, the empire, and religious life in the Ottoman lands would all suffer severe consequences. The latter was an attitude that reflected concern with hasty changes that might destroy cherished and worthy traditions and institutions in the name of "progress" and "reform" and would actually facilitate the spread of irreligious or religiously deviant social norms and religious practices. In reality, however, these contrasting attitudes did not divide the late Ottoman ulema into two neatly divided, clearly defined, and highly institutionalized ideological camps. Their positions and views were spread along a spectrum stretching from proactive and reform-minded inclinations at the one end to defensive and ultraconservative perspectives at the other end. Across time, and with changing circumstances, individuals and groups could and did move along this continuum.

The reform-minded standpoint largely accepted the contention that the fundamental problems of the religious establishment were of substance rather than of image. According to this viewpoint, as articulated by many Islamic intellectuals as well, the reputation of the ulema could be restored and their long-term viability secured only after comprehensive changes were made in their institutions and outlook. The basic premise was that much of the criticism they faced was valid. For instance, the argument that the failings of the religious establishment contributed to multiple crises in the Islamic world in general, and to the spread of antireligious views and practices in particular, did not ring hollow to many reform-minded ulema. They were more receptive than many of their conservative peers to the contention that the demands of modern life necessitated a comprehensive and accelerated overhaul of existing religious traditions, interpretations, and institutions. Reform-minded ulema therefore believed that the religious establishment should be revitalized through a comprehensive reshaping of the Islamic institutions and the educational and social outlook of the ulema. They advocated proactive actions from within the religious establishment, but many doubted whether these were indeed plausible. Quite a few reformist ulema concurred with the views of Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), an icon for many reform-minded Ottomans, who years earlier warned that if "the ulama would not change on their own, the state—as the primary agent of progress—would have to circumvent them." They found resonance in the Egyptian reformer's charge, shared also by many Islamic intellectuals, that many of the ulema were "obstacles of ignorant fanaticism and guardians of idiocy disguised as guardians of religion."[50] They therefore aspired to mobilize the government's power to introduce reforms in the religious establishment and in religious life, lest the reluctant and obscurantist ultraconservative ulema hinder further the strengthening and progress of the empire and facilitate the spread of antireligious attitudes, norms, and practices among its elites.

Musa Kâzım Efendi (1858–1920) became the figurehead of the reform-minded ulema after the Young Turk Revolution. A loyal supporter of the CUP, he served as the Sheikh ul-Islam for almost half of the CUP's decade of political dominance. Shortly after the revolution he had already explicated his belief that the ulema and their institutions require meaningful revitalization. In September 1909, for instance, he gave a speech to medrese students in which he emphasized the necessity to rethink the edifice of the ulema's claim to religious authority. He argued that Islamic

theology is outdated and therefore leaves the ulema weaponless in the struggle against antireligious ideas. "If we were to attempt to defend [Islam] now, with our current knowledge," he explained, "we would appear ludicrous, because we are uninformed." He therefore urged the abandonment of narrow-mindedness and "fanaticism in this respect" and the updating of Islamic theology to befit the demands of the time.[51]

Such depreciating assessment of the current state of the ulema became a staple of reform-minded critics from within their ranks. In late 1909, for example, Halim Sabit Efendi (Şibay) published in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* a series of scathing attacks on the merits and reputation of the ulema as a collective. The young *alim* (singular of *ulema*) of Tatar extraction charged in these articles that the ulema had lost any claim to guidance and authority and in fact had become no different than the hoi polloi (*avam-ı nas*). Only their attire and outward appearance set them apart, not their knowledge or morality. He emphasized that regaining their former competence and esteem would require a complete overhaul of their institutions and mentality. A superficial makeover would not be sufficient to reform them thoroughly and rebrand them positively.[52] Such bashing of the ulema as a collective by reform-minded ulema and like-minded Islamic intellectuals continued apace, and in some instances even escalated, in the years leading to World War I.

Harsh assessments that were barred from the public sphere under the Hamidian regime became a staple in reform-minded circles and won wide visibility and circulation under the Unionist rule. Some of their rhetoric echoed criticism made by Young Turk intellectuals, who were often suspected of antireligious inclinations. Reform-minded ulema, however, as well as Islamic intellectuals, emphasized that their sharp barbs were not malicious but in fact well-intentioned wake-up calls to the religious establishment. One commentator reflected this posture when addressing the ulema reprovingly in 1914 with this rhetorical question: "Would you persist in delivering from the blessed pulpits of our mosques sermons that are worthless for both religious and worldly purposes, and continue to distance our people from the mosques?"[53] These types of public rebukes were intended to emphasize the urgency of the situation, to mobilize support among ulema and their students, to shame opponents into silence, and to display to the powers that be that the religious establishment could be revitalized and made useful again if only the reform-minded ulema would be put in charge and given authority to initiate reforms. To put it differently, by attacking the ulema the reform-minded critics sought to distance themselves from the negative traits associated with the "brand" and affirm their own reputation—in the eyes of medrese students, political authorities, intellectuals, and the

public at large—as a progressive, forward-looking vanguard that could fix the religious establishment and positively rebrand the ulema and their institutions.

It should not come as a surprise that many ulema, particularly those of conservative inclinations, resented this condescending stance and rejected its premises. They found both the tone of the criticism and its indiscriminate nature quite disturbing. For one thing, conservative ulema were concerned that their peers' harsh rhetoric might indirectly dignify and legitimize ideas circulated by "enemies of the faith." For another thing, they disagreed on substantive issues of religious authority, legal traditions, Islamic education, social norms and morality, and so on. These topics are discussed in more detail in the following chapters. Here, suffice it to say that conservative ulema tended to perceive themselves as steadfast defenders of cherished Islamic traditions while viewing their reform-minded critics as akin to "useful idiots" of antireligious forces in the Ottoman elites. At best they were perceived as impressionable men disoriented by propaganda and all sorts of malignant pressures and influences from both Ottoman self-styled progressives and Europeans. At worst, some of them were loathed as unprincipled collaborators with an agenda of European-like secularization that spelled gloom and doom for the ulema and for religious life in the Ottoman lands. This is not to say that conservative ulema opposed any change or reform in the state in general and in Islamic institutions in particular. However, they tended to adopt a cautious stance that involved unapologetic defense of the reputation and merits of the religious establishment and support for only gradual and limited reforms, which would be supervised by the ulema rather than enforced or coerced by the central government.

Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869–1954) became the figurehead of the defensive-inclined ulema after the Young Turk Revolution. He and like-minded ulema dominated the Ulema Association in Istanbul (*Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i İslamiye*) and the editorial line of *Beyan'ül-Hak*, the new association's mouthpiece. He served as the journal's editor-in-chief, as a member of parliament, and after World War I as Sheikh ul-Islam. From these positions of influence and power, he and his supporters made the combat against negative designations assigned to the religious establishment a centerpiece of their agenda. Time and again they emphasized that the attribution of designators such *backwardness*, *fanaticism*, and *narrow-mindedness* to the ulema as a collective was an unfair and pernicious stigmatization whether it came from antireligious commentators or from Islamic intellectuals and reform-minded ulema. Mustafa Sabri indeed had already cautioned the latter shortly after the Young Turk Revolution that "a hostile hand has been treacherously stretched out against

the religion of Islam," led by "those who demean the ulema in order to destroy religion." He alerted them that the defamation and wild accusations against the ulema were made public as part of a clandestine stage-by-stage plan to marginalize religion and eventually uproot it altogether. He therefore advised vigilance toward any proposal for religious reforms and preached vigorous rejection of the misinformation, exaggerations, and lies spread about the ulema and their institutions.[54]

Mustafa Sabri and like-minded conservative ulema insisted that the attacks on the religious establishment were excessive and unwarranted. They conceded that the Islamic institutions did have shortcomings that should be addressed. However, they emphasized that graduates of medrese education were still the most qualified and authoritative interpreters of the faith nevertheless. They rejected the qualification of "laymen" with no background of traditional religious education to offer meaningful and worthy interpretations of Islamic texts and traditions. Mustafa Sabri indeed found it outrageous that people who did not master sufficient knowledge in theology (*kalam*), expertise in Islamic philosophy (*hikma*), training in logic (*mantiq*), and other required Islamic sciences were audacious enough to claim for themselves an interpretive authority. When confronted with these facts, however, these pretentious faux-scholars retorted that the ulema wished to silence them in order "to administer the laws of Islam as priesthood." Mustafa Sabri insisted that "only complete mindlessness could have generated such lack of confidence in the ulema." He therefore rejected the tone of "self-criticism" adopted by reform-minded ulema and lectured his peers to be proud of their expertise, institutions, and traditions and not be willing to acquiesce to the indiscriminate attacks on the religious establishment.[55]

The stage was thus set for a wide-ranging contestation over the fate of the religious establishment and its institutions, and their position in the state and society. Public debates and political maneuvering among ulema were of course nothing new or exceptional for the Ottoman Empire. The context, however, was novel and the stakes particularly high, what with the Ottoman Empire remaining one of the last independent Islamic powers, though with increasing threats to its survival looming, and with the menace of the purported European paradigm of secularization-cum-religious decline on the mind of all sides to the debate.

CHAPTER THREE

Contesting Visions of Reform

The Young Turk Revolution opened new avenues for change in many aspects of social, economic, and political life in the Ottoman Empire. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the dominant political power until 1918, assigned the government and state bureaucracies a major role as agents of wide-ranging reforms. The Committee's state-centered vision of administrative, educational, and social change appeared quite appealing to reform-minded ulema because many of them were convinced that their own agenda could fit well with the program of the CUP. This clandestine opposition organization-turned-dominant-power posited itself as a progressive and transformative force that was diametrically opposed to the alleged inertia of the Hamidian regime. Many reform-minded ulema believed that the Unionists could offer crucial help to their campaign for bold, comprehensive, and rapid changes in religious life and institutions. Defensively inclined ulema initially also embraced the reform agenda, at least on the declarative level, albeit with a much more cautious attitude regarding the extent and pace of change. The reform-minded camp wanted to redefine the ulema as agents of change whereas their more conservative peers viewed their role primarily as guardians of tradition. These contrasting visions translated into long years of contestation over the future of the religious establishment and its institutions. The court of public opinion and the political arena became major battlegrounds between the two sides over the future of religious institutions, norms, and practices in the Ottoman lands.

The printed word was employed extensively by ulema of all persuasions to disseminate their views and mobilize public support. They founded new journals, contributed articles to the daily press, and published scores of books and pamphlets. The relative liberalization that followed the elimination of the Hamidian censorship in 1908 allowed for lively debates about controversial topics that were formerly barred from the public

domain. Religious dogmas and practices and the future of Islamic institutions were topics of particularly heated debates. The burgeoning press allowed all sides to reach new audiences beyond the confines of traditional forms of oral communication in mosques, medreses, and social gatherings. Pundits and activists competed for influence over public opinion, for leverage in the political arena, and for authority within the religious establishment.

The Ottoman Empire had a long tradition of linkages between the religious establishment and the government. Building on earlier precedents, successive Ottoman governments had endeavored since the early nineteenth century to centralize the administration of religious institutions and help disseminate state-sanctioned interpretations of the faith. These efforts were only partially successful, but Unionist governments continued pursuing similar policies nevertheless, albeit more so in the Anatolian and Balkan heartlands of the empire than in its peripheries and frontier regions. Neither the reform-minded ulema nor their inclined-to-be-defensive peers in Istanbul rejected in principle these state-centered policies aimed at all but nationalizing religious life. Neither of the factions advocated religious pluralism per se or the privatization of religious institutions. At most, some of them believed that under the auspices of the state the ulema should be allowed a significant measure of autonomy over the religious establishment and its institutions.

The stakes were high and the rival factions subsequently engaged in a relentless battle over the control of the religious establishment. The factional division lines were quite robust, albeit not fully fixed. Changing circumstances in the volatile situation of the Ottoman Empire, and aggravated concerns about the inroads made by antireligious influences, effected some shifts in alignment over time. The early years after the revolution witnessed heated debates but very little meaningful change in the religious establishment, its institutions, or any aspects of religious life. The pace of reforms was very slow and their extent limited in scope. The stalemate was broken only after the CUP consolidated its rule by the eve of World War I. Developments and upheavals in the political arena indeed had dramatic ramifications for the outcome of the contest for power and influence between reform-minded ulema and their conservative peers.

AGENTS OF CHANGE AND GUARDIANS OF TRADITION

No comprehensive reforms were implemented in the religious establishment or in any Islamic institution prior to 1914. Nevertheless, the earlier public debates were not simply hot air, as it appeared to some observers

before 1913, because they helped shape attitudes within the religious establishment, with long-term implications. Although none of the ulema went public against the need for "reforms," they were far from unanimous about what such reforms might entail and, more generally, on the posture the ulema should adopt under the new political circumstances.

A seemingly petty semantic controversy from late 1908 offers an early example of the differing inclinations within the religious establishment. It began with an article published by Mustafa Sabri Efendi in the mouthpiece of the newly established Ulema Association in Istanbul. In the piece, he protests against the prevalent use of the term *Kuvve-i Teşriîye* (literally, legislative power) to designate the newly reinstituted legislative branch of the government. He argues that the parliament should not be designated with a term that he claimed is etymologically close to the word *Sharia*, the Islamic law (both words are based on the Arabic root *shin,ra,'ayn*). He suggests that alternative terms might be used in order to erase any possible doubt that the parliament engages only in legislating statutory laws. He even hints that the choice of the term was not innocent but rather could have reflected disrespect toward the Islamic laws, and perhaps was even part of a long-term campaign to undermine the Sharia and its qualified interpreters, the ulema. He therefore advocates precautionary measures to prevent any illusion that the laws of parliament are in any way comparable to the Sharia, God's Law.[1] The objection and its premises were immediately tackled and rejected out of hand in an article published in *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, the leading reform-minded publication of the day. The rebuke was penned by Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı, the sheikh of the imperial mosque of Ayasofya. Although by no means a radical reformist, he was nevertheless associated with the reform-minded circles. He argued that Mustafa Sabri overreacted, because all the choice of wording did was to help clarify a novel concept through a familiar vocabulary. There was cause neither for confusion nor for being overly defensive, and there was every reason to give the new constitutional order the trust it required.[2]

The semantic debate in Istanbul echoed, to an extent, a much more dramatic controversy in Iran, which at the time was in the midst of political turmoil. By 1907, conservative Shiite ulema who a year earlier had backed the constitutional movement and helped it secure a constitution and parliamentary elections now demanded amendments that would ensure the supremacy of God's Law over parliament's legislative authority. In practical terms, this meant affording senior ulema veto powers over any legislation deemed in opposition to their interpretation of the sacred law of Islam. All of the senior ulema supported this position, even as they were deeply divided on many other issues at the time. Subsequently,

parliament ratified a supplementary law that stipulated the establishment of a council of senior ulema invested with the authority to strike down any parliamentary legislation they deemed opposed to the law of Islam. The council was not established at the time. Nevertheless, the public debates that surrounded the issue and their conclusion in favor of the clericalist standpoint exposed the uneasiness and concerns among many Iranian ulema about the potential ramifications of a representative parliamentary system.[3] The success and setbacks of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution were followed closely by Ottoman opposition activists before the Young Turk Revolution and were reported extensively in the press of Istanbul after the revolution, including in ultraconservative publications.[4]

The debate between Mustafa Sabri and Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı echoed concerns about the role of the Sharia and the ulema in a constitutional regime. The seemingly trivial controversy itself resulted in a few more articles and died away. Mustafa Sabri's remonstrations notwithstanding, the term *Kuvve-i Teşrîîye* continued to be used to denote the legislative branch of government, and was even inserted into the first constitution of the republic.[5] But the exchange between the two ulema was indicative of things to come. The two men displayed antithetical attitudes that were to become familiar in more important controversies among the ulema. Mustafa Sabri represented an apprehensive and skeptical posture toward any novelty that appeared to substantiate fears of an encroaching "European-like" secularization. Although he supported the new political order, this defensive mode was evident in his writings from the early days of the constitutional regime. Reform-minded ulema, in contrast, viewed the new political order primarily in terms of creating new and exciting opportunities for their agenda rather than as foreboding and risky. In political terms this meant that the former tended to be either circumspect about the Unionists or outright opposed to them, while the latter were more often supportive and cooperative.

More substantive disagreements within the religious establishment soon accentuated these differences. In 1909, for instance, an initiative aimed at expanding the Majalla (*Mecelle*), the Sharia-based civil law code, became a major cause for controversy among the ulema. The Majalla, based on Hanafi jurisprudence, was promulgated in the 1870s. It was envisioned as an empire-wide unified and standardized Sharia-based civil code, but the project was not completed and thus did not cover all aspects of the civil law.[6] Once considered a vintage reformist project, it was conservative ulema who supported its expansion in 1909 in order to preempt initiatives for the reform of the legal system according to European examples. They therefore launched in parliament a legislative initiative to restart work on expanding the Majalla. Without consulting the Unionist leadership, Mustafa Sabri and like-minded ulema members

of parliament prepared a draft bill that called for the establishment of a committee of scholars to prepare the new sections of the code under the auspices of the Sheikh ul-Islam. They also took action to rally public support for the initiative with publications in the press and politicking in the markets of Istanbul.

The initiators of the legislation may have expected that reform-minded ulema would also back the bill. If this indeed was the case, they were soon disappointed. Rather than becoming a common cause for the ulema, the project soon exposed widening cleavages among them. Prominent reform-minded ulema in fact opposed the initiative quite explicitly. They did not necessarily disagree with its necessity, but they argued that the timing of the bill and the adverse motives of its initiators undermined any advantages the legislation could have had.[7] Halim Sabit Efendi, for instance, explains in two articles on the topic that the backers of the initiative wanted to invest the task of supplementing the Majalla in the hands of ulema who lacked the necessary erudition and familiarity with the demands of the time. He argues that this would have been counterproductive. Instead, such an initiative would have to be delayed until after comprehensive reforms in religious educations produced enlightened and qualified ulema.[8]

The legislative initiative had a promising beginning in early 1909 but ended in complete failure by the end of the year. On three separate occasions in February and March, a majority in parliament endorsed the bill. Some preliminary work toward its realization was meanwhile taking place in the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam. The Unionist leadership opposed the bill nevertheless. Playing for time, the president of the Chamber of Deputies deferred the final approval until the budget debates at the end of the year. By then the Unionist leadership had already engineered the hiring of Count Léon Ostrorog, a European jurist and noted orientalist, as a special advisor to the Ministry of Justice. He was tasked with "bringing the Ottoman code of law in line with that of Europe."[9] Mustafa Sabri and other supporters of the Majalla initiative opposed his appointment, arguing forcefully that Islamic scholars and not foreigners should be charged with reforming the legal system. Their objections were ignored. Moreover, when the Majalla initiative was finally scheduled for discussion in parliament, the Unionist leadership arranged its indefinite postponement on procedural grounds.[10] Ulema who supported the Majalla initiative still attempted for a time to mobilize public support, yet they could not even bring all their peers on board and the initiative never reached fruition.[11]

The failure of the Majalla initiative underlined the failure of conservative ulema to promote their preemptive agenda. Subsequently, from

late 1909 onward, Mustafa Sabri Efendi and like-minded ulema shifted to a fully defensive modus operandi. Their setbacks and new posture came about even as reform-minded ulema were gaining new positions of power and influence. Thanks to Unionist backing, the balance of power within the religious establishment began gradually shifting toward the reform-minded camp. The trend appeared to have reached a crucial turning point in July 1910 with the appointment of Musa Kâzım Efendi as Sheikh ul-Islam. The man most associated with the reform-minded stance now headed the religious establishment. His appointment raised new hopes and expectations among his supporters, but was met with dismay and alarm in more conservative circles of the religious establishment. Rumors about the new Sheikh ul-Islam's affiliation with Freemasonry further aggravated doubts about him. Defensively inclined ulema therefore watched his actions closely, determined to hinder any comprehensive reform he might endorse or seek to implement.[12]

Musa Kâzım Efendi and his supporters advocated wide-ranging institutional reforms in the religious establishment. For that purpose, the Sheikh ul-Islam established several committees to devise specific proposals for necessary changes in the administrative, judicial, and educational functions of his office.[13] His conservative critics, meanwhile, immediately mobilized to block virtually each and every suggestion these committees proposed. One bone of contention was the critics' charge that "reforms" were often a guise for the purging of ideological opponents from positions of influence. Another topic of disagreement was the pace of proposed reforms. The conservatives demanded only gradual and piecemeal changes in established ways and traditions. For instance, in 1911 it was decided by the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam to add a written component to the oral examination taken by candidates for medrese professorships in Istanbul. Conservatives did not oppose this change in principle, but they insisted that the new form could not be implemented right away but should rather be introduced very gradually, in a matter of years rather than months. Mustafa Sabri Efendi and his supporters took the opportunity to question the qualifications and worthiness of senior officials in the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam, whom they accused of ineptness.[14] Such bickering, within the context of unstable political conditions from late 1911 through 1913, ultimately hindered the introduction of comprehensive reforms. Musa Kâzım's controversial reputation within the religious establishment in fact led to his replacement in December 1911. His successors in office until 1914 were quite conservative. The agenda of the reform-minded ulema was therefore stalled for all intents and purposes until the CUP established its authoritarian one-party rule in 1913.

Nevertheless, the debates and controversies of the previous years were not inconsequential. They helped flesh out the differences in visions of reform among the ulema and divide them more clearly into competing camps. The contestation between the reformist and defensive inclinations increasingly required the ulema to take a stand, even if the demarcation lines between the competing agendas were not always clear-cut. In the immediate wake of the revolution virtually all the ulema in Istanbul made a point of emphasizing their support for reforms in the religious establishment. By 1911 some of them began embracing a self-definition of "conservatism" (*muhafazakârlık*),[15] with many more following suit by the end of World War I.

A THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

Public controversies among the ulema during the closing years of the Ottoman Empire focused primarily on practical matters rather than on theological questions. Doctrinal disputes did exist, however. In a few cases they became a matter of public discussion, particularly when they had a bearing on the reformist-conservative contestation. One of the most well-known of these theological controversies centered on the question of the fate of the unbelievers in the hereafter, and pitted Mustafa Sabri against Musa Jarullah Bigiyev, a Tatar scholar with many admirers and followers in Istanbul. The controversy originated in Russia but soon found its way into the Ottoman lands and attained a high public profile. The crux of the matter was whether hellfire was eternal and thus the infidels and sinners were doomed for unlimited suffering in the hereafter, or instead their suffering was confined to a specific time frame by the All-Compassionate, All-Merciful God. The controversy was quite intense, not necessarily because of the urgency of the topic at hand. Instead, it drew attention and interest because it became one more battleground in the broader contestation over religious authority and influence between reform-minded and conservative ulema. On the face of it, the controversy simply revived long-standing disagreements within the Islamic tradition. In reality, both sides to the dispute perceived the debate as part of a struggle between the "ulema as agents of change" paradigm (often presented as restoration of genuine forms and ideals) and the "ulema as guardians of tradition" model (with *tradition* often defined in terms of Hanafi interpretations of Islamic doctrines and laws).

The controversy was ignited on the eve of World War I, following a series of lectures given by Musa Jarullah in an important medrese in Orenburg, Russia. In the lectures, in journal articles that followed them,

and finally in a book, he argued that it is inconceivable that the endlessly merciful God subjects the majority of humanity to eternal torments in Hell. Instead, he suggests, although non-Muslims do remain eternally in Hell, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an, at a certain point the fire and suffering there come to an end. He explains that he reached this conclusion independently, but he also hastens to add that he was relieved to find out that his interpretation was supported by past Muslim luminaries such as the mystics Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) and Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) and influential scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). He therefore argues that the antithetical opinions presented in most books of Islamic theology (*kalam*) are wrong and should be dismissed.[16]

Jarullah takes the opportunity to launch a more general assault on the merits of the science of Islamic theology in its historical and contemporary state. He criticizes ulema who accept and perpetuate the teachings of the major books of Islamic theology. To him this was indicative of most ulema's disinterest in discovering and teaching the genuine truths of Islam. He accuses them of following existing traditions blindly and of reprehensible fetishism for centuries-old books, similar to the ways of the clergy in Christianity and the priesthood in past pagan civilizations. He insists that their interpretations are incorrect and detrimental to the interests of Islam. Returning to the specific topic at hand, the fate of unbelievers in the afterlife, he explains that his interpretation is not only the correct one but also might prove beneficial in the struggle against religious fanaticism and intolerance among the Muslims on the one hand and against baseless accusations leveled against Islam by European critics on the other. In other words, he clearly seeks to place this old theological discussion within the framework of a novel reformist agenda.[17] A similar strategy was employed by many would-be Islamic reformers throughout the Muslim world during this period.

Jarullah's book was published in Turkish in 1911 and soon found its way to the Ottoman lands. By then he was already well-known and extensively published in reform-minded journals in Istanbul. His book therefore gained wide exposure and was immediately a cause for controversy in the Ottoman lands, as it was in Russia.[18] His views won the admiration of some ulema and the strong disapproval of many others. The committee in charge of religious publications in the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam sided with the latter. In their view, Jarullah's interpretations were "completely opposed to the fundamentals of Islam," included "blasphemies and falsehoods," and "deceive and mislead the Muslims." The committee therefore appealed to the Ministry of the Interior in early 1913 to ban the book's publication and circulation in the Ottoman lands. The request was refused. Nevertheless, Jarullah took the opportunity to

hit back at the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam, lambasting the top echelons of the Ottoman religious establishment for serving as a bastion of conservatism and backwardness.[19]

The controversy died out for a time, before being resurrected by Mustafa Sabri Efendi after World War I. The figurehead of the conservative ulema in Istanbul took the trouble to write a long rebuttal of Jarullah's particular arguments as well as his broader reformist agenda. By the time the book was published in 1919, Mustafa Sabri was the Sheikh ul-Islam and at the summit of his public career. He makes it clear in this monograph that the theological debate was only of secondary importance for him. His real aim was to debunk the scholarly pretensions of Jarullah and other would-be religious reformers and expose the weaknesses of their reformist agenda. He explains that Jarullah typified the widespread trend of self-styled religious reformers that plagued the Islamic world. Some Ottoman commentators even depicted Jarullah as the "Luther of Islam," which Mustafa Sabri finds both troubling and bemusing at the same time. The conservative scholar opines that this search for a "Muslim Luther" was unwarranted and alarming but reflected the disorientation and malaise that afflicted the Muslim world.[20] He emphasizes that Islam had no need for reformation as argued by European observers and implicitly endorsed by some reform-minded ulema and Islamic intellectuals.[21]

The science of Islamic theology and its traditional texts were the targets of particularly intense attacks by reform-minded critics in general and Jarullah in particular. Mustafa Sabri found their views misinformed and misleading but lamentably effective in undermining many Muslims' confidence in this vital branch of Islamic sciences. As an established religious scholar, he addressed Jarullah's assertions about the fate of unbelievers in the hereafter in a very methodical manner, seeking to demolish the reformist's conclusion that their torments are not eternal. But Mustafa Sabri does not stop there. He further argued that Jarullah and his ilk sought to deny the Muslims the right to affirm and celebrate the superiority of the religion of Islam over all other faiths. In their eagerness to appear civilized to European critics of Islam, and because they were disoriented by Europe's material might and prosperity, these men instead adopted the false premises of relativism and were willing to forgo any Islamic tradition or belief that appeared to stand in the way of their skewed understanding of progress. Mustafa Sabri emphasized that this approach was unnecessary because no Islamic doctrine hindered the march of civilization. He then stressed, however—and here is the rub—that even if it were hypothetically proven that Islamic dogmas were preventing progress and prosperity, the Muslims should still stick

to their own ways and God's laws, accepting any hardship as a divine punishment for their sins. He therefore called on believers not to be seduced by the ideas and interpretations of self-styled "religious reformers" (*müceddidler*).[22] In a nutshell, he thus captured one of the salient but often unstated differences in attitude between reform-minded and conservative ulema.

Mustafa Sabri's view on the question of the eternity of hellfire has remained the majority view, but his broader ideological campaign against the reform-minded ulema was much less successful. Jarullah remained a respected figure in reform-minded circles in the decades that followed, but his argument about the fate of the unbelievers remained a minority view in Turkey and beyond.[23] Meanwhile, however, conservative ulema in the mold of Mustafa Sabri were losing ground by the eve of World War I. As the Ottoman Empire was drawing into the war that would spell its demise, defensively inclined ulema could do little but watch with dismay as their reform-minded adversaries established their dominance over the central institutions of the religious establishment.

THE REFORMISTS' BITTER VICTORY

The standoff between the reform-minded ulema and their more conservative adversaries was broken on the eve of World War I. In January 1913, the CUP retook the reins of power after a short hiatus in late 1912. During the Unionists' few months in the opposition, the empire suffered shocking territorial losses in the Balkans while CUP activists faced various degrees of persecution. Once they returned to power on the heels of a military coup d'état, the Unionist leadership was determined to eliminate any resistance to their self-assumed role as saviors of the empire. With military officers such as Enver Pasha and Cemal Pasha now taking prominent roles in the CUP's leadership, much tougher policies were implemented against critics of the CUP. Just in case anybody missed the point, the Unionist Sheikh ul-Islam Mustafa Hayri Efendi circulated in April 1914 a stern warning to dissenting ulema not to dare to engage in activities that might "disturb the public order."[24] Subsequently, the voice of the defensively inclined ulema was all but eliminated from the public sphere until the end of World War I. The institution of what amounted to a one-party regime by the CUP in 1913 thus created conducive circumstances for the predominance of reform-minded ulema and opened new opportunities for comprehensive reforms in the religious establishment.

A new dawn of reform appeared to be rising in March 1914 following the appointment of Mustafa Hayri as Sheikh ul-Islam. A well-known

reformist, he was a graduate of the Imperial Law School (*Mekteb-i Hukuk-i Şahane*) who held various positions in the civil court system during the Hamidian period and was elected to parliament and served in several cabinets after the Young Turk Revolution. A staunch Unionist, he was well-connected to the party's leadership and had served twice as Minister of Islamic Endowments (*Evkaf*), the second stint following the Unionist coup d'état in January 1913. His educational background, career path, political activism, and previous government positions thus set him apart from all his predecessors in office. The fact that he maintained his portfolio as Minister of Islamic Endowments meant that his jurisdiction was also more extensive than that of his immediate predecessors, covering virtually all aspects of Islamic religious life in the Ottoman lands. His appointment came with a clear mandate, explicated in a royal decree, to reform the religious establishment and its institutions.[25]

The years that followed his appointment indeed witnessed significant changes in the religious establishment. However, rather than galvanizing the reform-minded circles, the implementation of new policies created new cleavages among them. In the preceding years, potential disagreements about the extent and direction of the reforms remained latent, as the reform-minded ulema and their allies concentrated on countering the conservative opposition to comprehensive reforms. However, once the reformists prevailed after 1913, internal controversies among them about the extent, form, and orientation of the reforms soon followed.

Early signs of division within the reformist circles in Istanbul first became evident in their publications by the eve of World War I. After the Young Turk Revolution, the journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim* served as the primary medium for reformist publications. In 1912, however, editorial disagreements spelled the end of the journal and heralded increasing ideological tensions in the reformist circles.[26] Eşref Edib, one of *Sırat-ı Müstakim*'s two original owners established *Sebilürreşad* in its stead. The new periodical became the home of moderate reformists such as İzmirli İsmail Hakkı and the poet Mehmed Âkif Bey. Although they continued to advocate reforms, notably in religious education and Islamic theology,[27] these intellectuals nevertheless adopted an increasingly defensive posture during World War I—so much so that in 1919, shortly after the end of the war, the journal embraced a "conservative" self-designation and highly recommended Mustafa Sabri's polemical book against Islamic reformism.[28] Supporters of a more radical reformist vision meanwhile set up their own separate publication by the eve of World War I. Ebül'ula Mardin, the other owner of *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, established in 1912 the short-lived *Kelime-i Tayyibe*,[29] and later joined the editorial board of the much more important *İslam Mecmuası*. This

new periodical was edited by Halim Sabit Efendi and was supported financially by the CUP. It carried articles by influential intellectuals as well as by prominent ulema such as Sheikh ul-Islam Musa Kâzım Efendi and Şerafeddin [Yaltkaya], a future head of the religious administration under the republic. *İslam Mecmuası* interlaced its Islamic message with Pan-Turkist motifs, and its contributors advocated quite liberal reinterpretations of important Islamic traditions, practices, and institutions.[30]

Contributors to the two journals began sparring on a variety of topics shortly after their launch, with *Sebilürreşad* often criticizing *İslam Mecmuası*. The latter journal published various suggestions and opinions in favor of radical reforms and new interpretations on issues such as women's rights, nationalism, and Islamic sciences. One controversy, for instance, involved the question of polygamy in Islam. When a contributor to *İslam Mecmuası* argued that it is feasible and permissible to prohibit it, *Sebilürreşad* immediately carried a strong rebuttal.[31] The public debate between the two sides continued for weeks, with each periodical responding with counterarguments to views published in the other. Similar rebuttals and mutual criticisms followed several other calls for creative reinterpretation of Islamic practices and traditions by contributors to *İslam Mecmuası*. A particularly high-profile controversy followed the call for application of sociological methodologies to the study and interpretation of Islam. The agenda was set by Ziya Gökalp, the leading Turkist thinker of the day and a key Unionist ideologue by the eve of World War I. It was soon embraced by other contributors to *İslam Mecmuası*. Şerafeddin, for example, espoused the development of what he termed "social theology" (*İctimaî İlm-i Kelam*). Halim Sabit meanwhile followed Gökalp in advocating "social jurisprudence" (*İctimaî Usul-ı Fıkıh*). Their basic argument was that significant portions of Islamic jurisprudence and theology were man-made and not divine and therefore could be changed to meet the demands of the time.[32] *Sebilürreşad* hastened to reject the premises and necessity of such a project. İzmirli İsmail Hakkı led the way in arguing that Islamic jurisprudence and the study of theology ought to be updated but not reinterpreted on the basis of sociological methodologies.[33] Former allies in the reform-minded camp now found themselves on opposite sides of heated debates about the future of Islamic sciences and religious institutions in the Ottoman lands.

The fledgling rift within the reformist camp widened further during World War I as a result of disagreements on new policies adopted by the Unionist government. *İslam Mecmuası* dejected many ulema when from 1915 on it embraced calls for the redefinition and contraction of the authority of the Sheikh ul-Islam. Contributors to the journal endorsed the detachment of executive powers from the Sheikh ul-Islam and their

transfer to other government agencies. For instance, the journal's editor advocated placing the Islamic courts of law and the medreses under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education, respectively. He and other contributors to the journal argued that such changes would restore the genuine Islamic tradition of government. They explained that the Islamic law dictates that the issuing of legal opinions (*ifta*) and actual judgeship (*kaza*) should be performed by two separate agencies. They reasoned that the Sheikh ul-Islam should therefore forfeit his authority over the Islamic law courts and concentrate on his functions as issuer of authoritative legal opinions. In fact, contributors to *İslam Mecmuası* suggested that he should have no executive functions and authority at all. They argued that his jurisdiction should be centered only on the spiritual and piety-related needs of the people, as well as on setting general guidelines on legal questions.[34]

Some of these suggestions were officially endorsed by the CUP in 1916. The concluding statement of the party's annual congress of that year thus urged the detachment of judicial authority from the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam. Using similar phrases, the party's policy statement reiterated *İslam Mecmuası*'s argument that the Sharia opposes the concentration of the functions of issuing legal opinion and judgeship under one authority. The Sheikh ul-Islam was therefore to preside only over piety-related issues (*diyaniye*) and religious education. The statement explains that the new policy is informed by the desire to navigate a middle road between fanatic admirers of Europe on the one hand (read as advocates of separation between religion and state) and "medrese bigots" (*medrese mutaassıbları*) on the other (read as the supporters of a powerful religious establishment).[35] The resolution was adopted by the cabinet and the Unionist-controlled parliament and was subsequently implemented in early 1917. In the span of several months the Islamic courts were duly transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Islamic Endowments was removed from the authority of the Sheikh ul-Islam.

The new policies alienated even some of the most prominent ulema in the reformist circles. Sheikh ul-Islam Mustafa Hayri realized which way the wind was blowing and therefore resigned in May 1916. He came to office with a jurisdiction and mandate broader than his predecessors' and did not want to preside over the emasculation of the religious establishment. The man who had epitomized the reformist policies since 1914 did not want to be associated with policies that were suspected by many to be a covert effort to advance the secularization of the state and the marginalization of the ulema. He was replaced by the more compliant Musa Kâzım Efendi, who incidentally also served as a member of the

editorial board of *İslam Mecmuası*. He remained in office until the last weeks of World War I and oversaw the contraction of the jurisdiction of the religious establishment. After the war he claimed that he too opposed these policies but his misgivings were disregarded by the Unionist leadership.[36]

Sebilürreşad, in contrast, made its misgivings known. A series of articles written by İzmirli İsmail Hakkı endeavored to disprove the governments "Islamic" justifications for the changes in the religious establishment. The respected scholar contended at length that there is no difficulty in having the functions of judgeship and issuing legal opinions under the same roof, as had been the case in the Ottoman Empire since the early nineteenth century. In fact, he argued the opposite. His assertions thus went against the grain of a policy adopted by the CUP and endorsed by the Unionist-controlled wartime cabinet.[37] The government was unwilling to tolerate such dissent and ordered the indefinite suspension of *Sebilürreşad* in late 1916. Once considered a mainstay of the pro-Unionist reform-minded circles, the journal and its contributors were thus silenced until shortly before the end of World War I.[38]

The debates about the administrative jurisdiction and functions of the religious establishment were in essence not about Islamic or Ottoman traditions of government. It was no secret that the existing administrative framework of the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam was the result of bureaucratic reforms of the nineteenth century. This was particularly true in regard to the jurisdiction over the Sharia courts.[39] Nevertheless, because of severe limitations on freedom of speech and constraints of political expediency, the public features of the debate focused on the determination of genuine Islamic and Ottoman traditions and forms of government. Backers of the contraction of the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam thus argued in terms of "restoration" and "recuperation." Some of them were sincere in this respect, others probably less so. Many of their adversaries, meanwhile, including erstwhile allies from the days of *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, suspected that the reforms were in fact only one part of a broader clandestine secularist agenda of dominant factions in the CUP. *Sebilürreşad* made such accusations explicitly in late 1918, only a few weeks after the end of Unionist rule.[40]

The end of the war and the termination of CUP rule thus found the ulema divided more than ever before on the question of reforms in the religious establishment. There were those who had grave suspicions about the aims and ramifications of the reformist agenda in the first place. The developments of the previous years hardly changed the opposition of Mustafa Sabri and like-minded defensively inclined ulema to rapid and comprehensive change. If anything, they felt vindicated in

their reservations about the reformist agenda. They had suspected from the outset that an abrupt end to the status quo might create an opening for secularist and anti-Islamic policies. From their perspective, the CUP did just that, while using the reform-minded ulema as "useful idiots." They now hoped to reverse changes implemented by Unionist governments since 1913. On some issues, by the end of the Great War they found common cause with some of their less radical former reformist adversaries. Men associated with *Sebilürreşad* were unwilling to give up the cause of reform altogether, but they were inclined to cooperate with Mustafa Sabri and his supporters in an effort to undo some of the changes implemented during the war years. Moderate reformists indeed felt pressed to adopt more conservative positions in reaction to what they viewed as the excesses of their former allies in the reform-minded camp. Some of the moderates even adopted an outright "conservative" political identity. The more radical reformists meanwhile found themselves in a difficult position after the war. They became so completely associated with the CUP, and dependent on it, that the demise of the party translated into their immediate marginalization. Fittingly, *İslam Mecmuası* stopped publication in late October 1918, just as a cease-fire agreement between the Ottomans and the Allies was being finalized. By the war's end, the influence and reputation of the ulema who had been most associated with the reforms of the war years appeared shattered.

From the perspective of 1919, the prevalence of reform-minded ulema over their more conservative peers since the eve of World War I seemed a bitter victory indeed. Moderate reformists associated with *Sebilürreşad*'s editorial line believed that the cause of reform was maliciously abused by extremist factions in the CUP. They clearly felt they had been misled and manipulated. More radical reformists meanwhile faced relentless personal attacks on their role during the war years and were forced to witness helplessly the efforts of their conservative adversaries to turn back the changes of the previous years.[41]

THE DEBASEMENT OF *REFORM*

Reform, as both a term and an agenda, became very controversial by the end of World War I. In fact, once all but universally lauded, it acquired negative connotations in the view of many ulema and Islamic intellectuals. In the immediate wake of the Young Turk Revolution virtually all of the ulema endorsed calls for "reform" in the religious establishment. A decade of Unionist dominance later, the reformist agenda was suspected by many to be serving as a guise for pernicious revolutionary changes

in Islamic traditions and practices. Skeptics and opponents of "reform" were of course not necessarily opposed to changes in religious life and institutions as such. Their concern was that the agenda of "reform" might be perpetually manipulated by the powers that be as a means to mask steps toward the marginalization of the religious establishment and the implementation of secularist and perhaps antireligious policies. As a result, whereas pre–World War I debates within the religious establishment revolved around what kind of reforms should be implemented and at what pace, after the Great War it became a question of whether earlier reforms should be rolled back. Subsequently, although the agenda of religious reforms continued to be viewed positively by some ulema and Islamic intellectuals, it became completely discredited in the eyes of many others by the early 1920s. Yet the legacies and ramifications of the reforms of the previous years could not be easily disregarded or erased.

The contesting visions of reform and their results were particularly visible and hotly debated when it came to religious education in the Islamic colleges, the medreses. The flagship institutions of the religious establishment were the focus of heated controversies about alleged shortcomings of the ulema and the necessary means to address them, promote the positive rebranding of the religious establishment, and safeguard the long-term viability of religious life in the Ottoman lands. The fate of medrese education after the Young Turk Revolution was thus influenced by contrasting visions of reform within the religious establishment, and in turn helped shape changing perceptions of the "reform" agenda. In chapter Four we turn to a discussion of the remaking of medrese education after the Young Turk Revolution, the outcome of the comprehensive changes, and their long-term legacies under the republic.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Remaking and Unmaking of Religious Education

Assessments of medrese education have frequently been employed as a yardstick to measure the merits and shortcomings of the late Ottoman ulema. This was the case during the Ottoman period and has been the case in historical studies ever since. Severe criticisms and early calls for comprehensive curricular, pedagogical, and administrative reforms in medrese education were voiced in the 1860s. Yet, a few limited modifications notwithstanding, very few changes were introduced to medrese education during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.[1] This situation stood in stark contrast to massive expansion and occasional reforms in the new-style Ottoman school system, and to contemporaneous initiatives for reform in Islamic education in Egypt, India, and Russia. The Young Turk Revolution brought an abrupt end to the Hamidian status quo and opened new opportunities for meaningful changes in medrese education. There was broad agreement in the religious establishment that the curriculum, pedagogy, and administration of the medreses require modifications. The extent and pace of the needed changes, however, became a topic of heated controversy among both reform-minded and conservative ulema. An internal power struggle ensued, but by the eve of World War I the supporters of comprehensive, far-reaching reforms got the upper hand. The Ottomans were not the first to initiate comprehensive reforms in medrese education, but once the Unionist government undertook the task, by decree rather than by consensual consent, it went about implementing reforms with more vigor than in any other contemporary Muslim society.

The developments in the medreses of Istanbul after the Young Turk Revolution are worth exploring, for several reasons. For one thing, the debates on the form and content of religious education topped the list of

topics that divided the ulema ideologically and politically. Indeed, the ups and downs of the medrese reform project and its eventual materialization reflected changing power relations within the religious establishment between conservative and reform-minded ulema. For another thing, the comprehensive changes implemented in the late Ottoman medreses helped legitimize modern forms of religious education that served as a template for institutions of religious education under the republic.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS (1908–1912)

The situation of medrese education became an issue of public concern immediately following the Young Turk Revolution. Dozens of articles in the press, many written by ulema and Islamic intellectuals, took advantage of the end of the Hamidian censorship to urge government-led reforms. Commentators often emphasized in particular the urgency of integrating modern sciences into the curriculum. They voiced these demands both in the general press and in publications associated specifically with the ulema. For example, *Beyan'ül-Hak*, the mouthpiece of the newly established Ulema Association, took a leading role in raising public awareness of the topic in the early days of the new regime.[2] The journal published a reform program that was ratified in the 1870s but never implemented, and urged its readers to submit for publication their own proposals and thoughts on the subject. Most respondents were quite critical of the current state of affairs in the medreses and urged their fellow ulema to realize the opportunities of the new political circumstances and advocate government-led initiatives to modernize administrative, pedagogical, and curricular aspects of religious education.[3]

The priorities of the government were quite different, however, during the early months of the new regime. The primary concern of the first post-revolution cabinet was ending the sweeping exemption of medrese students from military service since the early 1890s. It passed a resolution along these lines in November 1908. The cabinet's decision was met with a wave of protests, led by medrese students and supported by many ulema. They organized public gatherings, participated in street demonstrations, and published letters and articles in the press, arguing that the new policy should be implemented only gradually. By early 1909, their street protests converged with the increasingly vocal opposition to the political influence of the CUP. Estimates are that there were more than ten thousand medrese students, easily distinguished by their clothes and headgear, in the capital at the time. The participation of many of them

in opposition activities was therefore very noticeable. This high visibility backfired after a short-lived anti-Unionist insurrection in Istanbul in April 1909, which many of the students indeed supported. Once the CUP reasserted its influence, by the end of the month, the authorities implemented harsh policies intended to put the medreses and their students under stricter control. Some students and professors were arrested and banished to the provinces while many more were drafted into the army. As a result, the number of students in the capital was halved, from more than ten thousand in 1908 to about five thousand by early 1910, with corresponding decreases in the provinces.[4]

The events of 1909 inflamed latent tensions within the religious establishment and between the Unionist leadership and conservative ulema. Some ulema and medrese students complained that in the aftermath of the failed insurrection they were subjected to occasional abuses and recurrent accusations of unpatriotic and reactionary inclinations. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that conservative ulema were suspicious of the Unionists and their intentions regarding the medreses.[5] Reform-minded supporters of comprehensive reforms, meanwhile, viewed the new political circumstances differently. With the CUP in fuller control by late 1909, the number of medrese students reduced, and the more conservative ulema on the defensive, new prospects for bold reforms appeared to be opening.[6]

Reports on events in Egypt during the same period appeared to underline the importance of disciplining the students as a prerequisite for comprehensive reforms. The question of reform of al-Azhar, the centuries-old flagship of Egyptian religious education, came to the fore in 1908. Some reforms had already been introduced to the mosque-school already in the late nineteenth century, but more ambitious and comprehensive ones were embraced only a few months before the Young Turk Revolution. These included extensive and elaborate curricular and administrative modifications. However, the implementation of the new program soon faced significant opposition from students and sympathetic ulema. The critics were not necessarily opposed to the content of the reform program, but they were adamant that its implementation should be only gradual, and that some long-standing traditions of al-Azhar should be maintained, including securing a central role in its administration for senior ulema. Their opposition was manifested in strikes, street demonstrations, and even full-scale riots at some junctures. As a result, the implementation of the reform program was impeded for almost three years, until a scaled-down reform was eventually negotiated, with the conservative ulema maintaining a central say in steering al-Azhar.[7]

In Istanbul, where emergency laws had been in place since the insurrection of April 1909, the government could initiate reforms without worrying about a similar backlash. Reform-minded ulema and Islamic intellectuals indeed relaunched their campaign for reforms in medrese education in Istanbul and beyond in late 1909. Their advocacy bore early fruits. In February 1910 the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam announced the initiation of a reform program in several medreses in Istanbul, which was soon approved by parliament and signed by the Sultan into law. Many of the forty-eight articles of the new legislation aimed at regularizing various administrative aspects of medrese education, such as the maintenance of order and discipline, admission and retention of students, and the appointment of faculty. The new law stipulated no radical break with the traditional pedagogy and courses of study. Instead, it sought to standardize the curriculum and regularize the requirements for graduation, and to augment the traditional courses with classes about nonreligious subjects. This was the major innovation. New courses included, for instance, instruction in chemistry, physics, zoology, geology, cosmography, geography, and arithmetic. They were to be taught by specialists, mostly not ulema, in designated classrooms and laboratories rather than in traditional study circles in the mosques or in medrese chambers.[8] The new reforms were envisioned as a pilot program to be tested first on a small scale before being extended to additional medreses in the capital and beyond.[9]

The new initiative was touted and hailed as heralding the end of a long period of stagnation and the beginning of an era of change in medrese education. Its inauguration was therefore celebrated with much pomp and fanfare in a public ceremony. The attendees included all the prominent officials of the religious establishment, as well as the Grand Vizier, the president of the senate, members of parliament, and many other dignitaries. Speeches given on the occasion described the initiative as the dawn of a new era of regeneration and renewal in religious education. Reports in the Ottoman press and in Islamic journals abroad, including in Egypt, lauded the government's commitment to helping to advance the medreses back to their former days of glory.[10] In reality, beyond setting a few important curricular and administrative precedents, the immediate effects of the reform program proved limited indeed. For one thing, the reforms remained limited to only some medreses in the capital and were not extended beyond them, which soon drew criticism.[11] For another thing, due to lack of funding and a high ratio of instructor turnover, students received either very poor instruction in nonreligious sciences or at times none at all. As a result, the reforms failed to live up to the high expectations they created.[12]

Supporters of more comprehensive reforms nevertheless found reason for optimism following the appointment of Musa Kâzım Efendi as Sheikh ul-Islam in July 1910. The new head of the religious establishment made no secret of his support for a major overhaul in religious education. He was also closely associated with the Unionist leadership, which suggested he might be able to mobilize the required political backing for a serious shake-up of medrese education. Early signs appeared promising. Shortly after his appointment he oversaw the abolition of free dining arrangements for medrese students and professors and their replacement with monthly stipends intended to cover the students' food and clothing expenses. The change was aimed at lowering costs and freeing funds for the ambitious goal of turning the medreses into full boarding schools, like the finest new-style state schools.[13] While these administrative changes were taking place, the new Sheikh ul-Islam also established a committee of experts to prepare detailed reform proposals for medrese education.[14]

The committee began its work in early 1911 during a period of increasing political tensions within the religious establishment. The new Sheikh ul-Islam and most of the reform-minded ulema were affiliated with the CUP. Their more conservative counterparts tended to support the opposition. This political divide was also evident when it came to the question of meaningful changes in medrese education. Reform-minded ulema and Islamic intellectuals advocated much more comprehensive and wide-ranging changes than those implemented in early 1910.[15] Conservative ulema, meanwhile, expressed reservations about the initiation of new reforms. They did not oppose in principle the introduction of changes. In fact, *Beyan'ül-Hak*, the organ of the conservative-leaning Ulema Association, welcomed the reform of early 1910 and even took pains to emphasize that it was initiated by the ulema themselves and not imposed by the cabinet.[16] Yet after the appointment of Musa Kâzım Efendi as Sheikh ul-Islam, some conservative ulema began expressing concern that under the guise of reforms he might introduce excessive changes that would prove more harmful than helpful. Their concern was that some of the advocates of reform were conspiring to dilute the weight of Islamic sciences in the curriculum in favor of modern sciences. Some opposition activists voiced even worse suspicions, according to which the government might have secret designs to drain the medreses of financial and human resources under the guise of reforms, thus precipitating their eventual closing down.[17] This level of distrust, coupled with the shaky political situation of the CUP in 1911, ended for the time being any prospect for immediate reform in the medreses. The CUP did add the goal of reforming medrese education to its party platform, and some press reports indicate that the subject was discussed by the cabinet. Nevertheless, by the time Musa Kâzım Efendi left office in late 1911 no practical steps toward the reorganization of religious education appeared to be in the offing.[18]

Yet the committee's work was not all for naught. Two of its members, Halim Sabit and Şevketi Efendi, prepared detailed proposals for the remaking of medrese education and published them in the press and as booklets. Halim Sabit, a frequent contributor to *Sırat-ı Müstakim* and later editor-in-chief of *İslam Mecmuası*, suggested that the medreses should be restructured to become a unified two-level system along the lines of the state schools. A lower branch would be geared toward junior positions in the religious establishment. Its students would study, in addition to Islamic sciences, courses on such topics as comparative religion, psychology, zoology, physiology, anatomy, astronomy, cosmography, and health education. Distinguished graduates would be admitted to the higher level of the new medrese system, which would serve as a graduate school and train experts in specific Islamic sciences. Graduates of this medrese would be admitted into career paths leading toward senior positions in the educational, judicial, and administrative branches of the religious establishment.[19] Şevketi Efendi, a rare example of a medrese professor who had also studied in new-style schools in Istanbul and Western Europe, suggested a very similar proposal. He put added emphasis, however, on the need to allay concerns that the current medrese professors might have. In an effort to ensure their support and cooperation, he thus included in his program stipulations that assured the professors a meaningful role in devising, implementing, and overseeing the reforms.[20] Both his and Halim Sabit's proposals shared some aspects with reform proposals that were being contemplated in Egypt at the time.[21] At any rate, in Istanbul they were the most detailed and comprehensive reform initiatives of that time. They helped elevate the public profile of the subject and served as a potential template for comprehensive changes in medrese education. The prolonged public discussion of the previous years helped galvanize support for the reform project both within and without the religious establishment. The actual implementation of reforms had to await more opportune political circumstances than the destabilizing internal crises and disastrous international wars in which the Ottoman Empire became entangled from late 1911 through early 1913.

THE REMAKING OF MEDRESE EDUCATION IN ISTANBUL (1913–1914)

The road to comprehensive reforms was finally opened only after the CUP established an authoritarian rule and quashed the opposition in January 1913. The future of the medreses became a topic of heated controversy in the months that followed the Unionist coup d'état. The CUP

retook the reins of power after a short period in the opposition, in the immediate wake of the disastrous First Balkan War. The Ottoman defeat and loss of extensive territories prompted national soul-searching and demands for radical and rapid reforms to prevent the complete collapse and disintegration of the empire. In this atmosphere of anxiety and urgency, the necessity of the medreses themselves was questioned publicly for the first time. Up until 1913, public debates revolved around what changes should be implemented in religious education. Thereafter, some pundits in the Ottoman press began questioning the medreses' right of existence in well-publicized articles and often in provocative style. On this backdrop of impatience with traditional institutions and increasingly hostile attitudes toward the medreses in the public arena, reform-minded ulema and Islamic intellectuals launched a new round in their campaign for a comprehensive overhaul of religious education.

Periodicals in Istanbul carried unprecedented harsh criticisms against the ulema in general and medrese education in particular in 1913. The most relentless attacks were published by the journal *İctihad*, a bastion of the Westernist stance in Ottoman public life. Without mincing words, contributors to the journal argued that the medreses were a major hindrance to progress but were not worth reforming. They openly envisioned a future in which "the existing medreses would be abolished" and replaced with educational institutions modeled on European schools of higher learning.[22] Similar views were disseminated at the time in a number of well-publicized books and pamphlets. They included such charges as that "the existing medreses should be completely abolished" because they turned into bastions of reaction and backwardness, and their elimination was thus the only way to turn their "good-for-nothing students" into useful individuals.[23] The tone, intensity, and consistency of these public attacks on the ulema and their institutions were unprecedented. One of *İctihad*'s main contributors even famously issued on its pages what he termed "a declaration of war against the pseudo-students of the medreses."[24] The office of the Sheikh ul-Islam submitted frequent complaints about *İctihad* and like-minded publications to the Ministry of the Interior. These publications were indeed suspended temporarily at times, but the depth of the hostility they now faced unnerved many ulema nevertheless.[25]

These vicious attacks took place on the backdrop of high-profile debates in the press on reforms in Ottoman education in general and on the medreses in particular. In this context, intellectuals associated with Turkist nationalist inclinations advocated the establishment of a uniform system of state schools for all citizens of the empire, or at least for all the Muslim students. Such a move toward unification of education in

the empire would have had to address the place of the medreses within such an ambitious scheme. The possible ramifications were not encouraging for most ulema. An article published in *Sebilürreşad* in early 1914 in fact suggested that "the medreses should not be reformed but instead be merged with the [state] schools, sharing the same administration and curriculum."[26]

Ulema of all political and ideological inclinations were rattled by such proposals and by the harsh public attacks on the religious establishment and the medreses. Many of them assumed, not inaccurately, that the acrimony and disrespect they and their institutions faced in the press were shared by many within the Unionist-dominated political and intellectual elite of the day. The ulema could not agree, however, on what should be done to keep their critics at bay and ensure the long-term viability of the religious establishment in general and the medreses in particular. Conservative ulema continued to contend that any changes in medrese education ought to be gradual and piecemeal, and assure the professors a major say in decision making, rather than be immediate, comprehensive, and dictated by the government. One medrese professor explained that he was concerned with the implementation of hastily introduced reforms that would be too radical a break with existing traditions and eventually prove harmful rather than beneficial.[27] Another explained that the pace of change should be slow because "religious learning always progresses gradually, in accordance with the principles of evolution."[28] Yet another conservative commentator went even further, arguing that "most of the changes [should] be left for future generations."[29] Although such defensively inclined positions were not exceptional among the ulema, they were definitely not consensual either.

The reform-minded camp in fact increasingly lost patience with the conservatives' standpoint. Supporters of dramatic reforms in religious education argued that slow and gradual changes would amount to "too little, too late" and might doom the medreses all together. They even accused their conservative peers of indirectly strengthening the hand of the enemies of religion and the ulema because their opposition to comprehensive reforms appeared to justify the stigma of backwardness and obscurantism attached to the religious establishment.[30] As a new stalemate appeared to set in, they therefore resolved to increase the pressure for reforms by opening the pages of reform-minded periodicals to new actors who had been all but completely silenced since 1909: the medrese students.

In the face of unprecedented attacks on medrese education, many students became convinced by 1913 of the need for a major overhaul of religious education. They embraced the argument that the maintenance

of the status quo was harmful for the long-term interests of the empire in general and their own prospects of employment and public respect in particular. That their concerns were serious became clear enough in their publications and activism in 1913. To the shock of many ulema, they unleashed unprecedented verbal assaults against their professors that were both generalizing and unrelenting. Their determination and level of confidence, or perhaps desperation, are attested to by the fact that many of them published their criticism under their real names and institutional affiliations. A petition that was signed by more than two hundred students and published in *Sebilürreşad* in May 1913 set the tone for the pro-reform student protest movement. The petitioners emphasized that the younger generation desired reforms. However, because of the indefensible opposition of their professors, the students were also being portrayed in the Ottoman press as backward and reactionary. The petitioners urged their professors "to abandon their defective practices" and accept the necessity of comprehensive and rapid changes. They cautioned the professors that their persisting opposition to the regeneration of the medreses was harmful and untenable, and should be abandoned immediately.[31]

The students' petition was followed by a wave of like-minded articles and letters to the editor. In them, students criticized everything from their professors' deficient mentality to their inadequate academic credentials. In one particular case, a student criticized the professors' insistence on basing their scholarship and teaching only on traditional Islamic sciences. He found such practices mind-boggling because it was inconceivable to attempt to understand present issues "in light of a millennium-old philosophy, or centuries-old logic and dogmas."[32] Another student went even farther, charging that the professors were "consciously digging our grave of annihilation with their own hands." He therefore reasoned that their opposition to reforms should be simply ignored.[33] Such harsh language and conclusions were not exceptional in the students' letter campaign. Thus another student, who signed his article with his full name and affiliation, urged his peers "to display our discontent collectively, in order to abolish the medieval methods of our professors." He warned his fellow students that if they would not mobilize for action, "our laziness and inertia might result in the general destruction of religious education."[34]

The harshness of the criticism and the generational cleavages it appeared to expose were disquieting for many medrese professors. Even some supporters of comprehensive reforms urged the students to tone down their criticism and use a more moderate language. At the same time, some of the professors expressed understanding for the students' sentiments and feelings of frustration with the status quo.[35] Indeed,

even as many conservative professors maintained their opposition to radical changes in medrese education, dozens of their reform-minded peers in Istanbul made public their support for wide-ranging administrative and pedagogical changes in religious education.[36] Their public stance was crucial for the creation of a new momentum toward reforms in the medreses. Along with the pro-reform students, they proved that within the Islamic circles there was significant support for change. Their backing helped legitimize the intervention of the government and the initiation of state-led reforms in disregard of the misgivings of many conservative ulema. Reform-minded ulema and students hoped that their enthusiastic campaign for comprehensive change would not only expedite their materialization but would also help exonerate the religious establishment from charges of lethargy and obscurantism.

Their expectations soon received a major boost following a dramatic change at the helm of the religious establishment in March 1914. The new Sheikh ul-Islam, Mustafa Hayri Efendi, was appointed with a clear mandate to initiate significant changes in religious institutions in general and in the medreses in particular.[37] His recent record was also very encouraging. In 1913, while serving as Minister of Islamic Endowments, he initiated the establishment of two new vocational medreses for mosque functionaries. One of the new institutions was devoted to the training of preachers (*Medreset'ül-Vaizin*) and the other to imams and orators (*Medresetü'l-Eimme ve'l-Hutaba*). The new institutions had detailed and regularized curricula and an institutionally centralized administration. Furthermore, their program of study included, besides Islamic sciences, a substantial number of courses in humanistic subjects, exact and natural sciences, and even gymnastics.[38] In February 1914, shortly before Mustafa Hayri's appointment as Sheikh ul-Islam, the authorities announced the founding of the Medrese for Experts (*Medreset'ül-Mütehassısin*), envisioned as an institution of higher learning. Its students, all graduates of regular medreses, were to specialize in specific Islamic sciences and become the next generation of senior religious scholars. The reform-minded camp welcomed the new institution but expected the new Sheikh ul-Islam to implement similar changes on a grander scale in all the medreses of the capital, and beyond.[39]

After years of debates and delays, it indeed took Mustafa Hayri less than six months to prepare a comprehensive reform program and pass it through the legislative process. The backing of his Unionist allies in government was of course instrumental to his success. On October 1, 1914, Sultan Mehmed Reşad signed the "Reform of the Medreses" bill into law, after it had already been approved by the cabinet and in parliament. The ambitious reform program centralized, regularized, and in effect

nationalized medrese education in Istanbul. A process that had begun in the nineteenth century with a gradual tightening of the Sheikh ul-Islam's oversight over the medreses thus culminated in handing his office complete authority over their curriculum, pedagogy, and administration. The reform program was sanctioned by the state, of course, and thus also reflected the increasing readiness of the government to intervene in the affairs of the medreses through the agency of the Sheikh ul-Islam.

The reform program stipulated the reorganization of all the medreses in the capital into a unified three-tiered system named the Abode of the Caliphate (*Dâr'ül-Hilafet'il-Aliyye Medresesi*). The new system was modeled on the state school system, which was divided into primary and secondary schools, higher schools of learning, and a university at the top. The names of each of the new branches of the reformed system were descriptive and bureaucratic, without any allusion to the traditional medreses of the capital. The entry level of the reformed system was named the Secondary Medrese (*Medrese-i Tâliye*), because its students were to be graduates of primary schools. The Secondary Medrese included an eight-year program of study, divided into two branches. The next level, christened the Advanced Medrese (*Medrese-i Âliye*), included a four-year program aimed at training students for entry-level careers in the religious establishment. In other words, this level was perceived as a vocational school with a focused mission. Its graduates were to earn an institutional diploma (*icazetname*) rather than the traditional personal certificate from individual professors, and they were to be eligible for employment in various religious functions. The best of them could also enroll in the Medrese for Experts the highest level of the new system. Graduates of this two-year institution were ensured teaching positions in the medreses and the prospect of becoming the future leadership of the religious establishment.[40]

The curricula of the reconstructed medreses were very different than those in the pre-reform period. They included many courses on nonreligious subjects, mostly based on the program of the state schools. In addition to Islamic sciences, medrese students were to study such subjects as sociology, philosophy, mathematics, hygienic practices, and European languages. Most of the courses of course still dealt with subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic commentary, and theology. These topics were taught by ulema. Many other courses, however, particularly those in exact and natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology, or in social and humanistic sciences such as history and philosophy, were almost exclusively taught by graduates of teacher seminaries or the university rather than by ulema. Some of these instructors were among the most prominent intellectuals of the day. A faculty list published in

1914 includes, for instance, the Turkist activist Ahmed Agayef [Ağaoğlu] (history), the Unionist ideologue Ziya Bey [Gökalp] (sociology), and the Islamic intellectual İzmirli İsmail Hakkı (history of Islamic philosophy).[41] The new faculty and the standardization and expansion of the curricula of the reformed medreses were part of a conscious effort of the Sheikh ul-Islam to refashion religious education similar to the state school system. In this way he hoped to remodel the medreses into modern institutions of learning and shore up their problematic image among the Ottoman elites.[42]

The rejuvenation of the medreses was to be expressed in their physical environment as well. Traditionally, medrese students learned in study circles in corners of mosques or in designated chambers, study halls, and courtyards in the medreses. In the reformed system they were to sit on chairs behind desks set in rows in designated classrooms, just like their peers in the state schools. Their instructors were expected to lecture from behind a podium, like in the modern schools. The long-term plan was to gradually replace the old medrese structures with modern buildings. In the short term, however, classes were to be held in renovated rooms of existing medreses. An extensive survey was thus held in 1914 to determine the physical and health conditions of all existing structures. The most suitable ones were renovated and designated as classrooms for the reformed system.[43] The Medrese for Experts, the crown jewel of the new system, was the exception. A decision was made to house the flagship of the reformed medreses in a new structure built from scratch specifically for this purpose. The building was intended to reflect the modernist vision of the new form of religious education. Its design was therefore entrusted to Kemaleddin Bey, a prominent architect with strong Turkist inclinations. In studies on the period he is usually associated with an architectural style known as Ottoman revivalism,[44] but in the new building he used hardly any "traditional" motifs associated with the medreses of old. The structure, built near the Yavuz Sultan Selim Mosque, is an imposing two-story building, U-shaped, with a high red-tiled roof. It did not borrow motifs such as the domed roofs and rectangular plan associated with the imperial medreses of Istanbul. Instead, it resembles the structures of state schools built around the same period.[45] Indeed, the new building was intended to project an image of renewal and change linked to the new schools rather than to the traditional medreses.

Reform-minded ulema were thrilled with all these changes, but many of their peers did not share this enthusiasm. The effective nationalization of the medreses meant that the future of religious education was now under the purview of a Unionist government that was suspected by many critics of covert secularist and perhaps even antireligious inclinations. In the six years since the revolution, many within and without the religious establishment came to view the Unionist leadership as hostile toward religion in general and Islamic institutions in particular. Therefore, whereas some ulema opposed the reforms because they still believed in the merits of traditional medrese education, or because they preferred less radical and abrupt changes, others were even more concerned that the government might be plotting a stage-by-stage plan to diminish religious education under the guise of reforms. Once a precedent of complete overhaul of medrese education was set, there was good reason to believe that the government might not hesitate to introduce other changes if it would deem them necessary, regardless of whether the majority of ulema liked them or not.

The reform of 1914 had already set alarm bells ringing, at least in some circles of the religious establishment, because it set caps on the number of medrese students. According to the new legislation, the Secondary Medrese was to enroll no more than 2,080 students and the Advanced Medrese no more than 800.[46] Even after adding the few dozen students projected to study in the Medrese for Experts, the new cap meant a 40 percent decrease in the student body compared to estimations of the number of medrese students in 1910. Reform-minded ulema viewed the reduced number of students as a price worth paying, whereas their more conservative peers feared it was a sign of things to come.

Critics of the reform program censured its supporters for their careless surrender of any measure of autonomy still enjoyed by the institutions of religious education. They argued that the existing arrangements were recklessly dismantled and replaced with an unproven and little-considered system, without any guarantees being given against malicious government intervention in the future. Such views were soon silenced by the authorities. Indeed, when one particularly harsh critic published an acerbic pamphlet that he entitled "Elegy to the Medreses" (*mersiye-i medaris*), he was immediately arrested, prosecuted in a court-martial on sedition charges, and sentenced to a one-year prison term.[47] Furthermore, beyond the threat of legal action, public opposition to the reforms meant risking the loss of one's employment and primary source of livelihood. Dozens of ulema who were considered politically unreliable or critical of the reforms were indeed kept out of the new system. Their reform-minded peers were meanwhile awarded senior administrative and teaching positions in the reorganized medreses.[48]

The reform program of 1914 thus reemphasized and widened the divisions within the religious establishment. The remaking of medrese education was supported by many ulema and students. Indeed, the reforms came on the heels of a prolonged public campaign in which they

played a pivotal role. These activists certainly did not view the comprehensive changes implemented in 1914 as a Unionist hostile imposition. They had great hopes that the reorganization of the medreses of Istanbul signaled the first dramatic step toward the revitalization of religious education throughout the empire. They expected that the conservative critics of the reforms would be proven wrong and eventually accept the new system as a positive move toward the regeneration of the religious establishment as a whole.[49] Little did any side of the debate know that the clouds of war that were gathering over Europe in late 1914 were soon to engulf the Ottoman Empire and have unexpectedly dramatic effects on the project of reform in religious education.

TRYING TIMES: TRIBULATIONS, DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND INNOVATIONS (1914–1918)

The Ottoman Empire was already at war when the first school year of the reformed medreses opened on November 19, 1914 (Muharram 1, 1333 AH). Less than a week before classes had begun, Sheikh ul-Islam Mustafa Hayri Efendi and all other prominent officials of the religious establishment signed their approval on a declaration of jihad against the Allied Powers.[50] The success of the reformed medreses was thereafter pushed down to near the bottom of the government's list of priorities. The survival of the empire was at stake and the war effort took precedent. In these circumstances, even the leadership of the religious establishment concentrated on helping mobilize support for the embattled empire and found little time to celebrate the implementation of the reforms. This time around, unlike in 1910, no high-profile ceremonies were organized to mark the occasion. This inauspicious beginning anticipated the challenges and travails the new system was to face during the long war years.

The government displayed very few inhibitions about draining the medreses of human and material resources and channeling them toward the war effort. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, many prospective and active students were drafted into the military, while many professors, ulema and non-ulema alike, were either mobilized to serve in various positions in the armed forces or reassigned to other teaching positions.[51] The Sheikh ul-Islam requested that the students be exempted from service in order to allow them to concentrate on their studies, but his appeal was rejected on the grounds that the national interest required their mobilization.[52] The massive recruitment of students, along with the increasing difficulty of traveling to Istanbul, resulted in a dramatic decline in enrollment and attendance figures. The number of students in the reformed system fell drastically from the caps set in the reform legislation of 1914. In the Advanced Medrese, for example, the legislation stipulated a cap of 800 students. In reality, only 178 were able to enroll for classes, and out of these only 38 were actually able to stick around long enough to take the mandatory end-of-the-year examinations. These tests were required in order to advance to the next stage in their education. A similar decline in numbers was also evident in other branches of the reformed system. All in all, the number of enrolled students during the long war years plunged to about a third of the figures projected in the reform legislation of 1914. Meanwhile, plans for renovation of medrese structures were halted even as many of the existing buildings were requisitioned by the government to house soldiers and civilian refugees.[53]

The difficulties of the war years created an atmosphere of gloom in the medreses and deep disappointment with the results of the reforms. Ulema who had opposed them in the first place became even more convinced that their initial concerns and suspicions were vindicated. But even many of those who had supported the remaking of medrese education felt disillusioned with the outcomes. The concerns with the direction of religious education increased further after the resignation of Sheikh ul-Islam Mustafa Hayri Efendi in May 1915. As discussed in Chapter Three, the architect of the reforms left office because of disagreements between him and the Unionist leadership on the contraction of the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam. His departure intensified the malaise that had affected many ulema since the beginning of the Great War. Very few of them were pleased with the results of the reforms of 1914. The impression of many more was that the study of Islamic sciences and the Arabic language in fact had regressed rather than improved since the reforms, even as the new nonreligious courses were taught unsuccessfully by unqualified teachers.[54]

Musa Kâzım Efendi, who was reappointed as Sheikh ul-Islam in May 1916, sought to assuage these misgivings. In an effort to reassure the ulema of the government's continued commitment to religious education and to the interests of the religious establishment, in early 1917 he initiated amendments to the reform program. This was a limited overhaul, not a fundamental change of the reforms of 1914. Nevertheless, the new legislation that ushered in the amendments did include a few notable modifications. Among them were the assurance of greater input by the medrese professors in hirings and firings, and a reemphasis of precedence given to ulema over other teachers in appointments to administrative and teaching positions. Another important new step was the expansion of the reformed system to all the major urban centers in Anatolia and Eastern

Thrace, including Bursa, Edirne, Konya, and sixteen other provincial centers. On a more symbolic level, the formerly nondescript names of the branches of the reformed medrese system were scrapped and replaced with traditional titles that had been associated with medrese education since at least the sixteenth century. The two levels of the Secondary Medrese were thus renamed *İbtida-ı Haric* and *İbtida-ı Dahil*, respectively; the Advanced Medrese was renamed *Sahn*; and the Medrese for Experts was officially renamed the Süleymaniye Medrese, despite its location in a different neighborhood than the famous mosque.[55]

Critics of the reformed system found very little consolation in these limited changes. For one thing, they had no confidence, to begin with, in the Unionist ulema who stood behind the legislation. For another thing, the new reform program did not address what many perceived to be the most crucial problem: the dramatic decline in the number of students. In fact, the cap on the number of students in Istanbul was lowered even further by the new legislation, from 2,880 in 1914 to only 1,350 in 1917. Moreover, the length of the program of study in each level of the system was shortened from four to three years, or overall from twelve to nine years. These changes appeared alarming enough to generate some mild criticism even in the Unionist-controlled parliament. Yet, when asked about the dramatic decline in the number of students, a senior representative of the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam replied that before the reforms of 1914, about 90 percent of the students were draft dodgers anyhow, and that now only the truly committed ones were enrolled. This astonishing answer did not satisfy either the critics among the ulema or the skeptics in parliament. All the latter managed to achieve, however, was the addition of a clause that allowed for a reassessment of the enrollment cap once the economic and political circumstances of the empire improved after the end of the war.[56]

For the vast majority of ulema the reform legislation of 1917 did not appear particularly inspiring or encouraging. The decrease in the cap on the number of students only stoked the fire of resentment among critics of the reformed system. They were also far from being impressed by the other stipulations of the program. Many reform-minded ulema meanwhile perceived the new legislation as somewhat of a setback. The symbolic reemphasis of the reformed medreses' inheritance of the traditional medreses dealt a blow to their hopes to distance the reorganized system from the negative reputation of the pre-1914 institutions. Likewise, the cutting back on the employment of non-ulema teachers and the decrease in the number of nonreligious courses undermined the earlier intention to broaden the curricular similarities between the state schools and the medreses. All in all, the reform program of 1917 failed to clear the air of

negativity and sense of failure that increasingly hung over the medreses by the end of the Great War.[57]

This malaise colored most assessments of the reformed system, which in turn tended to overlook some of the constructive effects of the changes in religious education. There were quite a few. One of the most important aspects of the new institutional setting was that it allowed medrese professors to experiment with new scholarly interests. Rather than teaching and commenting on centuries-old compilations, they could now shape their own course material and textbooks. Some of them indeed took the opportunity to do just that. Esad Efendi, for example, taught courses on comparative religion. In his lectures he included recent European scholarship and presented it, or at times reinterpreted it, so as to conform to Islamic perceptions and sensibilities. His lecture notes were eventually collected and published as a textbook.[58] Medrese professors simply did not teach such topics or publish similar books before the reform. The new institutional setting encouraged them to experiment with new forms of scholarship and expose their students to them in the classrooms of the medreses.

The legitimacy accorded to new directions in religious scholarship found expression in the works of some of the most influential ulema of the time. The teaching interests and publications of Muhammed Hamdi Efendi [Yazır] are perhaps the most instructive example of this trend. During the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution, this well-respected religious scholar was associated with the conservative line of *Beyan'ül-Hak* and the Ulema Association. However, by the eve of World War I he had become convinced that religious scholars should engage with European philosophy and thought in order to maintain the viability of the Islamic sciences. Other ulema who had reached the same conclusion often contented themselves with reading translations of European works. Hamdi Efendi was determined to gain direct access to European sources by studying French. He thus became the rare example of an Ottoman religious scholar who had never attended a state school or traveled abroad and still had a working knowledge of a European language. He read, translated, and taught works of European philosophy in his classes in the reformed medrese, and later published a few of his translations for the benefit of the general public. His translations included books about logic by Alexander Bain and Stuart Mill, and a history of philosophy by Paul Janet and Gabriel Séailles.[59] Hamdi Efendi remained a prominent figure among the scholars of Islam in Turkey. He went on to publish in the 1930s a very influential exegesis of the Qur'an in Turkish.[60] Thanks to the reformed medrese, he could take advantage of an institutional setting that encouraged academic experimentation

and innovation and helped legitimize new directions in religious studies in the eyes of the next generation of Islamic scholars in Turkey.

The reform of the medreses was certainly not a resounding success but neither was it a fiasco without any long-term significance, as has sometimes been concluded.[61] It is true that by the end of World War I even enthusiastic supporters of the reforms of 1914 were disappointed with their outcomes. Nevertheless, most of them still believed that the reforms were justified and necessary. Indeed, many ulema and medrese students remained convinced that the traditional modes of religious education had run their course. They felt that the reforms in the medreses should have been managed better and with greater support from the government, but they did not retreat from their commitment to the reformed system. This commitment was put to the test soon after the end of Unionist rule in late 1918.

The end of World War I opened a new period of political instability and uncertainty about the future of the empire in general and religious education in particular. With the termination of Unionist rule, the future of the medreses now hung in the balance. Conservative critics could now voice their displeasure with the reforms and seek their undoing. Some nationalists, meanwhile, eventually became convinced that the medreses should be abolished altogether and replaced by a more progressive national system of religious education. In these circumstances, and as an air of gloom and uncertainty was descending upon Istanbul in the aftermath of the Great War, supporters of the reformed system found themselves in a bind. As the debates and struggles over the fate of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were heating up in the wake of the armistice of October 1918, the future of religious education in Turkey in general and the destiny of the reformed medreses in particular were increasingly on the line.

ADRIFT IN UNCERTAIN WATERS (1919–1924)

The first salvo in the battle over the future of religious education was fired by conservative medrese professors in January 1919. Only weeks after the end of the authoritarian Unionist rule, dozens of ulema in Istanbul opened a campaign for the undoing of the reforms of the previous years. The tone of the movement was set in a series of articles in the press. Using such titles as "How the CUP Destroyed the Medreses," critics of the reformed system described the changes since 1914 as maliciously destructive, and hailed the traditional medreses as superior to the new ones.[62] A petition signed by dozens of medrese professors and addressed to the Sheikh ul-Islam therefore demanded "the restoration of the old principles of learning, which had proven themselves for 1,300 years as suitable for producing the necessary number of competent ulema." They also requested the exemption of medrese professors and their students from military service, as was the practice prior to World War I, and insisted that any future reforms should not be contemplated until after the existing system was dismantled and the pre-1914 system restored.[63]

Reform-minded ulema and medrese students were aghast. They responded angrily to these sentiments and demands with a storm of protests in the press. For the most part, they were readily willing to concede that the reformed system had many defects and that Unionist governments had mishandled the medreses. At the same time, they rejected out of hand any suggestion that the pre-1914 arrangements were preferable. In fact, they accused the petitioners of unreasonably longing for a completely dysfunctional system that had been medieval and backward and was thus unsuitable for the modern period. Some pundits even opined that the problems in the medreses stemmed from the fact that the reforms of 1914 were not radical enough in breaking away from the pedagogy and program of study of the traditional medreses. Reform-minded ulema and students therefore argued that rather than contemplating any thought of unmaking the reformed system, the powers that be should concentrate instead on fixing specific problems in the administration and curricula of the medreses.[64] They had good reason to be concerned, however, that this might not be the case and that their conservative peers might have their way.

The power relations within the religious establishment in Istanbul had changed dramatically in early 1919. In March, Mustafa Sabri Efendi was appointed Sheikh ul-Islam, ushering in a period of conservative control at the helm of the religious establishment. A few days after his appointment, Mustafa Hayri Efendi and Musa Kâzım Efendi, the architects of the reforms of 1914 and 1917, respectively, were arrested and put on trial for their cooperation with the Unionist leadership. The new Sheikh ul-Islam did not hide his disdain for his two predecessors, nor his grave misgivings about the reformed system. In a book written before his appointment but published in 1919, he opined that "the new method did not produce ulema who were as competent as the products of the older [system], despite the inclusion of most of the courses of the state schools in the program of the reorganized medrese in Istanbul." He believed that the new system in fact led to deterioration in the study of the Arabic language and the Islamic sciences.[65] This was not the only bad omen for the reformed system. Another indication of Mustafa Sabri's inclination to erase the effects of a decade of Unionist domination was his leading role in the establishment of a new conservative-leaning association of

medrese professors in early 1919. He served as the first president of the new association, assisted by several other ulema who before the Balkan Wars had cooperated with him in the Ulema Association and in its mouthpiece, *Beyan'ül-Hak*.[66] These developments did not bode well for the reformed system.

The prospect of restoration of the traditional medreses was disconcerting to many medrese students in Istanbul. They resolved to make their voices heard in opposition to calls for the unmaking of the reformed system, in a way reminiscent of the students' pro-reform campaign in 1913. In early 1919, they established the Medrese Student Association (*Talebe-i Ulum Cemiyeti*).[67] In a position paper published in the press, the student association endorsed the preservation of the central parameters of the existing system, including the teaching of modern sciences and European languages. Correspondingly, the students rejected any idea of the resurrection of the traditional system.[68]Letters penned by individual students and published in the press were much blunter. In one particularly poignant piece, a student cautioned his peers that "what is presently at stake is the fate of the medreses for life or death." He explained that there were only two options: "either reform of the current conditions, or return to the situation of six years ago [that is, pre-1914]; in other words: either deliverance or bankruptcy. Unfortunately," he cautioned, "the second view has its supporters, and they are not few." Echoing radical critics of the religious establishment, he denounced these conservative ulema as following the lead of Christian priests in seeking to resurrect harmful methods of scholasticism (*iskolastik*). He concluded that "such reactionary views should be defeated."[69] Recent graduates of the reformed system were meanwhile concerned that the bashing of the new medreses threatened their employment prospects in the religious establishment or other agencies of the state.[70]

The stiff opposition of reform-minded ulema and students, coupled with changes in the political climate, eventually blocked the initiative to restore the traditional medreses. The conservatives could neither achieve consensus for restoration nor master sufficient political power to coerce the unmaking of the reformed system. The whole episode demonstrated quite clearly that by the end of World War I the reputation of traditional medrese education was already tarnished beyond repair in the eyes of many ulema and students in Istanbul. Meanwhile, Mustafa Sabri Efendi and the supporters of restoration could not maintain the political momentum they had seemed to gain in early 1919. The heating up of the struggle over Anatolia and Eastern Thrace from the second half of 1919 and the political crises it prompted in Istanbul preoccupied them with more pressing political issues than medrese education.

Yet all was not good in the medreses of Istanbul as internal tensions within the religious establishment continued to brew. The conservatives may have been unable to do away with the reformed system but they invested effort in changing its outlook. When Mustafa Sabri served as Sheikh ul-Islam in 1919 and again in 1920, he diluted the study of non-Islamic topics and purged professors he suspected of ideological or political dissent. Many of his own appointees were in turn sacked when he was twice forced out of office.[71] Medrese students in Istanbul continued to study a curriculum that included European languages and such diverse topics as chemistry, physics, philosophy, Turkish literature, and health education, in line with the reforms of 1914.[72] But the constant bickering and administrative instability intensified doubts and led to demoralization among faculty and students alike. At times internal controversies arose around seemingly petty disagreements. In one case, for instance, a number of students were suspended for taking a group photo. Their conservative professor argued that the laws of Islam forbade taking photos of humans. The ensuing controversy reflected the continuing ideological and generational cleavages within the religious establishment, and aggravated the already existing tensions between ultraconservative ulema and their reform-minded peers.[73]

The uncertainty and unstable political circumstances of the time translated into persistent low enrollment figures in the medreses of Istanbul. The numbers remained low even after the end of World War I and the termination of Unionist rule. Economic hardships, social dislocations, and the political instability of the period, along with uncertainty about the value of medrese education and the employment prospects of medrese students, all contributed to the problem. In the Advanced Medrese, for instance, the size of the entering class fluctuated between nineteen and forty-six students between 1919 and 1923.[74] All in all, estimates of the overall number of students in all medrese levels in Istanbul in early 1924 ranged anywhere between seven hundred and a thousand.[75] These were embarrassingly low figures even compared to the early days of the reformed medreses, let alone to the pre-reform years or the Hamidian period. Low enrollment figures rendered the medreses more vulnerable than before to interventionist government policies.

The new government-in-the-making in Ankara initially endorsed the reformed model of religious education. The formation of the Grand National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*) in April 1920 was followed shortly by the establishment of a Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Religious Endowments (*Şer'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*). The new ministry served as a de facto alternative to the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam and was

staffed primarily by reformed-minded ulema. Not surprisingly, they embraced the reformed medreses of Istanbul as a model for religious education. These were war times, however. It was quite clear that financial constraints and lack of qualified instructors stood in the way of instituting such a system on a large scale.[76] In the interim, the ministry opted for more limited reforms in rural medreses. In May 1921, the Grand National Assembly passed legislation aimed at the establishment of a diluted version of the reformed system in the smaller towns of Anatolia. The curriculum of these revamped medreses, labeled *Medaris-i İlmiye*, was to include a few new courses, but the most significant change was in the regularization of their administration and the institution of tighter government supervisory control over them. The new reform in fact constituted another step toward the complete nationalization of religious education in the land.[77] For the time being it appeared that the nationalist government that came to control all parts of new Turkey by late 1922 had embraced the cause of the reformed medrese system. Ulema and Islamic intellectuals who supported the nationalist movement could take heart in praiseful remarks about the reformed medreses made by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] and other senior political leaders in 1922.[78]

The intentions of the Ankara government regarding the reformed medreses became less clear after the establishment of the republic in 1923. Declarations made by Mustafa Kemal and other government officials now appeared to indicate intentions to reorganize religious education under the authority of the Ministry of Education. The fate of the medreses in such an institutional arrangement was unclear. Some concerned ulema and medrese students feared it might spell the end of medrese education.[79] The government issued tepid denials in late 1923, but persistent rumors continued to circulate in Ankara and Istanbul through early 1924.[80] The whispering appeared credible enough to prompt the medrese students of Istanbul to come yet again to the defense of the reformed system. The Medrese Student Association thus published a note of protest against any intention to abolish the medreses or any single branch of them, and sent student delegations to Ankara to lobby officials and lawmakers in the fledgling republic's capital.[81] This time, however, their public campaign was to no avail. After long months of uncertainty and suspense, the government finally made a decisive move that spelled the end of medrese education.

In early March 1924, the republic took a number of dramatic steps to distance itself from the Ottoman state. Among the most important of them were the abolition of the Caliphate, the exile of all remaining members of the Ottoman dynasty, and the downgrading of the religious

administration from a ministerial level to an administrative department under the authority of the prime minister. The latter decision entailed the long-rumored transfer of jurisdiction over the medreses to the Ministry of Education. The bureaucratic reorganization was justified in terms of the necessity of "unification of education" under one national authority. For a short while the public was made to believe that the medreses would continue to operate under the new arrangement. After a few days, however, the Minister of Education made public his decision to close down the medreses altogether because of their allegedly incurable backwardness and many other deficiencies. He promised that in their stead the government would establish vocational Imam-Hatip schools for the training of imams and other mosque functionaries, and a Faculty of Theology (*İlahiyat Fakültesi*) under the auspices of Istanbul University (*Darülfünun*) for the education of religious scholars. This momentous decision was of course made with the full backing of Mustafa Kemal and other top republican leaders. Subsequently, the medreses of the capital closed their doors for the last time on March 15, 1924, without any guarantees being given to the professors about their future employment.[82] A centuries-long tradition of learning was symbolically eliminated while in reality a merely decade-old reformed system came to an abrupt end after years of great expectations, some achievements, and many struggles, frustrations, and dashed hopes.

LEGACIES OF THE REFORMED MEDRESE SYSTEM

The closing down of the medreses has remained a divisive topic in post-1924 Turkey. Pro-government commentators at the time often argued, as have Kemalist observers and sympathetic scholars ever since, that the abolition of medrese education was nothing more than an inescapable coup de grâce to a long-declining and irreparable system that was led by antireformist and reactionary ulema.[83] This narrative and efforts to obliterate the memory of the reformed system commenced immediately following the abolition of the medreses. Articles published in the pro-government press in 1924 already portrayed them as unfixable bastions of ignorance and reaction that had fossilized since the Middle Ages. Their closing down was presented as an unavoidable step toward the advancement of national unity and enlightenment in Turkey.[84] This narrative was perpetuated in the decades that followed, with Turkish audiences being informed that medrese students had been mostly ignorant draft-dodgers and that their instructors had been obscurantist, reactionary, and opposed to any change in religious education. The reforms

of 1914 and the new system that was established in their wake had been mostly either ignored or presented as a failed effort of the Unionist government to save the ulema from themselves.[85] Such inaccurate and exaggerated assessments helped only to widen the gap and increase the distrust between the Kemalist intelligentsia and conservative circles in Turkey under the early republic.

It is safe to say that the majority of ulema and Islamic intellectuals resented the closing down of the medreses in 1924. Some reform-minded ulema felt particularly dismayed and even betrayed because they felt that the republican government had abruptly ended a project that was on the right track and could have had a bright future. Their years of struggle for the remaking of religious education, and the advances they believed they had achieved, were brushed aside. From their perspective, the medreses not only were salvageable but actually were well on their way to becoming progressive schools of modern religious learning. The government's explanations for closing them down therefore appeared to some of the reform-minded ulema as flimsy and dishonest. Conservative ulema were similarly dismayed, but they also felt vindicated in their warnings against the reforms of the previous decade. They had cautioned all along that the government was supportive of reforms in medrese education only as a pretext to increase its intervention and eventually obliterate the medreses altogether. From their perspective, in 1924 the republican authorities had simply executed the last stage of a clandestine scheme hatched by their Unionist predecessors a decade earlier. Some of these misgivings were even voiced in the press of Istanbul before the government clamped down on all opposition publications in 1925. The most blatant criticism, however, was expressed by political exiles in publications abroad.[86] The early republican government sought to silence any voice of dissent through legal action against dissenters at home and bans on the distribution of "seditious publications" from abroad. For more than a quarter of a century ulema and other critics were thus precluded from expressing publicly their views on the reformed medreses and their impact and legacies.

Critics were again able to voice their opinions publicly only after the relaxation of curbs on free speech after World War II. In an article published in 1947, Eşref Edib reminisces favorably about the reformed medreses. The prominent Islamist journalist and critic of the early republican leadership emphasizes, quite correctly, that ulema and medrese students were a major driving force behind the movement to do away with "the old form of instruction and replace it with a brand new organization and a very rich curriculum." Some setbacks notwithstanding, he describes the reforms of 1914 as a success story. In his telling, idealized as it might be, thereafter "the medreses began producing men who were acquainted with the positive sciences of the twentieth century and were knowledgeable in both Eastern and Western languages."[87] Ahmed Hamdi Akseki (1887–1951), the last commissioner of medrese education and later the head of the republican religious administration in Turkey expressed similar sentiments in a report he penned in 1950. Both men also opined that the closing down of the medreses and the transfer of religious education to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education were mistaken decisions with very negative implications for religious education in republican Turkey.[88] Like many of their colleagues, they believed that the reformed medreses should have remained operative in the 1920s. Moreover, even decades later, as discussed in some detail in Chapter Seven, they suggested that the reformed system could still serve as a model for new institutions of religious education in post-World War II Turkey.

The reforms in medrese education and the debates and struggles that preceded and followed them were significant and should not be ignored or discounted. The implementation of the reforms in 1914 and the support they continued to garner in the following decade testify to important changes that were taking place within the religious establishment at the time. In contrast to what is often assumed, traditional forms of religious education became increasingly discredited even among the ulema and their students, albeit not consensually. Nevertheless, demands for modernized form and content of religious education came from within the ranks of the religious establishment as well. The reforms were not merely an imposition by an interventionist state on collectively reluctant ulema and medrese students. The inclusion of "secular" subjects in the curricula of the reformed medreses was a source of pride for many ulema and students, not a cause for resentment. It appeared for a time that in a matter of a few years the medreses of Istanbul had surpassed those of Egypt, India, and Russia in terms of their embrace of modern pedagogy and administrative principles. Whatever reservations some conservative ulema had about the reforms, they too had been forced to accept them as a fait accompli, even after the termination of Unionist rule. There was no turning back, because the reforms were fervently embraced by so many reform-minded ulema and medrese students. The overwhelming majority of ulema and students therefore viewed the abolition of medrese education as unjustified and perhaps even perfidious. These were the kinds of policies that many at the time associated with the atheist Bolshevik regime that was taking root in the newly formed Soviet Union in the early 1920s. The abolition of medrese education thus aggravated the distrust in the government that existed among both reform-minded and conservative ulema, and contributed in the decades that followed to a legacy of grave suspicion and even animosity toward almost any state-led reform in religion-related affairs.

The fate of the medreses, as much as the destiny of the ulema and all other Islamic institutions, was eventually determined in the political arena. Ultimately, the reformed system and the medreses more generally were doomed by the inability of the ulema to secure sufficient political leverage, though not for lack of trying, as discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

Political Activism and Its Discontents

The Ottoman Empire was heading into uncharted political waters in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. For the first time, party politics and a parliamentary system appeared to become the pillars of the political order. Ulema, like all other Ottoman citizens, were purportedly free to engage in political activism. Many of them were indeed enthusiastic to take advantage of these newfound rights. They had good reason to expect that their religious and moral authority would attract the support of many voters, mostly outside the upwardly mobile intellectual and bureaucratic elite of the Young Turks, and could be translated into political influence. The political realities of the time turned out to be more complicated, however.

The CUP initiated the revolution in the name of constitutionalism and some of its members were sincere in upholding the merits of an elective government and the parliamentary system. In the years after the revolution, however, dominant factions in the Unionist leadership became increasingly determined to hinder any challenge to the CUP's political hegemony, be it by legal means or by subverting the constitutional system. The clandestine organization-turned-dominant-political-force welcomed the political activism of ulema, as long as it was under the CUP's auspices. The Unionist leadership did all it could to obstruct and delegitimize the political activities of their opponents in the religious establishment. On the one hand, the CUP did not refrain from questioning the legitimacy of the involvement of ulema in politics. On the other hand, the CUP's active pursuit of supporters among the ulema and its intervention in appointments and dismissals helped politicize the religious establishment. This ambivalent approach was also evident among other major political groupings that competed for power with the CUP.

The involvement of ulema in politics indeed became a topic of heated controversy after the Young Turk Revolution. The advantages and risks

of political activism were also debated and disputed within the religious establishment. Some ulema insisted that their political activism was necessary to safeguard the Islamic character of the state and defend the interests of the religious establishment. Many others disagreed. Critics of political activism were concerned that the participation of ulema in party politics was divisive, risked tarnishing the reputation of the religious establishment as a whole, and exposed the ulema to potential political retaliation and backlash. Like many ulema since the early centuries of Islam, the Ottoman religious establishment was thus disunited on the merits and dangers of political activism already, long before the founding of the republic in 1923 and the subsequent adoption of an official policy of "separation of religion and politics."

Debates about the involvement of ulema in politics during the closing years of the empire took place on the backdrop of increasing challenges to the religious establishment. In this context, the possible correlation between the levels of political activism of some prominent ulema and the peripheralization of the religious establishment became a topic of heated controversy. Many ulema assumed that causality did exist, only they could not agree on its terms. Some argued that lack of commitment to political action within the religious establishment facilitated the marginalization and eventual demise of Islamic institutions. Many others countered that the political activism of some of their peers in fact helped galvanize their opponents and supplied them with pretexts to attack, delegitimize, and do away with religious institutions. The experiences gained in the years leading to the establishment of the republic and the opposing conclusions they entailed have left significant legacies. In the decades that followed, these legacies have continued to inform debates within Islamic circles in Turkey about the advantages and risks of political activism.

Mustafa Sabri Efendi, the figurehead of the conservative ulema, came to epitomize more than any of his peers the opportunities and risks of political activism. A little-known religious scholar before 1908, he became a journalist, parliamentary deputy, party leader, and eventually the Sheikh ul-Islam in the years that followed the Young Turk Revolution. His achievements, travails, and failures illustrate the opportunities, risks, and controversies that accompanied ulema who opted for political activism. In the process he became a divisive figure within the religious establishment: a hero and source of inspiration for some, and a disgrace and symbol of all that went wrong with the ulema for others. The disagreements about his career and legacy have contributed to the shaping of contrasting views in Islamic circles in Turkey about the merits and disadvantages of political activism.

STEPPING INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA

The Young Turk revolution of 1908 opened new avenues for political activism for ambitious ulema such as Mustafa Sabri. Under the Hamidian regime they faced severe limitations on their freedom of speech, perhaps more than any other group in Ottoman society. Sultan Abdülhamid II (who reigned from 1876–1909) was sensitive to any sign of public criticism of the status quo, but he was particularly wary of any evidence of censure or proclivity toward political activism among the ulema, and with good reason. His ascendance to the throne came on the heels of the deposition of his uncle, Abdülaziz, and his brother, Murad V, on both occasions with the active cooperation of the highest echelon of the religious establishment and the support of thousands of medrese students. Throughout his long reign, Abdülhamid II was therefore concerned with the recurrence of a similar plot against him. He sought to mitigate the potential threat by, on the one hand, offering patronage and various types of support to ulema and, on the other hand, maintaining close inspection of their public activities. Those who were suspected of political ambitions were punished severely. Many ulema naturally resented this policy and the intimidation inherent in it. A significant number of them therefore welcomed with sincere jubilation the restoration of a constitutional regime in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution.[1]

Mustafa Sabri and many other ulema indeed expressed full support for the CUP in the immediate wake of the revolution. In the days and weeks that followed the restoration of a constitutional regime in July 1908, he and many of his peers participated in public gatherings and delivered enthusiastic speeches on behalf of the clandestine organization that had initiated the revolution and now sought to dominate the political arena. At first glance, this endorsement of the new political order and its initiators may appear as somewhat surprising, at least in the case of Mustafa Sabri. The rural youngster who arrived in Istanbul in the early 1890s with few personal connections and no certain future in fact enjoyed the Hamidian regime's patronage almost from the moment he set foot in the capital city. Nevertheless, by 1908 he had quite apparently lost his faith in the Hamidian political order, along with many other Ottomans within and without the religious establishment.

The native of the central Anatolian town of Tokat arrived in Istanbul in his late teens to pursue religious education in the medreses of the imperial city. This was a typical path for many students from Anatolia and the Ottoman Balkans. Many of them would first pursue basic religious education in their hometowns or in regional learning centers before proceeding to further their studies in the medreses of the capital. After earning their

diplomas, the best of these students could expect either to become medrese professors or to secure employment in the state administration (most often in administrative, educational, or judiciary-related positions). During the Hamidian period, ulema found new employment opportunities in the rapidly expanding government bureaucracy and in state institutions.

Mustafa Sabri proved himself to be an exceptionally bright student and was thus able to earn his diploma after fewer than three years, when he was still in his early twenties. This was an unusually short period of study and a remarkable young age at which to complete one's studies. More significantly, however, he established strong personal bonds with Ahmed Âsım Efendi, his teacher and mentor in Istanbul. As was often the case in these situations, the ties between the medrese professor and his most promising student were cemented by marriage between the young scholar and his teacher's daughter. This was a significant development for Mustafa Sabri. His mentor-cum-father-in-law was not just any ordinary medrese professor. Ahmed Âsım was also the commissioner of medrese education (*ders vekili*) in the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam, which certainly did not hurt the young man's career prospects. Thanks to his academic merits, and perhaps also his influential father-in-law, Mustafa Sabri in fact had secured a position as medrese professor in Istanbul already in his early twenties, which was extraordinary. Moreover, a few years later and still before his thirtieth birthday, he was invited to participate in the prestigious and financially rewarding Imperial Ramadan Lectures (*Huzur Dersleri*) that were held annually in the presence of the sultan. Abdülhamid II apparently approved of the young scholar because in 1900 he appointed him to a position of private librarian in his imperial palace. Mustafa Sabri earned several official decorations and gifts in the years that followed and was handsomely compensated when he handed diplomas to fifty of his own students in 1903, at age thirty-four, which was in itself out of the ordinary. By the time the CUP initiated the revolution he was a thirty-nine-year-old mid-level scholar with an established career path and a presumably promising future.[2] Although he was of humble provincial origins, he became somewhat of a rising star among the ulema of the capital during the 1890s.

And yet, although the benefits of sultanic patronage were clear and tangible, they could not offset entirely Mustafa Sabri's concerns about the direction in which the empire was heading. The government's response to external threats and to the activities of separatist movements was one area of concern for many Ottomans. For Mustafa Sabri and many of his peers, however, not less troubling was what they viewed as the erosion of Islamic traditions and norms and the spread of antireligious ideas in widening circles of the intelligentsia and officialdom. They feared that the facade of Islamic devoutness that had been maintained by the Hamidian regime only concealed rather than prevented the subterranean development of increasing challenges to the Islamic character of the empire.

Mustafa Sabri's first newspaper article, published in 1898 when he was twenty-nine years old, reflects these concerns quite vividly. The piece was written as a response to an essay that suggested that the Ottomans should turn away from their ostensible attachment to the "sciences of the Arabs" and focus solely on acquiring contemporary European knowledge. Mustafa Sabri found this advocacy for the Europeanization (*Avrupalılaşmak*) of the Ottoman Empire detestable. Not mincing his words, he unleashed a scathing attack on the young litterateur who had written it. Denouncing him as an insolent decadent, Mustafa Sabri warned him and his ilk in no uncertain terms not to question the importance of religious sciences either implicitly or directly. The name of the journalist he attacked was Hüseyin Cahid [Yalçın], at the time a member of an influential clique of young intellectuals, and after the Young Turk Revolution, the renowned editor of the daily *Tanin*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the CUP. Unbeknownst to the two men at the time, their early encounter, which both remembered very well even decades later, in fact foretold Mustafa Sabri's relations with the Unionist leadership in general and Hüseyin Cahid in particular.[3]

The article also denotes Mustafa Sabri's desire to take part in public debates on the future course of Ottoman society. He indeed wrote at least one other article shortly afterward, but the Hamidian authorities prevented its publication and he might have been advised to desist from stirring public controversies.[4] Be that as it may, it is clear that he kept publicly silent for a decade and was able to publish his second article only immediately after the revolution. He wrote numerous more opinion pieces, essays, and books in the years that followed, for more than three years also serving as editor-in-chief of the mouthpiece of the Ulema Association in Istanbul. It is therefore safe to conclude that when he complained in late 1908 that under the Hamidian regime the ulema were suppressed and silenced, he was sincerely relating his own personal experience.[5]

In one of his first articles after the revolution he explains the role the ulema should play in the new constitutional order. He begins by denouncing the Hamidian regime for preventing the involvement of ulema in politics, which he equates with the Islamic injunction to "command right and forbid wrong." He was following here a long tradition of religious scholars who assigned the ulema a primary role in enforcing this key Islamic dictate.[6] He therefore praises the leadership of the CUP for the reinstitution of a constitutional regime in which the ulema would finally be able to practice "their duty to guide the executive branch of government."[7] In

diplomas, the best of these students could expect either to become medrese professors or to secure employment in the state administration (most often in administrative, educational, or judiciary-related positions). During the Hamidian period, ulema found new employment opportunities in the rapidly expanding government bureaucracy and in state institutions.

Mustafa Sâbri proved himself to be an exceptionally bright student and was thus able to earn his diploma after fewer than three years, when he was still in his early twenties. This was an unusually short period of study and a remarkable young age at which to complete one's studies. More significantly, however, he established strong personal bonds with Ahmed Âsım Efendi, his teacher and mentor in Istanbul. As was often the case in these situations, the ties between the medrese professor and his most promising student were cemented by marriage between the young scholar and his teacher's daughter. This was a significant development for Mustafa Sabri. His mentor-cum-father-in-law was not just any ordinary medrese professor. Ahmed Âsım was also the commissioner of medrese education (*ders vekili*) in the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam, which certainly did not hurt the young man's career prospects. Thanks to his academic merits, and perhaps also his influential father-in-law, Mustafa Sabri in fact had secured a position as medrese professor in Istanbul already in his early twenties, which was extraordinary. Moreover, a few years later and still before his thirtieth birthday, he was invited to participate in the prestigious and financially rewarding Imperial Ramadan Lectures (*Huzur Dersleri*) that were held annually in the presence of the sultan. Abdülhamid II apparently approved of the young scholar because in 1900 he appointed him to a position of private librarian in his imperial palace. Mustafa Sabri earned several official decorations and gifts in the years that followed and was handsomely compensated when he handed diplomas to fifty of his own students in 1903, at age thirty-four, which was in itself out of the ordinary. By the time the CUP initiated the revolution he was a thirty-nine-year-old mid-level scholar with an established career path and a presumably promising future.[2] Although he was of humble provincial origins, he became somewhat of a rising star among the ulema of the capital during the 1890s.

And yet, although the benefits of sultanic patronage were clear and tangible, they could not offset entirely Mustafa Sabri's concerns about the direction in which the empire was heading. The government's response to external threats and to the activities of separatist movements was one area of concern for many Ottomans. For Mustafa Sabri and many of his peers, however, not less troubling was what they viewed as the erosion of Islamic traditions and norms and the spread of antireligious ideas in widening circles of the intelligentsia and officialdom. They feared that the facade of Islamic devoutness that had been maintained by the Hamidian regime only concealed rather than prevented the subterranean development of increasing challenges to the Islamic character of the empire.

Mustafa Sabri's first newspaper article, published in 1898 when he was twenty-nine years old, reflects these concerns quite vividly. The piece was written as a response to an essay that suggested that the Ottomans should turn away from their ostensible attachment to the "sciences of the Arabs" and focus solely on acquiring contemporary European knowledge. Mustafa Sabri found this advocacy for the Europeanization (*Avrupalılaşmak*) of the Ottoman Empire detestable. Not mincing his words, he unleashed a scathing attack on the young litterateur who had written it. Denouncing him as an insolent decadent, Mustafa Sabri warned him and his ilk in no uncertain terms not to question the importance of religious sciences either implicitly or directly. The name of the journalist he attacked was Hüseyin Cahid [Yalçın], at the time a member of an influential clique of young intellectuals, and after the Young Turk Revolution, the renowned editor of the daily *Tanin*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the CUP. Unbeknownst to the two men at the time, their early encounter, which both remembered very well even decades later, in fact foretold Mustafa Sabri's relations with the Unionist leadership in general and Hüseyin Cahid in particular.[3]

The article also denotes Mustafa Sabri's desire to take part in public debates on the future course of Ottoman society. He indeed wrote at least one other article shortly afterward, but the Hamidian authorities prevented its publication and he might have been advised to desist from stirring public controversies.[4] Be that as it may, it is clear that he kept publicly silent for a decade and was able to publish his second article only immediately after the revolution. He wrote numerous more opinion pieces, essays, and books in the years that followed, for more than three years also serving as editor-in-chief of the mouthpiece of the Ulema Association in Istanbul. It is therefore safe to conclude that when he complained in late 1908 that under the Hamidian regime the ulema were suppressed and silenced, he was sincerely relating his own personal experience.[5]

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the long run, this standpoint was bound to lead him into conflict with the Unionist leadership. When it came to politics, the leadership of the CUP, and of opposing political groups for that matter, were willing to allow ulema only an ancillary role at best, or at worst no role at all.

In the short term, however, the two sides sought to paper over the clear differences in vision and establish a workable political relationship. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Mustafa Sabri helped organize the ulema of the capital in a voluntary association that was initially loosely affiliated with the CUP. He was elected to serve in the new Ulema Association's governing body and was nominated editor-in-chief of its mouthpiece, *Beyan'ül-Hak*. Soon thereafter he was also elected to parliament as a deputy for his native Tokat, which according to his own testimony he had not visited for almost two decades. Nevertheless, with Unionist backing, in late 1908 he was able to get elected as one of its representatives in parliament.[8] The CUP leadership was seeking at the time to consolidate its hold on power and could not be too picky in its choice of allies. The support of Mustafa Sabri and other ulema helped augment its credentials in conservative circles and rebuff early accusations of godlessness. This political marriage of convenience benefited Mustafa Sabri at least as much. The previously little-known medrese professor shortly emerged on the national stage as a prominent figure in public life in general and in the political arena in particular.

Mustafa Sabri and a number of other members of the Ulema Association joined the CUP's parliamentary group after the opening of parliament in December 1908. However, the relations between the Unionist leadership and the Ulema Association soon cooled down, as grave concerns about the Unionists' commitment to the upholding of the centrality of Islamic laws and traditional norms rapidly alienated a significant number of ulema—so much so that in order to maintain unity in its ranks, the Ulema Association found it necessary in January 1909 to proclaim in no uncertain terms its dissociation from the CUP.[9]

Brewing tensions between the two sides were further exacerbated in the early months of 1909 over the question of the implementation of Sharia law. The strains came to the fore as members of the Ulema Association launched a public campaign under the banner "We Want the Sharia." They rallied support in the streets and marketplaces of Istanbul and collected signatures for a petition to be submitted to parliament. The initiative was countered with ridicule by leading CUP parliamentary deputies and pro-Unionist publications. Moreover, its organizers were accused of reactionary proclivities. Mustafa Sabri Efendi, in contrast, wrote a number of articles in defense of the campaign. He also found reasons to criticize publicly other positions and political postures adopted by the Unionist leadership in early 1909.[10] Although he stopped short of quitting the CUP's parliamentary group, these were unmistakable signs of alienation and impending crisis.

The increasing tensions came to a head in the wake of a failed anti-Unionist insurrection in April 1909. As a result of a military uprising, the CUP lost control in the capital for about a fortnight and its leaders were forced to escape Istanbul for their lives. During this period of crisis the Unionist leadership was busy rallying support in the provinces and helping to organize a military force to march on the capital and reassert their political dominance. Mustafa Sabri and his allies offered no help to the embattled CUP during these trying times. Instead, the Ulema Association published proclamations that assured the population in the provinces that the constitutional regime was still intact, and acknowledged the legitimacy of the new cabinet in Istanbul. Moreover, while emphasizing the sanctity of the constitutional regime, the Ulema Association laid claim to the role of its primary champion and guardian. These positions flew in the face of the Unionist strategy to restore the CUP's dominance in the capital. CUP propaganda depicted the insurrection as a reactionary movement for the restoration of the despotic Hamidian regime, and discounted the new cabinet as illegitimate. On the basis of these assertions it was able to mobilize significant support in the provinces. The Unionist leadership therefore resented the posture of the Ulema Association, not least because it indicated support for a constitutional government without any role for the CUP in it.[11]

The final breakup between Mustafa Sabri and his allies and the CUP thus became only a matter of time. The gap between the two sides was simply too wide to bridge. The political divorce was not immediate, however. For a time after the suppression of the rebellion and the reassertion of Unionist political dominance, Mustafa Sabri and his associates sought to find some way to mend fences with the CUP. *Beyan'ül-Hak* even voluntarily suspended its publication for almost two months to allow matters to cool down. When it resumed publication in mid-June 1909, it devoted most of its space to articles that reiterated the ulema's unwavering support for a constitutional form of government. Contributors emphasized the Ulema Association's role in preventing the abolition of constitutionalism during the crisis. Mustafa Sabri, for example, employed strong language in rejecting accusations of reactionary inclinations leveled at the ulema in general and the medrese students in particular. At the same time, he also expressed "a sincere hope . . . for a rapprochement between our religious and political classes [*unsur-i dinimizle unsur-i siyasimiz*], in which both sides would strive to eliminate the misunderstandings, not to say alienation, that mar their relations, and would mutually agree to cooperate

for the good of the homeland."[12] This olive branch suggested cooperation between equal partners. There was little prospect of the Unionist leadership accepting such terms. The Ottoman military and bureaucratic elites in general and the CUP in particular were in no way inclined to accord the religious establishment an equal footing at the helm of the empire.

IN SEARCH OF LEADERSHIP ROLES

Increasing frustration with the Unionist leadership and a growing sense of political impotence eventually drove Mustafa Sabri and a few of his peers out of the CUP. In February 1910 they formally seceded from the Unionist parliamentary group and founded a new political party: the People's Party (*Ahali Fırkası*). The majority of the new party's members were ulema who had previously been affiliated with the CUP, and its founding began a new stage in Mustafa Sabri's political career. He was now an opposition activist on a quest to end the CUP's political dominance and secure for himself positions of political leadership and influence. This was a risky endeavor, considering the Unionist leadership's increasing determination to hold on to power by almost any means. Although some CUP members may have been genuinely committed constitutionalists, it was their more radical allies who increasingly dictated the organization's agenda and modus operandi in the years following the revolution. At a different but related level, the founding of the People's Party also contributed to the increasing formalization of a political chasm within the religious establishment.

Some ulema preferred to stay above the fray of party politics, but the many who opted for political activism became increasingly divided into two opposing camps. The Unionist "you are either with us or against us" mentality helped polarize the ulema into pro-government and anti-Unionist camps. The Ulema Association and the more conservative ulema, on the one hand, tended to side with the opposition after 1909. The reform-minded camp, on the other hand, overwhelmingly supported the CUP. They therefore left the Ulema Association and established an alternative association of ulema and Islamic intellectuals that operated under the auspices of the CUP.[13] These "Unionist ulema" were generally willing to accept secondary roles in the political process and submit to the authority of the CUP's leadership. They believed they could steer the CUP away from radical antireligious and Westernist directions but had no illusions about assuming leadership roles in it. Mustafa Sabri and his associates rejected these premises. They became convinced that the CUP leadership was bent on a clandestine program of gradual implementation of antireligious policies, with the naive, or senseless, cooperation of many ulema. From their perspective, the Unionists' political dominance became so dangerous that the unseating of the ruling party even merited political alliances with non-Muslims or with Muslims with reputations for "religious laxity." Years later, in an article published in 1927, Mustafa Sabri indeed acknowledged that many of the ulema who cooperated with the CUP were devout Muslims and that in his struggle against the Unionists he sometimes cooperated with atheists. He insisted, however, that "the crucial difference was that in the CUP the devout surrendered real influence to the atheist members, while this never happened" in the parties he helped establish and lead.[14]

The final straw that prompted Mustafa Sabri and his associates to join the opposition had to do with the appointment of a new Sheikh ul-Islam in early 1910. Formally, it was the Sultan who selected the Grand Vizier and Sheikh ul-Islam. However, the reality was that the CUP dictated these appointments to Mehmed V, the new monarch, who was enthroned in April 1909, after the Unionists regained control of the capital and engineered the dethronement of Abdülhamid II. The procedure was simple. The CUP parliamentary group held a secret ballot to determine a short list of three worthy candidates. The list was then submitted to the Sultan with clandestine recommendations for his choice of Grand Vizier. Mustafa Sabri and his allies now demanded a similar process for the appointment of the Sheikh ul-Islam. A vote was indeed taken and a slate of three candidates was duly prepared and presented to the Sultan. Mehmed V, however, selected none of them. His appointee, Hüseyin Hüsnü Efendi, was apparently nominated secretly by the Unionist leadership, without notifying all the members of the CUP's parliamentary group. At least this was what Mustafa Sabri and his associates believed, and they were furious about it—so much so that after a few days of fuming and consultations behind the scenes they decided to leave the ruling party and join the opposition. They were convinced that many other Unionist deputies shared their disgust with the leadership's manipulations and therefore might follow their lead. Their new political home, the People's Party, included ten to twenty parliamentary deputies. Contemporary reports about its membership vary considerably. Information from all sources establishes, however, that ulema were the overwhelming majority of the new party's membership.[15]

CUP members and Unionist sympathizers wasted no time in denouncing the new party as clericalist in character and reactionary in tendencies. In an effort to delegitimize it, they invoked images of obscurantism that were associated in public discourse with the ulema and in turn reemphasized that stigma. The public was warned that the new party might

even prompt another reactionary insurrection à la April 1909. Moreover, rather than scrutinizing the party's program or its members' declared goals, the Unionists led a well-orchestrated campaign of ad hominem attacks in the press. The members of the new party were thus charged with being overambitious, unpatriotic, and disrespectful of the Islamic oath of loyalty they had purportedly taken when joining the CUP.[16]

Mustafa Sabri and his associates understood the need for damage control in response to what they viewed as a well-coordinated effort of character assassination. They therefore reemphasized time and again their commitment to constitutionalism, democracy, and the interests of the common people. They insisted that they were not clericalists and compared themselves to populist (*popüler*) parties in Europe. At the same time they pointed out the hypocrisy of the Unionist charges against them. Mustafa Sabri thus remarked that no accusations of fanaticism and clericalism against him and his friends were ever made before they left the CUP. As long as they supported the CUP they were not libeled by such wild accusations, he insisted. He was willing to concede that some ulema may have been backward and ignorant, but he argued that many of them were in fact collaborating with the hypocritical CUP.[17]

The resulting political controversy aggravated divisions among the ulema. The animosity between pro-Unionist activists and their opponents indeed became quite apparent, and at times even nasty—so much so that when the aging Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı (1846–1912), the sheikh of the imperial mosque of Ayasofya, fell in the mosque and broke his leg, some ulema whispered gleefully, "God has taught him a lesson for his submission to the Unionists."[18] Rashid Ridda, renowned Syrian-Egyptian journalist and religious scholar, was exposed to the tensions among the ulema firsthand during a prolonged stay in Istanbul in 1910. He reports in a piece published in late 1910 that CUP-affiliated ulema warned him that the Ulema Association was a fanatical organization of reactionaries who opposed progress and reform. He then adds that he was pleasantly surprised to the contrary.[19] The tensions between the two sides continued to brew as opponents of the CUP felt increasingly victimized by the authorities, even as the CUP's allies were gaining access to various perks.

Mustafa Sabri and his supporters became targets of government surveillance operations soon after joining the opposition. Their mail was monitored and they were spied on by secret agents and plainclothes police officers. Years later one of these agents published in his memoirs a section on his efforts to infiltrate Mustafa Sabri's close circle of supporters. He was assigned the task of collecting evidence on their involvement in subversive activities. Mustafa Sabri and his associates were aware of these efforts and the agent was soon exposed.[20] Tensions intensified

in June 1910 when scores of people, including a few acquaintances of Mustafa Sabri, were arrested in Istanbul and a number of other towns on suspicion of membership in a secret revolutionary organization. Mustafa Sabri was not detained, but reports leaked to the press suggested his involvement in the plot. Meanwhile, two of his acquaintances were interrogated and tortured while in custody, in an effort to extract damning testimonials against him. They were pressured to testify that Mustafa Sabri was the driving force behind a plot for a 1909-like insurrection under the banner "We Want the Sharia." The pressures failed and eventually most of the suspects were released. Mustafa Sabri was clearly shaken by the accusations and persecution of his acquaintances, but his resolve to maintain his struggle against the CUP did not wane. He declared that he refused to be intimidated and that he was adamant to pursue his political agenda.[21]

These ordeals contrasted sharply with the experiences of pro-Unionist ulema during the same period. Many of them enjoyed various perks in return for their alliance with the CUP. In July 1910, Musa Kâzım was appointed Sheikh ul-Islam. In December, Mustafa Hayri Efendi became Minister of Islamic Endowments.[22] These two appointments not only benefitted the two most senior "Unionist ulema" but also handed them control over all aspects of the administration and finances of the religious establishment. They had the authority to make and break careers, and a measure of control over the livelihoods of most ulema in Istanbul and many in the provinces as well. Opposition activists could do very little more than ineffectively protest that "promotions even in the purely religious functions are determined according to affiliation with the Committee [of Union and Progress]."[23] The memoirs of Hüseyin Kâmil [Ertur], a senior member of the Unionist faction of the ulema, reveal that these were not unfounded charges.[24] Conservative critics also helped spread rumors that Musa Kâzım Efendi was a godless Freemason. The whisper campaign and the reactions it prompted became so serious that the Sheikh ul-Islam was eventually forced to publish angry denials in the press. The accusations stuck nevertheless, staining his reputation in some circles.[25]

The stakes for the two factions therefore became higher, and the politicization of the religious establishment became more pronounced. Tensions increased further in late 1911 as the empire was fast descending into a prolonged political crisis. Secessions from the CUP and a damaging war with Italy over Tripoli of Barbary (present-day Libya) conjoined to shake the Unionists' hold on power. Sensing this apparent vulnerability, the Ulema Association and its mouthpiece, *Beyan'ül-Hak*, began siding with the opposition more openly than ever before.[26] In August 1911, for

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instance, the association censured the Unionist governor of Istanbul for ostensibly undermining the constitution, while invoking its self-assumed role as "the genuine guardian of constitutionalism."[27] The broadside and the thinly veiled slight to the CUP were impossible to miss and created quite a stir.

The CUP's response was rapid and sharp. In October 1911, following its annual congress, it released a stern warning to the Ulema Association to keep its distance from politics. An official communiqué advised "the ulema" to be mindful that they were public officials on the government payroll and therefore should not intervene in "the internal politics of the state." Steering clear of politics, the communiqué emphasized, was also in their own best interests. That is because "the ulema have a religious duty to remain above the fray of party politics in order to escape the tarnishing of their status as 'heirs to the prophets' by the offenses and attacks that are inherent in political struggles." The Unionist message went on to warn quite ominously that a previous intervention of ulema in politics in 1909 culminated in a reactionary insurrection.[28] This was a thinly veiled attempt to invoke and reinforce the association between the ulema and religious fanaticism, and to warn the Ulema Association that its intervention in politics might exert a heavy toll. At the same time, these admonitions certainly did not stop the Unionist leadership from endorsing the political activism of their own allies in the religious establishment.

The Ulema Association responded with a short but sharp response that rejected out of hand the CUP's assertions and implied threats. Mustafa Sabri penned a longer piece in which he accuses the Unionists of scheming to "reduce [the ulema] to an apathetic group which is involved only in abstractions" rather than in important current affairs. He insists that he and his associates will never succumb to such machinations because the duty to "command right and forbid wrong" obliges them to be involved in politics. He then goes on to ridicule the hypocrisy of the Unionist demands. Pointing out that many ulema were involved in political advocacy on behalf of the CUP, he charges that the true aim of the ruling party was to silence any independent voice that could threaten the Unionists' political hegemony. He vows that the Ulema Association and its members would never forgo what he defines as their constitutional right and Islamic duty to be involved in politics.[29]

This enthusiastic support for political activism was far from being a consensual standpoint among the ulema. In fact, it was frowned upon even by some conservative ulema, in a manner reminiscent of a long tradition of ambiguity of Muslim scholars about the merits and drawbacks of involvement in politics. Most critics of political activism certainly

agreed that the ulema should have every right to comment on current affairs and express their views freely. However, some of them felt uneasy about ulema's involvement in party politics. Ahmed Şirani, for instance, published a number of articles in early 1912 in which he pointed out that the affiliation of ulema with political parties only divided them, increased tensions within the religious establishment, and hindered their ability to serve as an objective and universally respected voice of conscience and Islamic truth. In his mind, the ulema should have united to form an apolitical organization that would not seek political office but rather commend or censure the powers that be, whether they were the CUP or any other party. Because the ulema had succumbed to political factionalism, he explained, their influence in the polity had declined and they had become increasingly marginalized.[30] According to this view, opposition activists such as Mustafa Sabri were as guilty as their Unionist counterparts of the harmful politicization of the religious establishment. Accusations of excessive factionalism and political ambition thus continued to be hurled at Mustafa Sabri in the years that followed, even by some conservative ulema.[31]

Mustafa Sabri was convinced that advocates of political impartiality were naive and impractical. He insisted that the ulema simply had to participate in party politics in order to stop the authoritarian CUP and the anti-Islamic machinations. In fact, in November 1911 he became one of the founders and leaders of the Freedom and Alliance Party (*Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası*). This new political alliance, also known as the Liberal Union, was established in an effort to unite all the opposition factions, regardless of their ethnic makeup and ideological orientations, in a common front against the CUP. Mustafa Sabri was elected as one of the party's two vice presidents, reflecting an expectation that he would deliver the votes of ulema and other conservative electors. As such, he represented the party in debates in parliament, in public speeches, and in opinion pieces in the press. This increased exposure elevated his public profile and political stature to new heights. When parliament was dissolved following a political crisis and new elections were called for early in 1912, Mustafa Sabri and his political allies wanted to believe that they might finally have a chance to unseat the CUP through the ballot box.[32] He and his supporters in the religious establishment were ready for the task. He and a number of his associates in the Ulema Association stood as candidates for the Liberal Union, while *Beyan'ül-Hak*'s editorial line became clearly supportive of the main opposition party. As the campaign season began in earnest in February 1912, Mustafa Sabri and his allies squared off against Unionist ulema in a battle for the crucial votes of religiously devout Muslims. In these circumstances, the voices of

ulema who criticized their peers' party affiliations were all but drowned out in the commotion of the heated campaign season. Political activism carried the day.[33]

The campaign season was marred from the outset by harassment of opposition activists by government officials and Unionist activists. Mustafa Sabri experienced such pressures firsthand when he electioneered in Thrace and in central Anatolia. In Kavala, where he campaigned alongside an Ottoman-Greek candidate, a Unionist crowd sought to prevent his access to a political rally while berating him as a traitor to his fellow Muslims. The reality was that both of the major parties cooperated with non-Muslim organizations and activists, and both claimed to represent the genuine interests of the Muslims. After some difficulty, Mustafa Sabri was able to go through and deliver his speech, but in the following days he faced a barrage of accusations in the press of collaboration with the enemies of the Muslims. *Beyan'ül-Hak* responded with a spirited defense of the merits of interfaith cooperation between all Ottomans, something the conservative mouthpiece of the Ulema Association had hardly ever done since its founding in late 1908. Additional obstacles awaited Mustafa Sabri on the Anatolian leg of his campaign trip. In Konya, the Unionist governor of the province disrupted a Friday sermon he delivered in the town's main mosque, accusing the conservative religious scholar of delivering anti-Islamic messages. Meanwhile, Unionist activists were able to put pressure on voters in his native Tokat and dissuade them from reelecting him even before he reached his hometown. Faced with this setback he decided to return to Istanbul to help rally support for his party in the capital. Many other ulema who supported the opposition met similar difficulties and complained about harassment by the authorities, even as Unionist ulema campaigned for the ruling party quite unhindered.[34]

The official government policy was that religious sites and places of worship could not be used for political purposes. Existing evidence suggests, however, that these prohibitions were kept, and that disciplinary actions against offenders were taken, only when they involved ulema who were campaigning on behalf of the Liberal Union. In a few cases, opposition activists were even arrested on charges of sedition and sent to stand trial in a court-martial in the capital.[35] Meanwhile, former Sheikh ul-Islam Musa Kâzım Efendi and other Unionist ulema continued to campaign for their party without any harassment.[36]

What came to be known as the "Big Stick Elections" secured complete control of parliament for the CUP but with little public confidence. The widespread harassment of opposition candidates and reports about abuses of the electoral process undermined the legitimacy of the elections. This turn of events was very disappointing for opposition activists, who had hoped to unseat the CUP through the ballot box. It became clear that the Unionist leadership was willing to make a sham of the constitutional regime the CUP had helped restore in 1908, even if some party activists were at heart still committed to parliamentarism. For some Ottomans, including Mustafa Sabri, the validity of democratic elections and the parliamentary system itself were put into question. Mustafa Sabri remained involved in party politics until the end of the Ottoman Empire, but statements he made years later appear to indicate an increasing loss of faith in the fairness and workability of the parliamentary system in the wake of the elections of 1912.[37] Many other opposition supporters shared similar sentiments. They therefore welcomed the emergence, shortly after the elections, of an anti-CUP group of army officers that engineered the resignation of the Unionist cabinet in August 1912 through threats of violence. The CUP was thus dislodged from power less than six months after the elections, parliament was dissolved again, and an anti-Unionist cabinet of veteran statesmen was appointed to administer the affairs of the state.

A few months later, however, the travails and disasters that befell the empire under the new cabinet facilitated a speedy return of the CUP to power. The position of the veteran statesmen cabinet became weak and eventually untenable in the wake of shocking military defeats and territorial losses during the First Balkan War in late 1912. As a bleak atmosphere of gloom and doom descended on the capital, a group of Unionist officers led a coup d'état that restored the CUP to power on January 23, 1913. The CUP justified this violent takeover as the need to save the empire from the hands of an irresponsible and incapable cabinet. Its leadership, now dominated more than before by radical army officers, was in no mood to tolerate any opposition. A wave of arrests of opposition activists and sympathizers in the immediate wake of the coup d'état was followed by even more draconian measures after Grand Vizier Mahmud Shevket Pasha was assassinated in June 1913. Hundreds of people associated with the opposition, including dozens of ulema, were arrested in Istanbul. They were summarily sentenced in a kangaroo court martial and shipped away to remote destinations in Anatolia.[38] Mustafa Sabri was able to escape a similar fate, for the time being, by barely dodging an arrest warrant and escaping abroad in the immediate wake of the Unionist coup d'état.[39] From that point until the end of World War I, the opposition to the CUP was neutralized for all intents and purposes. This was a dramatic turn of events. For a time after the Young Turk Revolution, Ottoman ulema may have enjoyed more freedom for political activism than ulema in any other contemporaneous Islamic land

experienced. By 1913, however, the political environment in Istanbul was perhaps more restrictive than in any other major urban center in the Islamic world, including those under European colonial control.

The Unionist political omnipotence also translated into a significant change in the balance of power within the religious establishment. The ruling party's opponents were doomed to long years in a political wilderness of exile, imprisonment, or fearful silence. Meanwhile, Unionist ulema were awarded access to all the senior administrative positions in the religious establishment. Ulema who remained apolitical or advocated political impartiality were generally tolerated and mostly sidestepped and ignored. The aims defined by Mustafa Sabri in 1908, that the ulema would serve as a moral compass and fountain of guidance to the government, were far from realized. After the Ulema Association was dismantled and its mouthpiece stopped publication in late 1912, and following the establishment in 1913 of a de facto one-party regime of the CUP, no open avenue was available to pursue these goals. As war clouds were gathering over Europe and the empire in late 1914, it was clear to all that the ulema could hardly make any claim of independent political clout.

POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

The political weight of the religious establishment continued to diminish during World War I. Sheikh ul-Islam Mustafa Hayri Efendi preferred to resign in May 1916 rather than serve as a rubber stamp, and Sheikh ul-Islam Musa Kâzım Efendi testified after the war that he was hardly consulted or informed about any major political decision. Such a testimonial certainly served his interests after the end of Unionist rule in late 1918, but his attestation, even if somewhat overstated, does ring true nevertheless. Before World War I, Unionist ulema might have been used to playing second fiddle to the CUP's leadership, but they could still expect a major say when it came to the religious establishment and its institutions. During the war years, however, even this leverage was significantly eroded. Unionist ulema maintained their hold over senior positions in the religious establishment but had very little political clout. Opposition activists meanwhile were completely peripheralized. They were forced to observe the reforms in Islamic institutions and the contraction of the jurisdiction of the religious establishment with a mix of helpless frustration and bitter vindication. The transfer of authority over the Islamic courts to the Ministry of Justice and suggestions that the Sheikh ul-Islam should be stripped of executive powers were perceived

by Mustafa Sabri and like-minded ulema as new stages in a clandestine Unionist master plan to subdue and eventually do away with the religious establishment and its institutions.

Mustafa Sabri initially attempted to continue his political activism from abroad. His first year in exile, after escaping from Istanbul in January 1913, involved efforts to join existing Ottoman opposition networks in Europe. Several months in France and a few weeks in Egypt were sufficient to convince him to change course.[40] He did not feel comfortable among his new anti-Unionist political allies, all of whom were neither particularly conservative nor devout. He therefore resolved to relocate to a Muslim-heavy region in Romania, for the time being. He summoned his family to join him there, after initially leaving them behind in Istanbul during his hasty escape. Back in the Ottoman capital, however, the government resolved to press charges against him on account of his alleged involvement in the plot that had led to the assassination of Grand Vizier Mahmud Shevket Pasha in June 1913. When Mustafa Sabri refused to return to the Ottoman Empire to stand trial, the authorities retaliated swiftly. Property he had left behind was confiscated, his rank in the religious establishment was terminated, and his stipend allotment as a medrese professor was annulled. The government then went on to suspend his citizenship rights and revoke his passport, and asked the Romanian authorities to deport him. Soon thereafter, in February 1914, he was arrested by the Romanian police, separated from his family members, and put on a train to Austrian-ruled Bosnia. He arrived in Sarajevo shortly before Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria made known his plans to visit the city in June.[41]

The months leading to the assassination that sparked World War I were some of the most miserable and depressing in Mustafa Sabri's adult life—so much so that he was even willing to consider leaving political life altogether. With his family still in Romania and with financial constraints and health problems afflicting him, the allure of political activism dimmed and his determined opposition to any accommodation with the CUP quivered. Hitherto unpublished documents from the Ottoman archives reveal that he in fact approached the Ottoman government in mid-1914 in an attempt to secure an official amnesty. In return for dropping all charges and penalties against him, he vowed to settle quietly in his hometown and retire from any involvement in politics. Mehmed Džemaluddin Efendi, the head of the Islamic religious establishment in Bosnia (*Reis-ul-ulema*) also interceded on his behalf, before Mustafa Sabri met in person with the Ottoman consul to discuss his proposal. The authorities in Istanbul were neither forthcoming nor completely unresponsive to this overture. They replied that such a

deal was premature but, as a trust-building measure, the consul in Sarajevo was authorized to issue Mustafa Sabri a passport so he could travel to Romania and reunite with his family there. This response arrived in the nick of time. Mustafa Sabri was still in Sarajevo when Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated on June 28 but he was able to depart to neutral Romania a few days before the borders were closed in late July and hostilities commenced between Austro-Hungary and Serbia.[42]

Beyond exposing Mustafa Sabri's personal travails, the whole episode also reflects the deflating impact of Unionist political hegemony on the morale of opposition activists after 1913. Mustafa Sabri and his supporters concealed this chapter in his political life because they likely feared it might reflect negatively on his public image in ultraconservative Islamic circles as an uncompromising and unflinching warrior against the oppressive and antireligious policies of the CUP. The fact of the matter is that during the period of Unionist dominance and through the long years of the Great War, Mustafa Sabri and other opposition activists vacillated between moments of despair and times of hopeful anticipation of the end of hostilities and Unionist rule.

As long as Romania maintained its neutrality in the war, however, Mustafa Sabri kept good on his pledge to steer clear of political activism. He served as a teacher in a Muslim seminary in Romania during the early years of the Great War.[43] There are no indications that he engaged in any public criticism of the Ottoman government during this period, even as he was unquestionably aghast over the developments in medrese education and the initiatives to curtail the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam. Once Romania entered the war on the side of the Allies in August 1916, however, he may have felt freer to publicly criticize the Ottoman government. What is clear is that when Romania was soon thereafter invaded by the Central Powers, including an Ottoman contingent, Mustafa Sabri felt it necessary to leave his family and home near the heavily Muslim-populated Black Sea coast and escape to the capital, Bucharest. When the Romanian capital fell in February 1917, he was arrested by the Ottoman expeditionary force. After several weeks of imprisonment in Romania he was finally transferred to the Ottoman lands to serve an open-ended prison term in Bilecik, a small town in Western Anatolia.[44]

As World War I and Unionist rule slowly drew closer to an end, Mustafa Sabri was reunited with some of his former allies in the opposition. Since 1913, hundreds of political detainees, including Mustafa Sabri's two sons-in-law, were imprisoned in groups in various locations in Anatolia, such as Bilecik. The political prisoners spent much of their time in discussions on the empire's dire straits and its future prospects. Mustafa Sabri joined them and their debates in early 1917, while also finding

time and energy to work on two book manuscripts. Both were polemical works against Islamic reformism, which was a topic of grave concern for him throughout his adult life. Both books were published shortly after the end of the war.[45] The fires of political activism may or may not have died down in him during the early years of the Great War, but the period of imprisonment in Bilecik undoubtedly reignited his political passion.

When Mehmed VI Vahideddin, who ascended the throne in July 1918, issued a general amnesty in October, following the end of Unionist rule, Mustafa Sabri immediately hastened back to the capital. He arrived in Istanbul in November, armed with a burning determination to make up for the "lost years" of opposition and exile. He was one of many opposition activists who believed their time had come to take the reins of power into their own hands. But Mustafa Sabri also believed that with the defeat of the CUP and the tarnishing of its reputation, a window of opportunity had opened for the reassertion of the ulema's influence in the political arena.

UNABASHED POLITICIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The end of Unionist rule in late 1918 opened a period of political upheavals throughout the Ottoman lands. After hostilities ended in October, the Ottoman cabinet sought to maintain effective control over territories still under Ottoman direct rule, and negotiate an honorable peace settlement with the victorious Allies. The achievement of these goals was hindered by the triumphalist attitude of the Allies and their difficulties in reaching agreements between themselves and regional allies and clients. Anger about atrocities perpetrated by the Ottoman government during the war years, particularly its responsibility for the death of more than a million Armenians, was another major complicating factor in this respect. By late 1919, disagreements about the final peace settlement had deteriorated into hostilities in almost every corner of Anatolia, with the Muslim population being mostly on the receiving end of armed confrontations. These destabilizing factors weakened the cabinet in Istanbul even as locally based Muslim organizations and military units in the provinces were gradually merging into an Anatolia-wide resistance movement, independent of Istanbul. Mustafa Kemal Pasha emerged by late 1919 as the leader of the self-designated nationalist forces, with Ankara serving as the movement's headquarters. Many of the nationalists were former Unionists, mostly of mid-level ranks.

In Istanbul, meanwhile, anti-Unionist activists were seeking to secure a hold over the Ottoman government. Many of them viewed Mustafa

Kemal and his close associates as Unionists in disguise. They contended that the CUP's adventurism had caused the loss of the Arab provinces in World War I and that the resistance movement might now bring about the loss of Istanbul and Anatolia. Subsequently, the political battle lines between the nationalists and their opponents remained remarkably similar, albeit not identical and with important exceptions, to the divisions between the Unionists and their opposition in the preceding years.[46] Corresponding splits also reemerged or were accentuated among the ulema. Political disagreements regarding the nationalist movement hindered their cooperation even on issues on which they mostly agreed, such as the need for the reinvigoration of the religious establishment and reemphasis on the Islamic character of the state. Mustafa Sabri indeed faced serious difficulties in his endeavor to unite the majority of the ulema in a common political front under his leadership.

He set out to reestablish a strong political support base immediately upon his return to the capital in late 1918. For this purpose he targeted several constituencies. First, he helped revive the Liberal Union in as early as November 1918. The resurrected party established branches throughout Anatolia and lobbied the Sultan for cabinet appointments.[47] Second, he led an effort to organize the ulema in a voluntary association not unlike the dormant Ulema Association. He was subsequently elected to serve as the first president of the new organization.[48] Third, he established cordial relations of informal cooperation with conservative intellectuals who before the Great War had supported the CUP but had later become disillusioned with the Unionist leadership. Most notable in this respect was the public support he won from *Sebilürreşad*. This important Islamic periodical had been pro-Unionist until the eve of World War I, but its owner and main contributors became alienated from the CUP during the war years. Their fear was that the Unionists had initiated policies that might be precursors for the establishment of a secular state.[49] Mustafa Sabri won their approval because he promised to reverse these trends.[50] With the sound political support of his party, his regained leadership position among the ulema, and the newfound informal backing of Islamic intellectuals, he was able to reach the pinnacle of his political career in early 1919.

On March 4, Mustafa Sabri was appointed Sheikh ul-Islam in a cabinet led by Damad Ferid Pasha and dominated by members of the Liberal Union. Shortly thereafter he was also appointed to the Senate.[51] The long years of struggle, exile, and imprisonment appeared to be paying off. His political activism had brought him to the highest office in the religious establishment. Finally, after a decade of unsuccessful political struggles, he was in a position of leadership and power. He therefore immediately

undertook to reverse the emasculation of the religious establishment and reassert the observance of traditional Islamic norms and practices in the public sphere. In declarations to the press he was unapologetic about being a politically active Sheikh ul-Islam. He stressed emphatically that he had no intention to follow in the destructive footsteps of his Unionist predecessors. He therefore rejected any suggestion that the Sheikh ul-Islam ought to be removed from the cabinet and that his office should be depoliticized. Such demands, he explained, stemmed from a faulty equation of the Sheikh ul-Islam with the spiritual leaders of the Christian churches. Mustafa Sabri intended to move in a very different direction. His first priorities were the restoration of jurisdiction over the Islamic courts to the Sheikh ul-Islam, followed by the regulation and enforcement of Islamic norms of public conduct under the auspices of the religious establishment.[52] He believed that these were necessary and urgent steps toward the undoing of reforms that had been "initiated by the former CUP government as a preliminary step toward its notorious goal of separation between religion and state."[53]

These stated goals won the new Sheikh ul-Islam wide support within the religious establishment and in Islamic circles, but they also triggered strong criticism in the Ottoman press. Some pundits revived the argument that the ulema were salaried officials of the state and as such should refrain from political activism. Others accused Mustafa Sabri and his supporters of clericalist inclinations. He was censured and mocked for allegedly attempting to establish a "medrese regime" (*medrese saltanatı*). Critics warned him not to tread down this path because the bureaucracy, military, and intelligentsia were united in opposition to his political vision. The Sheikh ul-Islam's claim that he represented a majority viewpoint did not impress his critics either. Displaying their elitist inclinations, some of them reminded him that in every society since the beginning of history the way forward was charted by the progressive vision of a small enlightened minority and not by the ignorant masses. The potential implications of such perceptions were not lost on Mustafa Sabri's allies and backers. Islamic journals such as *Sebilürreşad* therefore published articles and petitions that rejected the attacks on the Sheikh ul-Islam and threw their support behind his political agenda.[54]

The realization of Mustafa Sabri's goals hinged, however, on his ability to mobilize support in the Ottoman cabinet. The backing of his fellow ministers could not be taken for granted. Many of his political allies in the Liberal Union were neither particularly devout nor conservative. They were therefore not enthusiastic to cooperate with measures aimed at strengthening Islamic institutions and traditional norms. Considering the uncertainty about the future of the empire, some thought that in any case

such controversial issues should be put aside for the time being. Mustafa Sabri therefore had to lobby hard and pull some political muscle.

The issue of regulation of public conduct and norms was particularly controversial. Mustafa Sabri suggested that a body of Islamic scholars would prepare a bill that would specify impermissible public behaviors, such as the un-Islamic public appearance of some Muslim women, the mixing of males and females in institutions of learning and in the workforce, public alcohol consumption and violations of the fast during Ramadan, and immoral content in the press and in theaters. The Islamic Academy (*Dar'ül-Hikmet'il-İslâmiye*), which was inaugurated in 1918 as an academic institution under the auspices of the Sheikh ul-Islam, was to prepare the exact guidelines and monitor their enforcement by the state's law enforcement agencies.[55] These were of course all very contentious issues that that had already been the focus of heated debates before World War I. They came to the fore again after the end of Unionist rule in late 1918.[56] It was in fact a CUP government that pioneered the establishment of a "morality police" (*zabıta-ı ahlakiye*) during the war years, though the Unionists did not give it teeth.[57] Mustafa Sabri now wanted the Islamic Academy to define guidelines that would be strictly and assertively enforced by the government.

He was able to make some headway by late 1919. After weeks of deliberations the cabinet finally endorsed the initiative in principle in July. The decision was accompanied by a resolution to restore jurisdiction over the Islamic courts to the Sheikh ul-Islam. Instead of immediate action, however, the cabinet resolved to establish interdepartmental committees to prepare the necessary legislation for the establishment of a "morality committee" (*ahlak komisyonu*) and for the restoration of the Islamic courts to the bureaucratic purview of the religious establishment.[58] Mustafa Sabri and his supporters could not have been happy about the delays, yet they understood that these were necessary compromises for the time being. In early May 1920, the Ottoman cabinet finally proclaimed the beginning of phased restoration of the Islamic courts to the jurisdiction of the Sheikh ul-Islam. The transfer was finalized in mid-July.[59] Meanwhile, the morality committee was established in the Islamic Academy, under the auspices of the Sheikh ul-Islam. Its members monitored alleged immoral and un-Islamic conduct and informed the police, but the actual results of its activities were very disappointing for Mustafa Sabri and like-minded ulema. By 1920, however, they had lost the political clout that Mustafa Sabri had appeared to have only a year earlier, and thus could do little to ensure the implementation of his agenda.[60]

The slow-paced adoption and lackluster enforcement of Mustafa Sabri's initiatives indeed went hand in hand with a major setback in his

political fortunes. His political ascendance in early 1919 was facilitated by the combination of the ability of his party to present itself as a viable alternative to the CUP, by his senior position within his party, and by his claim to represent the interests of the ulema. All of these factors were crucial for the realization of his vision of a politically assertive religious establishment under his own leadership. By late 1919, however, each and every one of these political bases was undergoing a process of rapid erosion as a result of a number of separate but interrelated dramatic developments.

The fortunes of the Ottoman cabinet and the Liberal Union began sinking in May 1919, as a result of its anemic response to the Greek occupation of Izmir and its environs. The impotence projected from Istanbul contrasted sharply with the message of defiance and resistance emanating from many parts of Anatolia. Because the future of Muslim-Turkish sovereignty in Anatolia was at stake, many Muslims became convinced that the cabinet in Istanbul in general and the Liberal Union in particular were not up to the task. Many of them viewed the nationalist movement that was taking shape in Anatolia as more viable, if risky, for the defense of the land against hostile Greek, Armenian, and Allied territorial designs. To the chagrin of government officials in Istanbul, even many conservative ulema actively supported the resistance movement in Anatolia, or at least approved of it.[61] Mustafa Sabri was certainly not one of them. In fact, he soon distinguished himself as one of the harshest critics of Mustafa Kemal and his associates in Ankara. He became convinced that the self-styled nationalist movement was in effect a Unionist outfit in disguise. Furthermore, he believed that the loss of territorial control over parts of Anatolia, as lamentable as it might be, was preferable to a bigger state that would be Muslim in name but antireligious in essence.[62]

This radical standpoint lost him the backing of ulema and Islamic intellectuals who had supported him in early 1919 but did not share his antinationalist stance. Perhaps the most noteworthy example in this respect is the circle of prominent scholars and intellectuals associated with *Sebilürreşad*. In early 1919 the journal supported Mustafa Sabri and praised his agenda. By 1920, however, its contributors were throwing their support behind Mustafa Kemal and his associates. Like Mustafa Sabri, they too had doubts about the sociocultural orientation of the nationalist movement. Nevertheless, they believed that the struggle for Muslim sovereignty over Anatolia took precedence and necessitated support for the resistance movement, and they hoped that they might help steer the movement away from secularist and antireligious directions.[63] Subsequently they became completely alienated from Mustafa Sabri and

his political agenda—so much so that even decades later Mustafa Sabri's son would still comment bitterly and resentfully on these Islamist activists' support of the nationalists during the struggle for Anatolia.[64]

The unraveling of the informal conservative front that had once supported him coincided with another setback for Mustafa Sabri: challenges from within his own party. By late 1919, even some activists who had gone a long way with him in opposition to the CUP and who shared his enmity toward the nationalist movement nevertheless turned on him. Mustafa Sabri's troubles with his party began in May 1919 after Sadık Bey, the Liberal Union's prewar leader, returned from six years of exile. He reassumed the leadership of the party in a matter of weeks, but also aspired to the seat of the Grand Vizier, or at least an influential portfolio in the cabinet. Mustafa Sabri was reluctant to cooperate. As a result, the relationship between the two men deteriorated rapidly. Finally, in late June, Mustafa Sabri was given an ultimatum: either accept the authority of the party's leader or be excluded from its ranks. At the time, the Sheikh ul-Islam also served as acting Grand Vizier because Damad Ferid Pasha was in Europe on state business. Mustafa Sabri refused to comply with the ultimatum. Instead, he published in the press a scathing attack on Sadık Bey's political acumen and personality. A harsh response was predictable, but its particular content took Mustafa Sabri by surprise. Taking a page from the Unionist book, Sadık Bey accused the Sheikh ul-Islam of being a latter-day Cardinal Richelieu whose overambition and foolishness were leading him to strive for a regime dominated by clericalists (*klerikaller*). The ensuing mutual denigrations created an irreconcilable split that resulted in the fragmentation of the Liberal Union into two hostile factions. Their members became busy feuding with one another almost as much as they were engaged in trying to undermine the nationalists, let alone offering viable strategies to secure Muslim-Turkish sovereignty over Anatolia, Istanbul, and Eastern Thrace.[65]

The whole episode is quite revealing of the political predicament of the ulema at the time. Mustafa Sabri was attacked by his erstwhile political ally not simply as an individual but rather as an alleged representative of a clericalist archetype. His "political meddling" was presented as reflecting a historical trend among the ulema,[66] and even some of his political partners fumed that "in the twentieth century no cabinet should be dominated by [bigoted] products of the medreses [*softa*]."[67] If Mustafa Sabri expected that his peers would close ranks behind him in the face of condescending depictions of the ulema as clericalist relics of the past, he was soon disappointed. Many of them actually accused the Sheikh ul-Islam of provoking "Sadık Bey's faux pas against the ulema" and other subsequent attacks on the religious establishment. Among them

were even fellow ultraconservatives who shared Mustafa Sabri's general sociocultural outlook. Some of them censured the Sheikh ul-Islam for acting like a petty politician rather than the top religious official in the land. He thus stood accused of undermining further the already blemished reputation of the ulema. Some ulema indeed concluded that the unabashed politicization of the religious establishment by the Sheikh ul-Islam backfired and hurt the ulema rather than helped their cause and the interests of the Muslims.[68]

The accentuated political activism of Mustafa Sabri indeed proved to be a double-edged sword even within the constituency whose interests he purported to represent. When it came to politics, the ulema had been divided since at least 1912 into three main groups: Unionists, opposition activists, and apolitical folks. Unionist ulema enjoyed all kinds of perks under the CUP but became the target of purges and pressures from late 1918 on, before many of them began bouncing back as nationalists in late 1919. Opposition activists, meanwhile, suffered various kinds of retribution under the CUP but were able to take charge of the religious establishment after the end of the Great War. Many of these ulema felt that they deserved compensation for their years of unjust suffering. Their appointment to desirable positions in the religious establishment thus appeared to them to be more than justifiable, and they expected Mustafa Sabri to deliver the goods. And he did. Shortly after his appointment as Sheikh ul-Islam he appointed many of his political allies to senior positions. These appointments would not have been likely to attract much opposition if they had replaced only Unionist-sympathizers. However, in his desire to benefit his political allies, Mustafa Sabri also sacked apolitical ulema. These men did serve under the CUP but they did not support the Unionists actively. They therefore saw no justification for the privileges accorded by Mustafa Sabri to his political allies, and many of them resented what they saw as his excessive politicization of the religious establishment.[69]

Many ulema and other erstwhile supporters were therefore more than content when Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi replaced Mustafa Sabri in office in September 1919. The new Sheikh ul-Islam, returning to the post after a six-month hiatus, was socially as conservative as Mustafa Sabri, but he was an apolitical figure and therefore was viewed as less polarizing. His reappointment was generally perceived as a measure aimed at cooling down tensions within the religious establishment and keeping the Sheikh ul-Islam away from party politics. Mustafa Sabri's agenda of political activism thus suffered a severe setback. A year that had begun, for him and his supporters, with great expectations after the end of long years of Unionist rule ended with a bitter disappointment. Although

the battle was not yet over, its prospect of success became substantially slimmer by 1920. As developments beyond the control of Mustafa Sabri and his supporters began shifting the center of power from Istanbul to Ankara, their agenda was fast losing steam even within the religious establishment in the Ottoman capital.

BACKLASH AGAINST POLITICAL ACTIVISM

The political standing of the ulema was ultimately determined by the struggle for influence between Istanbul and Ankara. Partially as a result of Allied interference, attempts at rapprochement failed and the uneasy relations between the Ottoman cabinet and the nationalist movement deteriorated into an open rift by mid-1920. A series of developments that began with an Allied occupation of Istanbul and the dissolution of the last Ottoman parliament in March culminated in the establishment of an alternative government in Ankara in April. Meanwhile, in Istanbul a new cabinet with pronounced antinationalist inclinations took office again under Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha. His cabinet attacked Mustafa Kemal and his supporters in uncompromising terms. Sheikh ul-Islam Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi in fact went as far as to issue a fatwa that denounced the Ankara leadership in no uncertain terms as rebels who should be suppressed by any means. The Ankara government responded in kind. Dozens of ulema in the provinces signed onto a counterfatwa on its behalf, denouncing the Ottoman cabinet and underlining the nationalists' readiness to defend themselves, including by force if need be.[70] Ulema indeed played a part on both sides of the conflict, although not exactly in the same capacity. In Ankara they were expected to serve an ancillary role, not unlike under the CUP rule. They were seen by the nationalist leadership as more or less a supporting cast. In Istanbul, meanwhile, some of their counterparts-cum-political-antagonists continued to seek meaningful leadership roles, as had been desired by Mustafa Sabri and his allies since 1908.

Mustafa Sabri indeed continued to lead the effort to secure for the religious establishment, and himself, a meaningful say in the political decision-making process. Although he had been left out of the cabinet in April, he supported it with public speeches, editorials, and pamphlets that denounced "the Unionist bandits in Anatolia" as antireligious enemies of Islam.[71] He therefore endorsed the fatwa against the nationalists and backed the dispatch of armed forces to suppress them. In his mind, the prospect of a nationalist victory was worse than plausible territorial losses in Anatolia. Indeed, when the Allies dictated humiliating peace terms to the Ottoman government, he supported their acceptance as a necessary evil because he believed that the territorial issues should be cleared so that the suppression of the Ankara government could become more feasible. This unwavering hostility toward Mustafa Kemal and his associates was informed by his identification of the nationalist movement with the Unionists and their allegedly antireligious agenda. This determined antinationalist stance and his endorsement of the tough conditions of the Treaty of Sèvres landed Mustafa Sabri again in the seat of the Sheikh ul-Islam in late July 1920.[72]

During this second but much shorter tour of office, Mustafa Sabri invested most of his time and energy in exploring ways to reassert the authority of the Ottoman cabinet. He continued to oppose any compromise with the nationalist leadership. From his perspective, as he emphasized time and again in the years that followed, even a colonial rule like that of the British in Egypt would have been preferable to a nationalist rule that would be Muslim in name but apostate in essence.[73] He resented ulema who did not share this perspective, either because of their pro-nationalist sympathies or out of their preference for an apolitical religious establishment. He therefore orchestrated the sacking of a substantial number of them and their replacement with his political allies. These measures proved largely counterproductive. They neither endeared him to many ulema nor helped support his argument that politicization was both necessary and beneficial for the interests of Islam in general and the ulema in particular. Those who lost their jobs certainly felt otherwise. The resulting tensions within the religious establishment coincided with a fallout he had with the Grand Vizier over the most effective strategy for suppressing the Ankara government. When his more belligerent opinion was not accepted, he resigned in late September 1920, less than two months after his reappointment.[74] He had hoped to be reappointed Sheikh ul-Islam again in a new cabinet under a like-minded Grand Vizier, but the whole affair turned out to be the beginning of the end of his eventful political career. He was never again appointed to any government office. At the same time, the decline of his political fortunes also entailed the sinking of his vision of a politicized religious establishment.

The new and last Sheikh ul-Islam, Mehmed Nuri Efendi, represented a diametrically opposed vision on the involvement of ulema in politics. He typified the apolitical religious scholar par excellence. During the years of Unionist rule, he associated neither with the ruling party nor with the opposition. He viewed the political activism of his predecessor very negatively indeed. Thus, immediately upon his appointment, he reversed the many politically motivated dismissals and appointments made by Mustafa Sabri only weeks earlier. In his next two years in office, until

the resignation of the last Ottoman cabinet in November 1922, he kept away from involvement in any political controversy. He also required the same from all senior officials of the religious administration. In essence, he implemented a policy of depoliticization of the religious establishment, long before the government in Ankara extended its authority to western Anatolia and Istanbul. This backlash against the type of political activism associated with Mustafa Sabri originated from within the religious establishment and was supported by many ulema.[75]

A decade and a half of political activism thus left conflicting legacies in the religious establishment before the foundation of the republic in October 1923. Mustafa Sabri Efendi had to escape Istanbul for his life in late 1922, but his views and example continued to inspire some Islamic activists in Turkey in the decades that followed. He never backtracked on his conviction that the challenges of the modern period necessitated the political activism of the ulema and their involvement in steering the government. He continued to insist that the apolitical stance was naive and disempowering because it left the ulema and the Islamic institutions vulnerable to malicious antigovernment policies.[76] Many ulema did not share this perspective, however. Ömer Nasuhi [Bilmen], who served as the Mufti of Istanbul for almost two decades under the republic and for a short period was the head of the republican religious administration, gave expression to their views when he contended that "the duty of genuine men of religion is to pray for the welfare of the nation and the homeland and keep clear of any involvement in politics."[77] He and many of his peers became convinced that the political activism of ulema after 1908 stained the reputation of the religious establishment and made it more vulnerable to political backlashes and retributions. For some, Mustafa Sabri remained a tragic hero who failed in his struggles for a worthy cause. For others, his uncompromising ways and subsequent failures served as important lessons on the merits of moderation and compromise. These diverging views and legacies were carried into the early republic and influenced attitudes and choices made in response to the changing circumstances and difficult challenges under the new republican regime.

CHAPTER SIX

Trials of the Early Republic

The Treaty of Lausanne of July 1923 largely settled the international aspects of the conflict over Anatolia but opened a period of internal upheavals in Turkey. During the preceding years, the nationalists had concentrated on jointly confronting their common enemies and were mostly able to paper over the quite evident ideological and sociocultural differences among them. A range of viewpoints, from secularist and revolutionary on the one end to Islamist and ultraconservative on the other, found representation under their big tent. Once the struggle was determined by a string of stunning nationalist military successes in 1921 and 1922, however, differences in visions for the future of Turkey became gradually but unmistakably evident. The establishment of the republic in October 1923 and the abolition of the Caliphate in March 1924—both very controversial decisions in their own right—were thus followed by a period of struggles for political and ideological dominance in new Turkey, struggles that coincided with and were influenced by Kurdish rebellions in the southeastern regions of the new state. The period between 1923 and 1930 was characterized by varying degrees of political repression of opponents and critics of Mustafa Kemal and the republic over which he presided, and by internal contestation among the nationalists over the economic, cultural, and political orientation of Turkish nationalism and the state. A short period of transition to democracy in 1930 was followed shortly by more restrictive forms of authoritarianism and the rise to dominance of radical forms of Turkish nationalism, secularism, and statism, all considered part of an ideology that came to be known as Kemalism. This period was exhilarating for many citizens of the young republic. For many others these were miserable times with devastating consequences for the state and society.

The majority of ulema, though by no means all of them, were mostly inclined toward the latter viewpoint. Government policies during the

early years of the republic entailed the curtailing of the roles and functions of Islamic institutions, the debasement of the ulema's social and political capital, and the elimination of their political influence. At stake was not only their vision of state and society but also their livelihood. In March 1924 the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Religious Endowments was abolished and replaced with a downgraded Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*). The new state agency was placed under the direct administrative authority of the Prime Minister, and its roles and functions were substantially reduced. Meanwhile, the Islamic law courts were abolished and medrese education was shut down. Soon the application of Islamic law in the legal system was terminated altogether, followed by the demise of formal religious education and the closing down of many places of worship by the early 1930s.[1] Government pledges in 1924 to reform and revive religious learning under the auspices of the Ministry of Education notwithstanding, both the few Imam-Hatip vocational schools and the Faculty of Theology became dysfunctional by 1933. Furthermore, even during the Faculty's almost decade of operation, a fair number of its professors were products of new-style education who never attended a medrese and had no formal religious training.[2] These and quite a few additional state-led administrative and sociocultural reforms were by and large unwelcome from the perspective of the majority of ulema.

Technically, the religious establishment ceased to exist and was replaced by a more strictly bureaucratized and regulated civil administration. The roots of this bureaucratization and regularization in fact lie in late Ottoman times, but the new republican policies also broke with the past in some fundamental ways, symbolic and otherwise. For one thing, the term *ulema* itself was officially abandoned by the 1930s, and traditional articles of clothing associated with religious functionaries and scholars were either banned or restricted for use only in places of worship. For another thing, the number of officials in the republican religious administration was reduced substantially in comparison with late Ottoman times, and positions once occupied by ulema, particularly in education and law, either dwindled or were eliminated altogether. At the same time, ulema were forced to endure in silence a barrage of condescending publications on the alleged obscurantism and backwardness of the Ottoman religious establishment, as well as frequent criticism of the Ottoman ulema's ostensible transformation into a priesthood-like organization. In the decade after the establishment of the republic it indeed became quite clear that the government's policies were aimed at eroding the significance of the ulema by forcing compliance and marginalization on those employed in state service, and by silencing and peripheralizing all others.

During the war over Anatolia, Islam-based solidarity served to unite disparate ethnic groups and ideological currents within the nationalist movement. After the establishment of the republic and the abolition of the Caliphate, however, a Turkish nationalism with notable secularist overtones gradually became the basis for government policies of nation building in general and national homogenization of the diverse ethnic elements in the new republic in particular. Nevertheless, Islam continued to play an important role in defining aspects of Turkish national identity, at least on a symbolic level, alongside civic, territorial, cultural, and ethnic definitions of Turkish nationalism. Even in the 1930s, when more radical forms of secularism and nationalism became dominant and efforts were made to make religion irrelevant to the definition of national identity, nominal Islam still maintained a meaningful role as one important marker of Turkish identity.[3] The religious administration was expected and pressured to facilitate the implementation of government assimilationist, modernist, and secularist policies by rendering Islam serviceable through Turkish nationalist-colored reinterpretations of Islamic dogmas, doctrines, and customs.

The policies of the early republic left "former" ulema with difficult questions and tough choices. Particularly disconcerting for many of them was the fact that reforms related to Islamic institutions and norms appeared open-ended. The adoption of "revolutionism" (*inkılapçılık*), or Kemalist reformism, as an ideological tenet of the regime in the 1930s exacerbated further concerns about perpetual nationalist and secularist radicalization.[4] Informed by past experiences, present circumstances, and assumptions regarding plausible future trends, the ulema adopted various types of responses and attitudes toward the early republican government and its policies. Their spectrum of responses in fact ranged from full cooperation at the one end to various forms of tenacious opposition and resistance at the other. The majority, as is often the case, chose neither extreme and sought to navigate a middle course. The variation in attitudes should probably not be surprising in view of the divisions among the ulema that already existed in late Ottoman times. Yet it flies in the face of generalizing descriptions of "former" ulema as redundant, either because they were all hopelessly and helplessly opposed to the republic or, conversely, because they were almost seamlessly co-opted and controlled by the state.[5]

TAKING SIDES

The early republican governments adopted increasingly assertive and interventionist secularist policies under the rule of the Republican People's Party (RPP). The ruling party already upheld the virtues of secularism

(*sekülerizm*) from the early days of the republic. Secularist measures were debated and implemented piecemeal, and at times haphazardly, evolving gradually through the 1920s and leading to the adoption of laicism as a central tenet of Kemalism and the republic in the 1930s.[6] Throughout this period the exact definition and practical implications of the government's secularist policies, and more specifically their ramifications for Islamic institutions and religious life, have remained contested and never fully settled. When the government's secularist agenda began taking shape shortly after the establishment of the republic, its degree of assertiveness and eventual consequences could have been predicted one way or the other, but certainly could not have been foretold by the republican leadership and its supporters or by their opponents. As the state-sponsored official vision of nationalism and secularism evolved and government policies unfolded piecemeal through the 1920s, they were met with opposition, resignation, and varying degrees of support in Islamic circles.

The most enthusiastic support for the government and its policies came from circles associated with the reformist vision formerly advocated in *İslam Mecmuası*. In fact, quite a few of the religion-related reforms of the early republic followed ideas that had already been floated during the CUP rule and justified in Islamic terms in *İslam Mecmuası* and other like-minded pro-Unionist publications. Many former Unionist ulema who faced the threat of severe personal repercussions in 1918 found redemption and rehabilitation in the nationalist movement and under the early republic. Take Hüseyin Kâmil [Ertur] (1862–1944), for example. He joined the CUP in 1908 and held very senior positions in the religious establishment under Unionist rule, including a stint as the undersecretary of the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam. After the end of the Great War, however, he was purged from the religious establishment and faced threats and pressures from the Ottoman government. His situation began to improve in late 1919 after he joined the "national forces" and was elected to the last Ottoman parliament before escaping to Ankara after the occupation of Istanbul by the Allies. The fledgling government in the nationalist de facto capital appointed him to serve as a judge in one of the major provincial towns in Anatolia, where he was stationed until the establishment of the republic. In the years that followed, and until his retirement in the early 1930s, he continued to serve in various positions in the legal system and remained a dedicated supporter of the republican leadership. In his memoirs, written in 1937 but published decades later, Ertur explains his admiration of Atatürk and his achievements thus:

> Mustafa Kemal Pasha . . . cleansed our homeland from the enemies; saved it from incompetent sultans, caliphs, and traitors; neutralized the excessive influence of Arabic; and presented us with a shining new state, independence, and liberty. . . . May God help the Great Atatürk be successful for many more years in taking care of the interests of this nation and homeland.[7]

Other ulema and Islamic intellectuals thought along similar lines. Terms such as *Islamic nationalists* and, more recently, *Kemalo-Islamists*, have been suggested by scholars to denote these men's ideological and political proclivities.[8] Especially during the early years of the republic, they helped to supply and substantiate Islamic justifications for the reforms instituted by Mustafa Kemal. For instance, they described the establishment of the republic and the abolition of the Caliphate as a restoration of a genuine Islamic form of government that existed under the first four "Rightly Guided" caliphs. These revered figures in Sunni Islam were described as leaders of a republic. Each of them was duly identified as *Reis-i Cumhur*, president of the republic, the exact title accorded to Mustafa Kemal. It was the Umayyads, the traditional villains of choice for both Sunnis and Shiites, who allegedly ended this ideal Islamic form of government. Their corrupt form of Caliphate ostensibly became even worse under different dynasties in the centuries that followed, not least because of the purported concurrent process of ossification of the ulema and the corresponding stagnation of religious learning. The new regime in Turkey was presented as an effort to restore the genuine spirit of the original form of Islamic government and to eliminate the effects of centuries of corruption and backwardness.[9] In some cases, Mustafa Kemal has even been cast either directly or by implication as a savior figure in the mold of the Prophet Muhammad himself.[10]

These and similar ideas were imparted to a new generation of children of the republic in the state schools until at least the mid-1930s. Take, for example, elementary school textbooks written by Abdülbaki [*Gölpınarlı*] in the late 1920s. The future university professor, leading academic expert on Sufism, and Mevlevi sheikh in his own right, was at the time a doctoral student and an elementary school teacher in Istanbul.[11] The textbooks he authored for grades 3 to 5 communicate in a very simplified form the prevailing educational agenda of the republican leadership. The pupils are informed time and again in the books that the policies of the republican government follow the example set by the Prophet Muhammad and are comparable to his actions. For example, they are informed that Mustafa Kemal had to confront and overcome his opponents exactly as the Prophet had to prevail over his many enemies. Both in new Turkey and in early Islam all types of "bigots and religious phonies" sought to withhold the progress of the nation because of their particular group interests. But Mustafa Kemal succeeded because he followed the path of the Prophet Muhammad and adopted the conduct of his four

righteous successors, the "Rightly Guided" caliphs. In another instance, the young students are instructed that it was the Prophet of Islam who was the first to decree the separation between religious and temporal authorities, an assertion based on a *hadith* tradition. Subsequently, his four immediate successors were each elected to serve as president of the republic. The students were informed that the new Republic of Turkey in fact endeavored to restore this pristine Islamic government and the genuine religion of God as taught by the Prophet. With this purpose in mind, the government initiated many reforms, and emasculated "bigots" and reactionaries who pretended to be religious scholars. In place of this harmful bunch, the republic elevated religious scholars (*hocas*), who were not ignorant, who actually "worked for the benefit of the nation," and who "spoke to us in our own language." The children were therefore instructed to rejoice in their good fortune to grow up under the republic rather than under the backward and baneful regime that had preceded it.[12] Similar messages, if somewhat less simplified, were disseminated at least until the early 1930s at all levels of the state's educational system.

The republican leadership valued the backing of religious scholars who endorsed its policies in Islamic terms, or at least helped undermine claims that it was antireligious. These men were hailed as the enlightened few among the late Ottoman ulema and could expect various perks. Şerafeddin [Yaltkaya] (1879–1947) is the example *par excellence* of reformist ulema turned Kemalists. During the CUP rule, he taught in the reformed medreses and published many articles in which he advocated comprehensive changes in Islamic theology.[13] After the establishment of the republic, his modernist reputation landed him senior academic and administrative positions. In 1924 he was appointed to the newly established Faculty of Theology in Istanbul. After it was closed down in 1933, many of his former colleagues lost their teaching positions, but he was awarded a professorship in the reorganized university. He was considered one of the most reliable allies of the RPP in Islamic circles. Fittingly, when Mustafa Kemal passed away in Istanbul in November 1938, it was Şerafeddin Yaltkaya who was summoned to lead the prayers in the private funeral ceremony for the founder of the republic.[14] He maintained a close relationship with the administration of İsmet İnönü, Atatürk's successor, which led in 1942 to his appointment as head of the religious administration, a position he held until his death five years later. During the early decades of the republic he became the embodiment of ulema who were committed to full cooperation with the government and its secularist and nationalist agenda. Other like-minded religious functionaries similarly defended the early republican regime and its policies and motives, denouncing the "wretched people" who dared question Mustafa Kemal's genuine sentiments for Islam, and emphasizing that "Atatürk was never indifferent to religion and only attacked those who exploited religion [for their personal benefit]."[15]

Critics of the government and its reforms were meanwhile denigrated as reactionary and antipatriotic traitors. Public dissent met with severe reprisals, from prevention of employment to banishment, imprisonment, or even execution in some cases. In 1925, for instance, dozens of ulema and Sufi sheikhs were apprehended and put on trial for treason at a time when the government faced internal dissents and a major Kurdish rebellion in the southeast regions. Some defendants were imprisoned and others were executed. The government thus sent a clear message that anyone who dared challenge or criticize it would face severe repercussions. The ruling RPP suppressed any political dissent from 1925 to 1945, save for a short hiatus in 1930. The ruling party was particularly bent on quashing any religion-inspired or Islam-based opposition. Every instance of religiously motivated protest or violent opposition—and there were a handful of these in the 1920s and 1930s—was lambasted as a manifestation of religious fanaticism and dealt with very harshly by the security forces.[16] In these circumstances, public expression of outright Islamic-based antigovernment views was hardly possible in Turkey.

There were far fewer inhibitions abroad, where Mustafa Sabri became the primary exponent of uncompromising Islamic opposition to the republic during its early years. Fleeing from Istanbul in late 1922 just before the nationalist takeover, the former Sheikh ul-Islam spent years in Egypt, The Hejaz, Lebanon, Italy, and Romania before settling in Greek Western Thrace in 1927. During these five years of exile he published a book and several articles in Arabic and Turkish in which he lambasted the allegedly anti-Islamic regime in Ankara.[17] The republican government also suspected that he was engaged in subversive activities. In 1925, a number of well-known ulema and Islamic intellectuals were accused of belonging to a secret revolutionary order that Mustafa Sabri allegedly established and led. Some of them, including Ahmed Akseki, a future head of the *Diyanet*, were eventually acquitted after weeks of incarceration; others were found guilty and were either imprisoned or executed.[18] In his new base in Greek Western Thrace, a heavily Muslim-populated region on the other side of the Turkish border, Mustafa Sabri published a new Turkish-language periodical named *Yarın* (Tomorrow), which targeted Muslim audiences in the Balkans but was also smuggled into Turkey despite an official ban by the Ankara government.[19]

Mustafa Sabri gave voice to ultraconservatives who not only resented the secularist policies of the early republic but also rejected its embrace of Turkish nationalism. In a period in which nationalist ideologies were

making significant inroads throughout the Islamic world, the former Sheikh ul-Islam lamented that the Turks held on to their language and ethnic identity after their conversion to Islam in the early Middle Ages. In his view, it would have been much better had the Turks and all other non-Arab Muslims undergone a process of Arabization (*Araplaşma*). If that had been the case, no one would have been able to attempt to drive a wedge between their religious and ethnic identities and manipulate their diverse language and ethnocultural characteristics in order to distance them from Islam. The former Sheikh ul-Islam argued that the "apostate" republic indeed "was bent on annihilating and destroying" the Islamic institutions and their personnel. He therefore denounced the "spiritual baseness" of "phony ulema" who were willing to serve in the atheist religious administration (*dinsiz Diyanet*) of such an allegedly anti-Islamic regime. He called on the people of Turkey to disregard the preaching of such "mindless ulema" and "covert enemies of Islam" who back a regime that "trampled on the religion of Islam and violently silenced the [genuine] ulema." Going against the grain, he therefore declared his "resignation" from the Turkish nation and emphasized that he was opting for his Muslim identity instead of his ethnic affiliation.[20] This was an extraordinary message indeed in a period that was witnessing a rapid rise in ethnicity-based nationalisms throughout the Islamic world. Mustafa Sabri Efendi even went as far as suggesting that a European colonialist occupation of Anatolia would have been preferable to the Kemalist rule.[21]

Mustafa Sabri stood behind his antinationalist stance, solidifying the admiration of some in Turkey and the derision of many others. In the early 1930s he was forced to relocate again, following a thaw in the relations between Ankara and Athens. He moved to Egypt and resolved to continue from there what he termed his "intellectual-religious campaign" (*al-jihad al-'ilmi al-dini*), which he described as a mere continuation of his earlier political crusade (*al-jihad al-siyasi*) by other means.[22] Although in 1938 he was given an opportunity to seek amnesty and return to Turkey, he never did, unlike some of his erstwhile political allies and fellow exiles. Until his death in 1954 he remained convinced that what he termed "the atheist Kemalist regime" was the greatest calamity to have befallen the Turks. He remained a pariah in official Turkey but was held in great esteem by some Islamic circles in Turkey. Thus, when the republic underwent a process of democratization after World War II, a number of Turkish students traveled to Egypt to meet Mustafa Sabri and benefit from his guidance and learning. His writings and teachings continued to be disseminated clandestinely among his admirers in Turkey in the decades that followed. As legal prohibitions have gradually been lifted since the 1970s, almost all of his works have been translated and republished in accessible modern Turkish and have become readily available in Islamic bookstores and at online booksellers.[23]

In the early decades of the republic, however, upholders of similarly uncompromising hostile attitudes toward the early republican regime could not go public. Facing government repression, they were compelled to act with caution and subtlety. For the most part, the Islamic opposition to the regime retreated to clandestine loci of operation such as illicit Sufi networks, private gatherings, small neighborhood mosques, and so on.[24] Away from the public sphere and the gaze of the authorities, some conservative ulema continued rearing students and inoculating them with traditional religious dogmas and doctrines that often ran counter to the official policies of the state. Such risky activities took place primarily in provincial towns and villages, away from the prying eyes of government agencies. Despite occasional harassment by the authorities, some informal medreses thus continued to operate, teaching Islamic sciences and the Arabic language to a new generation that came of age under the republic.[25] Despite government pressures they were able to cultivate a new generation of students who were imbued with traditional forms of religious studies and knowledge. Their number was small in comparison with Ottoman times, and the difficulties they faced were daunting. Yet, despite their marginalization and many setbacks, they ultimately were able to defy efforts to render them completely irrelevant and to turn redundant the traditional Islamic sciences, norms, and practices associated with them.

The great majority of "former" ulema neither enthusiastically supported the regime and its policies nor were diehard opponents unwilling to offer any cooperation. Instead they opted for middle-of-the-road approaches that entailed various levels of qualified cooperation and low-intensity resistance. Many were employed by the government, either in the religious administration or in other state agencies. As such, and under the political circumstances of the time, they could not blatantly oppose government policies. Nevertheless, oftentimes even government employees were left with some room for maneuverability to engage in subtler forms of resistance against certain policy goals. The extent and level of their cooperation and compliance with the state, or resistance to its directives, of course varied from one individual to another. In general, however, the choice made by many ulema and Islamic intellectuals was for pragmatic engagement with the republic rather than either enthusiastic support or outright hostility and disengagement. Practical considerations informed the choice of qualified cooperation by many, despite serious and widespread concern about the government's policy goals and

agenda. Employment and personal security were certainly important factors. Not less important, however, were pragmatic conclusions drawn from experiences under Unionist rule. Many ulema came to believe that outright opposition to the CUP helped to empower antireligious circles and triggered increasingly radicalized backlashes. The situation under the republic appeared to be similar, with each case of religion-rooted opposition prompting more suppressive policies. In these circumstances, mitigation of the effects of the excesses and radicalism of the republican leadership from within the system appeared to many ulema to be a more viable option than fruitless and dangerous outright opposition. Qualified cooperation appeared as the lesser of evils in comparison with taking sides, either in unmitigated support or in uncompromising opposition to the government. Association with a government that was suspected by many ulema of harboring antireligious sentiments was hard to swallow at times, but a long tradition of integration in the state apparatus and acceptance of the state authority by Ottoman ulema, and many earlier examples of political quietism in Sunni Islam, may have helped make it more bearable.

Ahmed Hamdi Akseki embodied, more than any other religious official, the middle-of-the-road approach. He was a well-respected religious scholar who under Unionist rule gained some renown among the reform-minded ulema. Later, during the struggle over Anatolia, he relocated to Ankara and was appointed commissioner of medrese education under the nascent nationalist government. He maintained this post until the abolition of medrese education in 1924. Worse still, a year later he was arrested along with dozens of other ulema on suspicion of membership in a secret antigovernment society that was ostensibly led by Mustafa Sabri Efendi. He spent about forty days in jail before he was cleared of all charges and released. Only a few months later he took employment as a senior official in the religious administration, remaining in government service until his death in 1951. His decades in government service witnessed the implementation of the most interventionist secularist policies in the history of the republic. He and other senior officials in the *Diyanet* privately disapproved of quite a few of them. He continued to serve in government nevertheless, seeking to balance his contribution to the legitimization of government policies that he did not approve of with efforts to use his insider position to promote an Islamic agenda within the inhospitable political environment of the early republic.[26]

Ahmed Akseki published dozens of articles and books that sought to re-present the fundamentals of Islam in a moderately modernist form that would be sufficiently "enlightened" for the tastes of the Kemalist leadership but not stray too radically from the mainstream of long-

standing Sunni interpretations. Akseki's contributions, as well as his assistance in the publication of writings by other like-minded scholars, became particularly important after the transition to a new alphabet in 1928. The abandonment of the Arabic-based Ottoman script and the implementation of language reforms in the years that followed threatened to doom much of the Ottoman religious literature to oblivion. Akseki and like-minded scholars worked to prevent this from happening. In the early 1940s, for instance, he contributed articles to an "Islamic" encyclopedia. The project was conceived in response to the government-sponsored translation into Turkish of the "Encyclopaedia of Islam," the crown jewel of Western Orientalism of the time.[27] Indeed, despite his long years of service in government and his general cooperativeness, Akseki was unwilling to endorse government-led reforms that he judged to be excessively radical in their departure from established Islamic dogmas, practices, and norms.[28]

Opting for qualified cooperation was bound to earn Akseki, and many other former ulema who acted likewise, mixed reviews. Some uncompromising Islamic opponents of the RPP described their middle-of-the-road approach as nothing short of collaboration with an antireligious government. Some Kemalists, meanwhile, criticized Akseki and like-minded ulema of excessively conservative leanings that hampered the implementation of essential religious reforms. For a fair number of his colleagues, however, Akseki was an admirable scholar who did all he could to mitigate the negative effects of the government's overbearing and interventionist secularist policies during a difficult time of an authoritarian one-party regime—a period in which assertive secularism had transitioned from a possible but not particularly likely future ideological direction in late Ottoman times to unrivaled ideological dominance by the 1930s.[29] In these circumstances, Akseki and many other ulema believed that their service in the state administration gave them at least some chance to mitigate the harmful effects of the seemingly ever-mounting challenges to the future of religious life in Turkey. Where authorized, former ulema taught students in government-sanctioned Qur'an courses. In many more cases, ulema also continued nurturing students informally in small mosques, offices, and workshops, or even in their private residences.[30]

The times were trying indeed from the perspective of many religiously devout citizens of the republic. This was a period in which a book entitled "Is Religion Dying?" could be published, and capture the fears and expectations of many. These were years of radicalized nationalism in which an author wrote a book entitled "National Religious Sentiment and Genuine Turkish Religion" in which he essentially argued for the

institution of a national creed in place of Islam.[31] Coming on the backdrop of the downsizing of the religious administration, the closing down of many Islamic institutions, and the curtailment of some traditional religious practices and norms, these publications appeared to represent a plausible future trend. Men like Ahmed Akseki often found their cooperation with the republic and their compliance with its policies to be difficult and at times even torturing, yet they believed it was necessary in order to prevent even worse excesses. From their perspective, qualified cooperation promised better chances of maintaining the relevance of the religious administration and Islamic institutions than either fawning collaboration or uncompromising opposition. Those who took the former approach were bound to be regarded lightly because they were yes-men whose support could be taken for granted, while those who took the latter stance were cut away from any influence on decision making. They therefore believed that their choice of qualified cooperation was the lesser of evils, during a period in which the general direction of the government's policies became increasingly evident but their final destination remained highly ambiguous, and a time when all kinds of worrying reports about challenges to Muslim religious life were arriving from throughout the Islamic world and in particular from the atheist Soviet Union.[32] The viability of this approach was tested most dramatically on highly controversial initiatives to increase the use of the Turkish language in religious life.

A QUESTION OF TRANSLATION

The feasibility and desirability of the translation of key Islamic texts, including the Qur'an, had been a topic of heated controversy since late Ottoman times. Reformist ulema and Islamic intellectuals argued that the Word of God and other foundational texts and important commentaries should be made accessible and comprehensible to each and every believer. They mostly envisioned these translations as auxiliaries to the original Arabic texts, for educational purposes only. Many conservative ulema disapproved of such endeavors, albeit mostly not because of opposition in principle. Instead, they were primarily concerned about possible misuse of the translated texts. Some conservative ulema were most particularly suspicious about calls for the translation of the Qur'an into vernaculars, not least because the original might be mistranslated in order to mislead Muslims to embrace new religious perceptions and interpretations, and perhaps even worse, might be used in worship instead of the original Arabic text. Such concerns were not completely

imagined. Some Turkish nationalists indeed believed that translations of the Qur'an and other key Islamic texts could and should replace the original Arabic texts in every aspect of religious life. They viewed this as a necessary component in efforts to assimilate all the Muslim citizens of the republic, strengthen their Turkish national identity and mutual bonds, and delineate the boundaries between the Turkish nation and other Muslim-majority peoples and ethnic groups. A spectrum of opinions ranging from advocating complete transition to translated texts at the one end and strict upholding of the status quo on the other end left much room for maneuvering and contestation in between.

There were longtime historical precedents for the translation of the Qur'an, Qur'anic commentaries, and other key Islamic texts into Turkish. In a few rare cases, from long before the Ottoman period, such texts were employed as equivalent substitutes for the original Arabic texts. For the most part, however, and certainly in Ottoman times, they were used as ancillaries for explanatory purposes only. In 1836, for instance, an American missionary reported that he had "noticed a writer who was preparing a koran [sic] with the signification of the Arabic words written underneath each word in Turkish." Such interlinear translations of the Qur'an are traceable back to Turkish-speaking Muslim societies in Central Asia around the year 1000. They were quite common in the Ottoman lands and continued to be produced in considerable numbers up to the nineteenth century.[33] Interestingly, after remarking on this traditional form of translation, the American missionary added that although "no [independent] translation of the koran [sic] exists in Turkish, . . . some of their liberal men have talked of preparing one."[34] Whether such an issue was at all on the agenda in the 1830s is debatable. Be that as it may, in the decades that followed, a much more important development was the increasing encroachment of the printing press into a field formerly dominated by handwritten texts. Some old translations of commentaries or parts of the Qur'an were republished in print in many more copies than had ever been available before. By the late nineteenth century, older translations and their antiquated language were supplemented and increasingly replaced by new translations that were accessible to wider audiences. For the most part, however, these were only partial translations, mostly in the form of commentaries. Although in the 1870s some intellectuals had already begun advocating the publication of complete translations of the Qur'an, none were actually produced and the topic was barred from discussion once the Hamidian regime became increasingly authoritarian and restrictive in the 1880s. Public advocacy of the translation of the Qur'an into Turkish was thereafter mostly limited to opposition publications abroad.[35]

The Young Turk Revolution eliminated the curbs on public discussion of the merits of translation into Turkish of Islamic texts in general and the Qur'an in particular. In 1910, for instance, Ubeydullah Efendi proclaimed during a sermon in the Ayasofya Mosque, that "there can be no reasonable objection to translating the Quran into Turkish. . . . It should be printed in Turkish for the sake of the Turks," because "divine revelation can make no discrimination between Arabic and Turkish."[36] These were views that before the revolution he could and did express only in the safety of exile in Egypt. Now, as a member of parliament and a Unionist ally, his message reverberated in the greatest imperial mosque of the capital city and was reproduced in the local and foreign press. Advocates of a Turkish Qur'an mostly did not claim that it should serve as a substitute for the original Arabic text. Nevertheless, some hinted that this should indeed be the goal, a stance most famously explicated by Ziya Gökalp in a famous poem he penned in 1918.[37] Conservative opponents of the translation of the Qur'an were primarily concerned with this issue. They argued that any translation should be limited to Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*) for both practical and theological reasons, largely in order to hinder any possibility of substituting a Turkish Qur'an for the original Arabic text. During Unionist rule they had their way. Considering the highly controversial and politically risky nature of the issue, the few efforts to publish a complete Turkish translation of the Qur'an were suppressed by the authorities.[38]

Debates on the potential merits and possible drawbacks of translation resumed during the years of struggle over Anatolia and after the establishment of the republic. Some intellectuals and private entrepreneurs in fact undertook to independently and privately produce and publish complete translations of the Qur'an. Three of these came out in print in 1924, on the heels of the declaration of the republic and the abolition of the Caliphate. None of their translators could claim expertise in Islamic sciences or even affiliation with the religious establishment, and all three versions were touted as literal translations rather than as synopses or commentaries. One translator, Cemil Said [Dikel], was in fact proven to have based his translation largely on an earlier French translation of the Qur'an rather than on the original Arabic text. He was also the boldest of the three in actually entitling his work "The Noble Qur'an in Turkish" (*Türkçe Kur'an-ı Kerim*). Nevertheless, all three translations immediately faced sharp criticism in the Islamic press and from senior officials of the newly established *Diyanet*. They took the authors to task on everything from the accuracy and literary value of the texts themselves to the amateurish and unqualified gall of the authors in undertaking such a momentous task of historical proportions.[39]

In a break from the past, however, the *Diyanet* embraced in principle the calls for translation of the Qur'an and other key Islamic texts into Turkish. Rifat Börekçi, the former long-serving Mufti of Ankara and the first head of the *Diyanet* (from 1924–1941), declared in 1924 that he and his colleagues "are of the opinion that a complete Turkish translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'an are necessary. We think that such a translation and commentary will be very auspicious and useful for our nation." He emphasized, however, that such an authoritative translation should be a masterpiece of beautiful and accurate prose, and at the same time never pertain to replace the original Arabic text as a scripture. This was a position that was generally shared by reform-minded ulema and Islamic journals such as *Sebilürreşad*.[40] On this backdrop, the Grand National Assembly accepted, in late February 1925, with the approval of Prime Minister Ali Fethi [Okyar], "a motion for the appointment of a committee of experts for the translation into Turkish of the Koran and other Islamic works."[41]

The new official translation initiative was set in motion just as major political changes were about to take place in Turkey. The flaring up of a large-scale Kurdish rebellion in the southeastern provinces served as the backdrop for the appointment of the more radical and authoritarian-inclined İsmet [İnönü] as Prime Minister, the suppression of opposition publications, and the establishment of an authoritarian one-party regime in 1925. The translation project remained on track nevertheless. With the backing of the *Diyanet* and the earmarking of funds by parliament, a group of noteworthy religious scholars who held no official state position set out in early 1926 to produce the desired translations.[42] Mehmed Âkif [Ersoy], noted poet and Islamic intellectual, took upon himself to produce the translation of the Qur'an; renowned religious scholar Muhammed Hamdi [Yazır], was tasked with writing the first modern and yet tradition-grounded Qur'an commentary in Turkish; and Ahmed Naim, a well-known pedagogue and Islamic intellectual, took upon himself the translation of al-Bukhari's hadith collection. All their compilations were to be published in conjunction with the *Diyanet* and under the auspices of the republican government.[43] Mehmed Âkif's Qur'an translation was supposed to be the crown jewel of the translation project. In an interview with a correspondent of the *New York Times* in 1926, the head of the *Diyanet* indeed reportedly "referred with pride to the forthcoming translation of the Koran from Arabic into Turkish—the first official translation of the sacred book, which is expected to play a role in Islamic history only a little less sensational than that played by the Lutheran Bible in the history of the Church." Rifat Börekçi made sure to add, however, that "prayers are to retain their original Arabic form."[44]

All sides to the debate couched their arguments in Islamic terms but often also invoked lessons from the history of Christianity. Supporters of comprehensive reforms in Islam often suggested that the Islamic world needed a Protestant-like reformation in order to regenerate and maintain its viability in the modern world. The translation of the Bible into vernaculars and the eventual substitution of the vernacular versions for the Latin text were often seen as prerequisites for the Protestant Reformation and essential factors for its success. This narrative, which had been advanced by Western intellectuals, diplomats, statesmen, and missionaries since at least the early nineteenth century, was accepted by many in the Ottoman intelligentsia by the end of World War I. By the same token, some supporters of comprehensive, Reformation-like religious reforms in Islam therefore advocated the substitution of Turkish for Arabic in all aspects of religious life.[45] Conservative opponents of radical religious reforms meanwhile drew the exact opposite conclusion from the Protestant example. Mustafa Sabri, for instance, cautioned that the Protestant reformation had in fact had adverse effects on the Christian World in that the introduction of vernacular versions of the Bible was instrumental in sowing division within Christendom and facilitating the spread of antireligious norms and practices. From the safety of exile abroad he warned that "the heretics of Ankara" were plotting a similar outcome by sponsoring the translation of the Qur'an into Turkish, as one more step in "their plan to annihilate whatever is still left of Islam in Turkey."[46] He and like-minded diehard opponents of the early republic were adamant that no respectable and God-fearing religious scholar or devout intellectual should assist the state-sponsored translation project, if nothing else because its ultimate goal was to replace the original Arabic Qur'an.[47]

Mehmed Âkif and his friends, including senior *Diyanet* officials such as Ahmed Akseki, shared some of these concerns but they reached different conclusions. They saw a number of advantages in their participation in the translation project. For one thing, they actually believed that authoritative translations of key Islamic texts were necessary in an age of expanding public education and rising literacy rates. Without such quality translations, educated Turks who did not know Arabic might have to rely on European translations, or might simply lose interest in familiarizing themselves with the Islamic texts. For another thing, they were aware that influential circles in the republican elite were determined to encourage the translation of the Qur'an and key Islamic texts anyhow, and they thus preferred to be the ones in charge of the undertaking rather than unqualified and untrustworthy translators. The publication of the three private Qur'an translations in 1924 served as a wake-up call in this respect. Indeed, once the resolution to sponsor official translations was approved by parliament, the authorities in fact prohibited any private translation initiatives.

The republican leadership had its own reasons for endorsing the assignment of the state-sponsored translation project to a group of known skeptics of its secularist policies. Since the Young Turk Revolution, Mehmed Âkif, Muhammed Hamdi Efendi, and their colleagues had built themselves a reputation for both piety and scholarly merit. Such men could lend a level of credibility and legitimacy to the translations that men closely associated with the RPP could not. Mustafa Kemal and other republican leaders were quite explicit in the 1920s about their support for increasing use of Turkish in religious life in general and for the translation of the Qur'an in particular. Their position on the controversial question of whether a Turkish translation of the Qur'an could be used in worship remained vague.[48] The enlisting of men not known as ardent government supporters but famous for their devoutness and erudition had a better chance of laying to rest all kinds of rumors about the dependability of the translations. From the outset this was an awkward relationship, which was facilitated by senior *Diyanet* officials such as Ahmed Akseki who were both part of the government and personal friends of the men behind the translation project.

The state-sponsored initiative bore early fruit by 1928, even as the intensification of the government's secularist policies was putting new strains on the uneasy cooperation. In 1927 the *Diyanet* published a compilation of fifty-one Friday sermons (*khutbahs* or *hutbeler*) in Turkish, written by Ahmed Akseki for use in mosques throughout Turkey. Mustafa Kemal had advocated such a reform publicly since the early days of the republic.[49] To prevent any undue fears or misplaced hopes, however, Akseki took the trouble to emphasize in the introduction to the compilation that all aspects of the ritual prayer and worship would have to continue to be in Arabic.[50] The translation project was also moving apace. By 1928, Ahmed Naim was able to complete and bring out in print the second volume of his translations of al-Bukhari's massive hadith collection.[51] Meanwhile, Mehmed Âkif and Muhammed Hamdi were busy working on their translations of the Qur'an and the compilation of a Turkish-language Qur'anic commentary, respectively. Akseki's and Naim's works were published in the Arabic-based Ottoman alphabet, and their colleagues' works in progress were expected to follow suit. This all changed with the introduction of the alphabet reform in 1928 and language reforms in the years that followed. As a result of these policies, the Arabic-based alphabet was soon replaced by a new Latin-based Turkish alphabet, Arabic and Persian were dropped from the curricula of the state schools, and "foreign" Arabic-rooted and Persian-based

vocabulary were purged and replaced by "pure Turkish" neologisms.[52] Meanwhile, the definition of Islam as the official religion of the republic was dropped from the constitution in 1928.

The translators were now more keenly concerned with the future of Islam in Turkey in general and with the potential role of their works in it in particular. The change of alphabet and efforts to "purify" the Turkish language jeopardized the access of future generations to Ottoman and Arabic religious literature in general, and to key Islamic texts in particular. In these circumstances the translators faced a dilemma. On the one hand, the publication of their translations in the new alphabet and based on officially sanctioned vocabulary would render key Islamic texts accessible for years to come. On the other hand, the texts themselves and the precedents they would set might be hijacked by the republican leadership to promote policy goals not necessarily shared by the translators. For the most part, they decided that the potential benefits outweighed the inherent risks. Ahmed Naim's translation of al-Bukhari's hadith collection thus continued as planned until his death in 1934, and then was continued to completion by Kâmil Miras. Muhammed Hamdi meanwhile pursued his work on his Qur'an commentary. Both of these important works were published in full in the new alphabet by 1940. In the case of the translation of the Qur'an, however, Mehmed Âkif eventually concluded that the danger of misuse was too great. Whether he ever completed his translation in full or only in part is not fully clear. It is certain, however, that he withdrew his participation in the project and eventually ordered the manuscript burned shortly before his death in 1936. This must have been a great disappointment for the republican leadership. In early March 1930, Mustafa Kemal himself reportedly told a foreign interviewer that he was "now having the Koran issued for the first time in Turkish," presumably referring to Mehmed Âkif's work in progress.[53] Ultimately, the devout poet's concern that the government might dictate the adoption of his translation instead of the original Arabic text in all aspects of religious life overrode his desire to make the Qur'anic text more accessible to future generations of Turkish speakers.[54]

By the early 1930s, similar concerns were shared by many other conservatives, including participants in the translation project. Muhammed Hamdi Yazır in fact tackled the issue head on in the introduction to his exegesis, which included translations of the Qur'anic text. Despite official pressure not to broach the topic, he emphasized in no uncertain terms that the "Qur'an is an Arabic text" that cannot under any circumstances be translated and presented as a "Turkish Qur'an." He insisted that a Turkish version could only paraphrase and help illuminate the original but never substitute for it in worship, ritual, or serious study.

He went on to criticize the merits of the Qur'an translations produced in 1924, questioning the motives of their authors and warning that they willfully or unwittingly go down the path of confusing and misleading believers. To make sure that his own text and translations would not be misused, he left many Qur'anic verses untranslated and written in Arabic, and interlaced the parts he did translate with long passages of commentary. This format and his use of difficult vocabulary and complex syntax prevented any use of his work beyond its intended scholarly purpose.[55] Ahmed Akseki and many other senior officials in the *Diyanet* were satisfied with this result. They too shared Yazır's convictions and concerns. Although they had initially been supportive of Mehmed Âkif's commission to translate the Qur'an, by the early 1930s they had lost their appetite for the project because of increasingly credible fears that it might be touted by the government as an alternative to the original Qur'an. From this perspective, Yazır's exegesis was an acceptable alternative to a complete translation because it included Turkish renditions of the meaning of almost every verse in the Qur'an, but there was no prospect that it could be used to replace the original Arabic text.

At this point, the cooperation between the conservatives and the republican leadership ended, which led to very different assessments of the state-sponsored translation project. Ahmed Akseki and his conservative associates within and without the *Diyanet* were generally content with the outcome. Kemalist advocates of the "Turkification" of religious life were much less satisfied. From the former's perspective, the publication of key Islamic texts in the new Turkish alphabet helped establish a bridge between modern Turkey and its Islamic-Ottoman past during a difficult period of immense challenges to religious life and scholarship in the republic. Yazır's exegesis, for instance, was admired in Islamic circles for its scholarly merit and important contribution to the continuation in the republic of the tradition of late Ottoman religious scholarship. It was for exactly this reason that some Kemalists sneered at his achievement, which they saw as excessively conservative and outdated.[56] Worse still from their perspective was the fact that the publication of an official translation of the Qur'an never materialized. If in 1926, when Mehmed Âkif himself took on the project, there was some concern in Islamic circles that the Kemalists might exploit him for their own purposes, when he died a decade later without producing the desired text it was many of the latter who felt frustrated and manipulated. A number of Kemalist intellectuals eventually took it upon themselves to produce a translation of the Qur'an. None of these works saw light before the 1950s, which was long after the end of the period of breath-taking secularist reforms of the early republic.

PRIVATE INITIATIVES FOR MODERNIZATION AND "TURKIFICATION" OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS

But why would there be suspicions in Islamic circles about the government's motives in supporting the translation of the Qur'an? After all, neither any cabinet minister nor Mustafa Kemal ever expressed publicly any intention to substitute a "Turkish Qur'an" for the original Arabic text. Yet the perception that this was their intention existed nevertheless by the early 1930s, among many supporters and opponents alike. The answer has to be sought in the general atmosphere of increasingly assertive and intrusive nationalist and secularist policies of the 1930s, and in the cumulative weight of experiences gained under Unionist rule and in the early years of the republic. The second decade of the republic saw government-led initiatives to replace "foreign" influences with "pure Turkish" cultural markers in all aspects of the state and society. In a pattern continued from late Ottoman times, private initiatives that were initially not owned by the authorities often served as a trigger or even a foundation for radical reforms. The agenda of "Turkification" of religious life appeared to be following this familiar trajectory during the early years of the republic.

The common pattern of government-led religious policies and reforms since 1908 went more or less as follows: First, commentators associated with the ruling party would publish in the press suggestions for comprehensive changes in some aspects of religious life or Islamic institutions and urge the government to adopt them as an official policy. Second, the propositions would trigger controversy and public debate in the press and in private social settings, gaining the reform proposals broad exposure. Third, government agencies would step in to cool tempers, often by issuing denials of any intention to implement the proposed far-reaching changes. Fourth, after some time in which the reform proposals would nevertheless win traction in the bureaucracy and intelligentsia, they would be implemented at a politically opportune juncture. Conservatives and Islamists were well aware of this pattern, with some seeking to make sense of it in conspiratorial terms. For that reason, when pro-government commentators published suggestions for radical religious reforms in the heavily censored press of the mid-1920s their articles were taken seriously as a sign of possible things to come.

Take for instance the question of the language of prayer and ritual. A wave of articles in support of the transition to Turkish appeared in the press in 1925, even as the government was clamping down on freedom of speech and expression.[57] Advocates of transition to the vernacular in every aspect of religious life couched their proposals in Turkish nationalist terms, but they often also pointed out Islamic justifications. Most

conspicuously, they referenced views attributed to Abu Hanifa (699–767), the eponymous founder of the predominant Sunni school of Islamic law in Turkey. He is reputed to have authorized, under certain conditions, the recitation of ritual prayers in Persian translation rather than the original Arabic. Supporters of the transition to Turkish renditions of Islamic rituals and texts argued that his authoritative opinion in effect legitimized the switch from "foreign" Arabic texts, incomprehensible to most Turkish Muslims, to understandable translations. They brushed aside as ultraconservative, narrow-minded, and obscurantist conservative rebuttals of this interpretation of the standpoint of Abu Hanifa and his students and followers.[58]

A few months after the wave of publications in 1925, words were followed by deed. In March 1926, one of the backers of "Turkification" of all aspects of religious life decided to take matters into his own hands and force the issue on the public and the government. His name was Mehmed Cemaleddin [Seven] (1876–1964). He was a former medrese professor who served as the imam of the mosque of Göztepe, a suburb of Istanbul. He was thus in a position to practice what he and other pundits preached in the press in 1925. During the first Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, after delivering the sermon in Turkish, as was slowly beginning to become the norm, he went on to also lead the ritual prayer in Turkish rather than in Arabic. He apparently made use of his own translation of the relevant text. Reportedly some congregants voiced their displeasure with this unexpected innovation, which many must have found shocking and even sacrilegious, but there was no violence or any major public disorder as a result. News of the deed spread far and wide in a matter of a few days, first in confidential official reports and by word of mouth and then in the press of Ankara and Istanbul.

Outraged critics complained to the *Diyanet* and demanded his dismissal, even as exhilarated supporters backed the precedence he appeared to set. Major newspapers carried generally favorable reports and editorials about the novelty, and the "reformist imam" was commended by well-known journalists and intellectuals. The leadership of the *Diyanet* did not share this enthusiasm. Mehmed Cemaleddin was shortly dismissed from his position and soon removed from the religious administration altogether. Rifat Börekçi, head of the *Diyanet*, defended his dismissal on both administrative and religious grounds. Börekçi contended that, for one thing, Mehmed Cemaleddin should have sought pre-approval from his superiors in the *Diyanet*, and for another thing, he should have known that the language of prayer could never be changed from its original Arabic text. Mehmed Cemaleddin may have lost his job as a result of this uncompromising opposition to his actions, but he by

no means became an outcast within the Kemalist elites. In fact, shortly after his dismissal by the *Diyanet* he was hired by the Ministry of Education to serve as a teacher in one of Istanbul's Imam-Hatip schools. This appointment to train future religious officials, which was the official designation of these vocational schools, must have been taken, and probably rightly so, as sticking a finger in the eye of his former colleagues and superiors in the *Diyanet*. After the Imam-Hatip schools were all closed down, by the early 1930s, Mehmed Cemaleddin continued to serve in various teaching positions in the state schools until his retirement as a government employee many years after the events of March 1926.[59]

The fact that the initiative won approval in the press and did not incur any serious penalty to Mehmed Cemaleddin did not go unnoticed. Many opponents of the project of "Turkification" of religious life in fact suspected that his actions were taken in collusion with elements in the ruling RPP. Otherwise, critics reasoned, the perpetrator would have likely been disciplined more harshly by the authorities. Critical observers were well aware that the delivery of the Friday sermon in Turkish, which was officially endorsed by the *Diyanet* in 1927, was also preceded by private initiatives of "enlightened" religious officials and supporting articles in the press.[60] Such doubts and concerns had to be kept private inside Turkey, where draconian laws against any criticism of the government had been in place since early 1925. Opposition publications abroad faced no such inhibitions at the time. In Greece, Mustafa Sabri's newspaper, for instance, had no qualms about linking the private initiative of Mehmed Cemaleddin to a clandestine government agenda. Thus, an article from early 1928 warned that his actions were a trial balloon on behalf of the RPP. The author of the piece explains that the ruling party sought to gauge the public reaction before officially endorsing this "heresy" and coercing its implementation throughout Turkey.[61] There is no question that many conservatives in Turkey shared this distrust of the republican government's intentions toward the religion of Islam in general and the preservation of the traditional form and content of worship in the mosques in particular. They were forced to keep such views in private until after World War II, finding in the meantime some outlet to express their animosity in religious curses and imprecations.[62]

Suspicions about a clandestine government agenda to interfere in the form and content of worship in the mosques only intensified in 1928. A year earlier, the teaching personnel of the Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University (*Darülfünun*) established a committee aimed at formulating proposals for reforms in religious life. In June 1928 the press of Istanbul published the ostensible outcomes of the committee's deliberations, which were nothing short of astonishing. Only weeks after legislators dropped from the constitution the definition of Islam as the official religion of the state, the professors of the highest institution of Islamic learning in the land were reportedly endorsing a reform program that called for a radical remaking of the form and content of Muslim ritual and worship. The plan stipulated, for instance, the adoption of Turkish texts instead of the prevailing Arabic ones in all aspects of worship and devotional activities, including the ritual prayer, and this was one of the least radical changes proposed. Much more stunning were suggestions that pews (*sıralar*) and musical instruments should be introduced into the mosques, and that the requirement to take off one's shoes before entering places of worship ought to be abolished. The need for such a radical remaking of the form and content of worship was justified in terms of modern hygienic requirements, the necessity of improving the quality of the spiritual experience in the mosques, and the urgent need to rebrand the Muslim places of worship in order to enhance their attractiveness for the educated elites.[63]

In all probability the reform program was the brainchild of İsmail Hakkı [Baltacıoğlu], a well-known pedagogue and a professor in the Faculty of Theology since its inception in 1924. He apparently leaked his proposals to the press before they were discussed at length and ratified by his colleagues. But in press reports in Turkey and abroad his proposed changes were presented as the outcome of teamwork involving the faculty as a whole.[64]

The publication of the radical reform program reached far and wide across the globe. The European press described the reforms correctly as "draft proposals," though at times with the questionable assertion that their aim was the democratization of Islam.[65] In North America, meanwhile, inaccurate and unverified reporting by the Associated Press, which attributed the reform program to Mustafa Kemal himself, prompted much more sensationalized headlines. "Kemal Orders Pews for Moslem Mosques," shouted a headline in the *New York Times*. "Altars, Pews, Choirs and Organs to Replace Rugs—Faithful Must Keep on Shoes," explicated another headline in the *Montreal Gazette*. "Turks Must Abandon Ancient Rituals for Modern Worship," explained yet another headline in the *Los Angeles Times*. Even the local newspaper of Ellensburg, a small town just outside Seattle, found it necessary to inform its readers that "Turks Must Wear Shoes and Sit in Pews to Worship."[66] All of these reports presented the reform program as another step in the Westernization of Turkey, with some explicitly stating that the Kemalist regime was seeking to turn the mosques into churchlike religious places of worship. Such perceptions, or rather misperceptions, were not limited to Western observers. The publication of the reform project

in the Egyptian press prompted similar reactions, with critics protesting that "the Islamic prayer service should not be mixed up with Christian and pagan elements."[67] Meanwhile, in Istanbul, according to a report by an Associated Press correspondent, "devout Moslems" interviewed "declare doggedly that they will pray at home (as many already do) rather than enter a mosque desecrated by pews and organs and shoes and other Christian indecencies."[68] Observers in Turkey and abroad might have been exhilarated, bemused, or disgusted by the reform program, but virtually none assumed that it was implausible that the republican leadership could embrace such a radical project.

The radicalism of the time rendered such an initiative conceivable to its author and believable that it could be endorsed by the government to many inside and outside Turkey. In fact, in previous years pro-government commentators had already endorsed at least some of the proposals. The transition to Turkish as the language of worship was one of these. The suggestion to keep the shoes on in the mosque was another. In 1925, for instance, Ubeydullah Efendi published articles that claimed that traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad authorized the performance of ritual worship in the mosques with clean shoes on rather than barefooted.[69] Considering these opinions, and in light of the government's other formerly inconceivable reforms since 1924, many observers found it easy to believe that the reform program reflected the thinking of influential circles in the republican elite. In fact, even years later, some Kemalist intellectuals described the initiative in terms of a laudable effort to renew Islam and rid it of "old forms and conventions."[70]

Reports on the reform program continued to reverberate abroad for a time, even as the authorities in Turkey stepped in to quash any public discussion of it. The whole affair was silenced either because the proposals were judged too extreme or because the timing appeared inopportune from the government's standpoint. At any rate, neither Baltacıoğlu nor any other professor or journalist was disciplined. Moreover, rumors about Mustafa Kemal's intention to adopt at least some of the proposals continued to circulate in 1929, finding expression in the foreign press.[71] The fact that these were only rumors made little impression on some critics of the government's secularizing policies, who by 1928 could believe any outrageous hearsay about the republican government's policies and long-term goals.

From the safety of Greece, Mustafa Sabri's opposition newspaper indeed warned yet again that the Turkish government wants "to interfere with the ritual prayer. If they institute the introduction of seats [into the mosques] they would proceed to abolish the ritual ablution. Thereafter, instead of five times they would accept only two or even one [ritual prayer a day]. Later on they would say that a ritual prayer once a week on Friday is good enough, and after that will come the time of the abolition of ritual prayer altogether."[72] Nothing of the sort ever happened, of course. But the concern in Islamic circles about the government's intentions in the wake of the 1928 reform proposal was real enough. Even two decades later it was described by Turkish Islamists as reflecting how the RPP "had sought to annihilate the religion [of Islam]."[73]

Assumptions that the avowedly secularist government endeavored to inspire or enforce changes in the form and content of religious practices only intensified in the early 1930s. New formal initiatives toward the "Turkification" of religious life appeared to validate the expectations of some Kemalist and the preexisting suspicions of many conservatives. The official campaign came after years of agitation in the pro-government press and on the heels of a short-lived democratic experiment in 1930, which was followed by repressive measures against opposition activists in general and ultraconservative "religious fanatics and reactionaries" in particular.

THE GOVERNMENT WEIGHS IN

A series of events in January and February 1932 appeared for a time to set the stage for dramatic changes in religious life in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was staying in the old imperial capital at the time. As the month of Ramadan was approaching, reports in the Istanbul press made public a plan to deliver "a Turkish Qur'an-based" Friday sermon in the centrally located but relatively small Yerebatan Mosque. This time around, unlike the earlier instance in 1926, the initiative was backed and closely monitored by the president of the Republic. Mustafa Kemal personally encouraged Hafız Yaşar [Okur], the intended imam, to undertake this historic role, most likely as a trial balloon. Hafız Yaşar obliged and delivered the sermon in front of a full house at the Yerebatan Mosque. Reports in the foreign press had it that "verses from the Koran were read today in the Turkish language instead of Arabic,"[74] although according to Hafız Yaşar's own testimonial, he in fact did not forgo the traditional Arabic verses altogether but rather appended them with their Turkish translations. Be that as it may, there were some grumblings in the city, but no serious backlash ensued. With the trial balloon seen as a success, Mustafa Kemal promptly instructed its extension to more than a dozen other mosques in the old Ottoman capital.[75] When these measures were also received calmly, and as the holiest month in the Muslim calendar was nearing its end, it was resolved to amplify the public exposure of the intensified use of Turkish translations of Qur'anic verses in the mosques.

Mustafa Kemal decided that circumstances were ripe for the broadcasting of translated passages of the Qur'an to much larger audiences than ever before. The venue selected was Ayasofya, arguably the most celebrated mosque in Turkey before the former Byzantine church was transformed into a museum two years later. The time chosen was *Laylat al-Qadr*, the holy night on which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. On this special occasion, translated passages of the Qur'an were to be included in the ceremonies and rituals, and were for the first time also to be broadcast over the radio. After extensive promotion in the Istanbul and foreign press alike, more than twenty thousand people gathered in and around the mosque to observe and participate in the historic event. It was generally assumed that the aim of the whole affair was to shatter any existing psychological barriers against the use of Turkish translations, as another step toward the gradual substitution of Turkish texts for the Arabic original throughout Turkey. But assessments of the effectiveness of the whole affair varied. Some foreign commentators reported, for instance, that most attendees simply came for the spectacle rather than as a show of support.[76] Mustafa Kemal and his advisers apparently did not share these doubts. They deemed the event a great success. In its wake, directives were given to all mosque officials in Istanbul to include in their Friday and holiday sermons, alongside the original Arabic texts, Turkish translations of Qur'anic verses.[77]

But even though the agenda of "Turkification" of religious life appeared to be gaining steam, it was in fact heading into an impasse. There were some notable advances, such as a new requirement that the Islamic call to prayer and a few other religious chants (at funerals, for instance) be made in Turkish rather than Arabic. The order was first implemented in Istanbul in 1932, before being extended to the whole country in early 1933. Except for a few short-lived public protests, the directive was enforced with relatively little resistance throughout the land, at least in the earshot of government officials. Very few dared to challenge what was a de facto ban on the call to prayer in Arabic, after the well-publicized arrest and imprisonment of religious officials who had protested in Bursa, and the subsequent distribution of a circular by the head of the *Diyanet* in which he emphasized that the call to prayer in Turkish is not forbidden by Islamic law and warned religious officials not to oppose or criticize it. Those who did were prosecuted, and in 1941 it became a criminal offense.[78] Nevertheless, this limited introduction of Turkish texts into religious life was far short of the kind of religious reforms expected or feared in the early 1930s.

The heyday of Kemalism, a period in which new levels of assertiveness were achieved in the implementation of the ruling RPP's nationalist and secularist agenda, did not produce any significant state-led reform in religious life in Turkey. This is despite the fact that many Kemalists at the time did not view the principle of secularism as deterring the intervention of the state in religious affairs. In fact, many of them believed that the government, as the presumed representative of the collective will of the nation, should sponsor enlightened reforms in the form and content of Muslim worship. Yet even as the government-sponsored agenda of "Turkification" of the language, history, geography, and culture was continuing to make headway during the 1930s, it mostly ground to a halt when it came to religious reforms.

Most studies of the period suggest that this apparent change of course was the result of a combination of ideological modifications, frustration with the results of earlier religious reforms, and fear of violent popular backlashes. Niyazi Berkes suggests that "the idea of having the state an organ of reform in Islam was abandoned together with the legal identification of Turkey as an Islamic state [in 1928]." M. Hakan Yavuz opines that "after the 1930 [violent] Menemen incident, the state gave up its attempts to create a national (Turkish) and enlightened Islam and adopted a militant secularist policy to eliminate the public manifestation of Islam." Andrew Mango, although alluding to a different time line, argues along similar lines that "the Bursa incident [in 1933] showed that it was not safe to go further in Turkishing Muslim worship."[79] All of these explanations are only partially satisfying. Although there is no question that public order was a concern and that the secularist ideology and policies of the regime were radicalized in the 1930s, available evidence seems to suggest that these prevailing assessments are overstating the impact of these issues and understating the role of other factors.

Available evidence suggests that practical obstacles and miscalculated strategy rather than ideological change of heart or political apprehensions were in fact much more crucial in delaying and eventually derailing the agenda of comprehensive "Turkification" of religious life. The most important hindrance was the lack of a credible translation of the Qur'an. In 1932, for instance, the translated passages used in the mosques of Istanbul during the month of Ramadan were partially drawn from the French-based translation of Cemil Said [Dikel], which was neither credible nor free of mistakes. These shortcomings were pointed out to Mustafa Kemal in person by religious officials who were considered by the government to be cooperative.[80] The only viable option for a credible text remained Mehmed Âkif's translation, but the celebrated poet was by then convinced that his translation might be introduced into the mosques as a substitute for the original Arabic. By

the mid-1930s it had become increasingly hard to deny that this indeed was the intention. The government therefore opted for persuasion rather than ambiguity or deceit. In 1935, after some pressure from the Ministry of Education, two of Mehmed Âkif's personal friends, university professors and noted Islamic scholars in their own right, İzmirli İsmail Hakkı and Şerafeddin Yaltkaya, produced a confidential written opinion authorizing the use of "any language other than Arabic" in each and every part of the ritual prayer and during the Friday sermons. With this opinion in hand, efforts were made to convince the leadership of the *Diyanet* to endorse this ruling. Because Rifat Börekçi, head of the department, was quite sick and feeble, the decision was left to Ahmed Akseki, who was both a former student and a personal friend of the two men, and a close friend of Mehmed Âkif. But despite pressures and efforts of persuasion, he was simply unwilling to endorse such an opinion.[81] It is not clear whether Mehmed Âkif would have delivered his translation anyhow, even if Ahmed Akseki had endorsed the opinion. But now that the masks were off, because Mehmed Âkif was most likely aware of these behind-the-scenes pressures, his resolve not to deliver his translation and to request the destruction of the manuscript upon his death could only harden. In fact, as late as 1936, only months before Mehmed Âkif's untimely death, Atatürk renewed his invitation to the celebrated poet to submit his work, but to no avail.[82] In a crucial period, Mehmed Âkif's and Ahmed Akseki's intentional procrastination tactics took the steam out of the whole project of comprehensive "Turkification" of religious life.

After 1936, Turkey's efforts to navigate a safe path in an increasingly complicated and dangerous international arena, and Mustafa Kemal's deteriorating health and eventual death in 1938, undermined the expediency and feasibility of new highly controversial policies. As the European crisis that led to World War II was intensifying, the window of opportunity for radical reforms in religious life was fast closing. In the immediate aftermath of World War II there was some renewed interest among the RPP leadership in restarting the Qur'an translation and the "Turkification" of worship projects. After all, the head of the *Diyanet* since 1942 and until his death in 1947 was Şerafeddin Yaltkaya, the same person who in 1935 had endorsed the feasibility of ritual prayer in languages other than Arabic. Initial discussions eventually led to naught.[83] Turkey's transition to democracy after World War II created political circumstances that were not conducive to highly controversial and divisive religious reforms. In fact, as discussed in some detail in Chapter Seven, the situation was exactly the opposite, with increasing demands to roll back some of the reforms of the early republic.

ULEMA IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC: MARGINALIZED BUT NOT REDUNDANT

The authoritarian and domineering form of secularism that existed during the first two decades of the republic was not exceptional in the interwar period. Quite a few European countries, including many in Southern Europe, were ruled as autocracies or single-party regimes during that time. Meanwhile, atheist policies were implemented in the Soviet Union, including in Muslim-majority regions, and secularist if not overtly antireligious thought, often embedded in nationalist and liberal agendas, was continuing to make headway among the intelligentsias and political elites in Iran, Egypt, and former Ottoman territories in the Middle East. The authoritarian impulses of the early republic stood in the way of complete secularization of the republic, in the sense of full separation between religion and state and the institution of freedom of worship and conscience. On the one hand, the undemocratic ways of the early republic facilitated the swift introduction of important secularizing measures and other changes in Turkey in a relatively short time. On the other hand, they also undermined any potential for a broad-based consensus on a range of controversial topics, including the relations between religion and state. Instead, the late Ottoman period and the formative period of the republic had also produced, along with important advancements, long-standing resentments and unsettled questions. Not many observers foresaw this at the time, however. In fact, the early republican regime served to a certain degree as a shining role model for political elites in other Muslim-majority countries, such as Iran and Afghanistan, as well as for sections of the intelligentsia in the Arab lands.

The policies of the early republic brought about rapid erosion of the position of the religious administration but did not render the "former" ulema completely redundant. The *Diyanet*, which was an official state agency, continued to be dominated by former ulema who were mostly cooperative with the government yet not uniformly spineless, fully coopted, and submissive yes-men. Many Kemalists indeed never came to fully trust the *Diyanet*, because they perceived its officials as conservative leftovers from the Ottoman past, albeit necessary ones for augmenting the republic's claim to the loyalty of the devout Sunni Muslim citizens of Turkey. Thus, even as late as 1960, self-appointed guardians of the Kemalist legacy often still viewed the *Diyanet*'s senior officials, including those nurtured under the republic, as untrustworthy, ignorant, bigoted, and reactionary.[84] Ultraconservative opponents of the early republic were not less critical, although from a diametrically opposed perspective. For many of them, former ulema who held positions in the religious estab-

lishment were nothing short of weaklings who not only had failed to abate the misdeeds of an antireligious regime, but also had in fact collaborated and helped legitimize it and its policies. Thus, whereas Kemalist critics viewed the middle-of-the-road approach of men like Ahmed Akseki as not cooperative enough, ultraconservative detractors found it to be excessively collaborative. These assessments, of course, depended on the ideological eye of the beholder. They all indicated, however—as does a closer look at the events of the period—that the actions, or lack thereof, of such men mattered.

The secularist bent of the early republic did not exclude or eliminate the ambition to reform Islam and put it to work as a tool for political legitimacy, nationalist acculturation, and ethnic homogenization. Even if "in this regard, it is very difficult to see the Kemalist understanding of secularism as the separation of Islam from the state," Mustafa Kemal and his associates were aware of the inherent tension between their secularist claims and the state's deep involvement in regulating religious life.[85] When significant changes were introduced to institutions affiliated with the religious establishment, the "national will" could be invoked, and reform by decree could be implemented, with little heed given to the viewpoints of Islamic scholars and religious officials. The issue was much more delicate when it came to the form and content of Islamic worship and ritual. On these issues the government employed a combination of enticements and pressures rather than outright coercion and imposition in order to persuade religious scholars and *Diyanet* officials to cooperate with its policy goals and implicitly certify their Islamic legitimacy. With all of the attacks on the Ottoman ulema, the medreses, and Islamic scholarship, it was still people with these backgrounds and not Kemalist intellectuals who held sway when it came to matters of faith, worship, and ritual. The power relations were of course clear enough, and the republican government indeed was able to meet most of its expectations in this respect, to the chagrin of ultraconservative critics of the *Diyanet*. At the same time, officials of the *Diyanet* who opted for a path of qualified cooperation felt that their activity within the state apparatus prevented even much worse excesses and radical state-sponsored reforms in religious life. The translation of the Qur'an and the language of worship was a case in point.

The range of attitudes adopted by ulema, from full cooperation to determined defiance, divided them, but at the same time helped maintain their relevancy. As of the late 1940s, no alternative source of religious authority had replaced the graduates of the Ottoman medreses. Counterintuitive to the expectations of many observers, the fact that some of them were willing to cooperate with the RPP in one way or another

diminished the potential for their complete peripheralization and redundancy. Meanwhile, the hostility and opposition of others maintained their religious and moral authority in the eyes of like-minded sections of the population. Still, once the authoritarian one-party regime began giving way after World War II, it was the middle-of-the-road former ulema who were best served to launch initiatives for the strengthening and reconstruction of Islamic institutions in Turkey. They were less likely, on the one hand, to be tainted by accusations of unmitigated collaboration with the RPP, or on the other hand, to be considered beyond the pale because of uncompromising antirepublicanism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ottoman Memories, Republican Realities

The end of World War II signaled the beginning of a period of major political change in Turkey. On the backdrop of Turkey's efforts to secure American backing during the early years of the Cold War, the RPP government felt compelled to implement measures of democratization and liberalization that gradually brought to an end its long one-party rule. The restrictive secularist policies of the interwar period also had to be at least moderated if Turkey was to be accepted as a card-carrying member of the Free World, which was, after all, led by a nation that contrasted its trust in God with the godlessness of Communism. In Turkey, the volatile international situation and the anxieties it engendered fueled, for the first time, official campaigns against an alleged internal "red danger." The new political circumstances of the time, which included the transition to democracy and attacks on the Communists' atheism—opened new public spaces for those from religiously conservative circles who had been silenced and often ignored since the mid-1920s. In this context, the desirable form of secularism in a democratic regime and the future of Islamic institutions in the republic became topics of heated controversy. The urgency and liveliness of these debates, and the range of new possibilities that appeared to be opening, bore resemblance in some respects to the periods that followed the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and the end of CUP rule in late 1918. Just like at these earlier junctures, it appeared quite clear that state and society were about to be taking a new turn in their history, but it remained uncertain in what direction and under whose leadership and terms.

The post-World War II period was also a time of accelerating generational shifts in Turkish politics and public life. The generation that came of age around the time of the Young Turk Revolution began giving

way to the "children of the republic." Before passing the torch, however, the last Ottoman generation sought to influence Turkey's future course. Not surprisingly, their perspectives on the questions at hand in the late 1940s were strongly influenced by and to a large extent were the continuation of debates and controversies that harkened back to the period of CUP rule and the early years of the republic. This much was true for men of all ideological leanings, including Islamists and ulema of various political orientations. Many of those who lived through the end of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the assertive and domineering secularism of the early republic sought to help steer Turkey toward a reassertion of the role of Islam in public life in general and in the revitalization of Islamic institutions in particular.

The relaxation of curbs on the press in the late 1940s allowed Islamists to express their views and political visions relatively freely, for the first time since 1925. Eşref Edib Fergan was perhaps the most noteworthy example, although not a unique one, of a veteran Islamist journalist who returned to the forefront of public life after long years of forced silence. After the death of Atatürk in 1938, the new İnönü administration authorized Eşref Edib to issue a periodical supplement to the Islamic encyclopedia he helped publish. After World War II he gradually turned this scholarly publication into a political journal, before feeling confident enough to rename it *Sebilürreşad* in 1948, a little more than two decades after the suppression of the original journal by the early republican government. The symbolic statement was clear enough, as was the journal's campaign against many of the reforms of the early republic. Eşref Edib and his co-contributors were very hostile toward the Kemalist political and intellectual elite. At the same time, *Sebilürreşad* was closely identified with "establishment" figures in the leadership of the *Diyanet*. This association was based on decades-long personal friendships with senior officials in the religious administration and a common agenda for the reinvigoration of the religious administration and Islamic institutions in Turkey.[1] Their vision drew heavily on precedents set in late Ottoman times and thus entailed the scaling back or modification of reforms of the early republic. At the same time, they had no illusion, at least publicly, about a full restoration of the pre-1924 circumstances. Instead, they advocated for greater authority and additional functions for a reenergized religious administration that would help restore some institutional traditions and symbolism associated with the Ottoman past. Their public campaign and its consequences attest to the continuing interplay between the Ottoman legacies and the new realities of the republic in post-World War II Turkey.

RELIGION AND STATE IN A SECULAR AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The revived Islamist press of the late 1940s demanded an immediate retraction of the government's intervention in religious affairs. Turning slogans of the ruling RPP's spokespersons on their head, Islamist commentators demanded the lifting of restrictive regulations, in particular the criminalization of the traditional call to prayer in Arabic, in the name of democracy, secularism, and the principle of freedom of worship.[2] On these issues, they found common cause with some liberal critics of the RPP, even if their ultimate goals may have differed. Islamist intellectuals and activists in the late 1940s incorporated into their discourse modified forms of secularist and democratic arguments that were championed by liberal thinkers. In what would become a hallmark of many Islamist intellectuals in Turkey and beyond in the decades that followed, Eşref Edib and like-minded commentators displayed intellectual flexibility rather than strident ideological dogmatism.

Islamists often justified their embrace of democratic principles in Islamic terms, not unlike the ones deployed to legitimize constitutionalism after the Young Turk Revolution. A piece entitled "The Fundamental Principles of Democracy in Islam" may serve as a good example. It was written by Ahmed Hamdi Akseki, the head of the *Diyanet* beginning in 1947, and was published by *Sebilürreşad* in June 1949. Akseki argues that it was the Prophet Muhammad who first laid the foundations for a democratic republic based on popular sovereignty.[3] This was a recurring theme, according to which Islam not only was compatible with democracy but also Muslims were actually the first group to introduce democratic principles such as religious liberty and freedom of conscience.[4] These were in fact the types of arguments once employed by government supporters, especially in the 1920s, to legitimize the reforms of the early republic. Rehashing these arguments in an effort to portray the RPP as hypocritical, Eşref Edib and like-minded commentators now demanded the scaling back of policies implemented since the 1920s in the name of democracy and the principle of freedom of conscience.

Secularism was similarly invoked to support Islamist demands, though the Islamists found it somewhat hard to embrace it in principle. *Sebilürreşad* had a long history of opposition to any measure of separation between religion and state, dating back to at least 1918.[5] Three decades later, the Islamist journal still contended that in contrast to the Christian West, Muslim societies have historically enjoyed high levels of religious tolerance and social harmony that have precluded the need for secularism. Nevertheless, for legal and pragmatic reasons, Islamists could not openly criticize the secularism of the republic. Instead, they mostly expressed their acceptance of secularism as a fait accompli, as long as it did not serve as a pretext for suppressing religious life. Eşref Edib thus stated emphatically that "the separation between religion and state requires that the government not interfere—legally, educationally, or politically—in any religious issue or with religious worship."[6] He and other Islamists therefore demanded that in true secularist spirit the government should stop suppressing Islamic institutions and desist from trampling over freedom of worship and conscience.[7]

In an ironic twist, Islamists presented the Western nations as an example for emulation when it comes to genuine secularism that is not antireligious. Although they were mostly unabashedly anti-Western in their sociocultural orientations, in the context of the early Cold War the Islamists found it expedient to present their demands as aligning with the policies of the United States and its allies. Eşref Edib, for instance, argued that Turkey's existing "Bolshevik-like" curbs on religious freedoms should be abandoned and replaced with the pro-religious standards of the democratic countries.[8] During this period of an anti-Communist crusade in Turkey, he and like-minded commentators accused the RPP government of Soviet-like repressive policies. To drive the argument home, Islamist journals published numerous articles about the ostensible renaissance of religious life in the West, particularly in France, long the model for Turkey's assertive secularist policies.[9] One Islamist journal even went so far as to suggest that newborn Israel, a nation usually reviled in the Islamist press, should be seen as a convincing example of how religion inspires "the world's most modern, young, advanced, and progressive state."[10] The Islamist press demanded that the government respect the democratic wishes of the majority in Turkey by eliminating the restrictions on religious associations and practices and by forfeiting any ambition to "Turkify" religion.[11]

The question of "Turkification" of religious life indeed became a hot issue again in the late 1940s. In February 1949, for instance, during the budgetary debates in parliament, one deputy pressed the government to renew the initiative to produce an official Turkish translation of the Qur'an. He explained that in all the Christian countries the Bible is read in the vernacular and that the Turks should also enjoy the benefit of worship in their national tongue. A heated debate followed between him and other parliamentarians. Supporters of the proposal cited examples from Martin Luther's actions and the opinions of past Muslim scholars. Opponents responded that the original Arabic texts cannot be replaced and that a genuinely secular government should not intervene in such matters of faith.[12]

The heated exchange prompted public debate and animated commentary in the press. *Ulus*, the semiofficial mouthpiece of the ruling RPP, backed calls for the transition to Turkish texts in every aspect of religious worship and ritual. Besim Atalay, a parliamentary deputy and a noted linguist who was once a medrese student led the way in insisting that "nobody can say: 'Turk! Do not implore God in your own language and do not worship Him in your own tongue.'" Referring to verses from the Qur'an and to the opinion attributed to Abu Hanifa, and pointing to precedents set by pre-Ottoman Turkish dynasties in Anatolia, Atalay concluded that the opposition of "the old hodjas" and the voices of reaction should be ignored and the initiative to translate the Qur'an and adopt Turkish texts in every aspect of religious life should be renewed.[13] Falih Rıfkı Atay, the journal's editor in chief, concurred and even went so far as to state emphatically that "if Atatürk had not died [prematurely], the Qur'an too would have already been read in Turkish."[14] Islamist publications responded lividly that a translation could be considered only a synopsis (*me'al*) of the original, not its equal. They emphasized that a secular government should not interfere in such questions in the first place, and they accused the advocates of a "Turkish Qur'an" of a decades-long secret agenda to alienate the Turks from the Holy Book and drive a wedge between them and fellow Muslims abroad.[15]

The impassioned disputes of the late 1940s were one more phase in a debate that has continued contentiously in the decades that have followed.[16] Kemalist intellectuals eventually produced a number of translations of the Qur'an in the late 1950s, but none was ever accorded an official approval or won wide public appeal. The most famous of these Qur'an translations was produced by İsmayil Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, of the controversial reform program of 1928. Key Kemalist figures endorsed his undertaking, including former long-serving Minister of Education Hasan Ali Yücel (who served from 1938 to 1946), but it was rejected by the *Diyanet* and Islamists alike.[17] Supporters of the translation project continued to argue that in Europe progress was achieved only after the translation of the Bible and that similar advances in Turkey necessitated the translation of the Qur'an.[18] They accused their detractors in the *Diyanet* and in the Islamist press of being "ignorant, backward, and reactionary medrese students, who—in order to defend [their] special interests—are scheming to prevent everybody else from being able to read and understand the Qur'an."[19] The redeployment of such negative images of the ulema helped to sustain and reproduce late Ottoman discourses, but in post-World War II Turkey it reflected frustration and a sense of malaise, not anticipation and triumphalism.

Kemalist hard-liners were on the defensive even within the RPP by the late 1940s. Following the democratization of Turkey, political contestation over the support of devout constituencies prompted a rethinking of the party's agenda and priorities. In an effort to soften its radical secularist image, the party appointed Mehmed Şemseddin Günaltay, once a member of the *Sebilürreşad* circle, as Prime Minister in January 1949. He promptly declared that the secularism of the republic safeguarded against the government's dictation of any change in religious life, including the language and form of worship. This was also the position adopted by the main opposition party, the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, or DP), since its inception in 1946.[20] Günaltay's cabinet went on to preside over the reintroduction of courses on religion into the state schools, he took steps to legalize visitations of some holy tombs and shrines, and he proclaimed the cabinet's intention to reopen institutions of Islamic higher learning and vocational religious schools.[21] The pendulum was swinging back, but it was not clear to what point.

Islamist publications demanded much more substantial and vigorous changes while their Kemalist critics rallied against the alleged destruction of Atatürk's achievements. The Islamist press openly demanded the immediate end of the "twenty-five-year-long repression of religion," a reference that clearly included Mustafa Kemal's period at the helm. Time and again they emphasized that the political authorities should not even discuss religion-related issues.[22] On this particular topic they found a common cause with other opposition activists, despite warnings from RPP circles that such a position amounted to a betrayal of Atatürk's reformist legacy and would empower reactionary forces in society. The Islamists were accused of hypocritical embrace of democratic principles only when it suited their own antisecularist agenda.[23] As is often the case in heated and polarized political arenas, the innuendos and hypocrisies of all sides to the debate were not difficult to discern or for political opponents to exploit.

One important topic on which their critics harped was the Islamists' selective support for religious freedoms, which did not extend to the Alevis. This diverse religious community of both Turkish and Kurdish speakers was historically marginalized and at times persecuted under Ottoman rule. Whether considered Shiites or a distinct sect, their relations with the Sunni majority in general and the Sunni religious establishment in particular had been fraught with distrust and animosity. Under the early republic their distinct religious and community institutions were suppressed, but the secularist policies of the regime also allowed them greater potential for acceptance and integration as equal members of the Turkish nation. Kemalists now pointed out that reintroduction of religion into the public sphere and state institutions would

require similar amends for the Alevis, and would unnecessarily accentuate religious divisions among citizens of the republic.[24]

Islamists were not particularly impressed with such arguments and took their critics to task for inventing pretexts aimed at keeping genuine Islam at bay. They argued that the real motivation of those who brought up the Alevi issue was their anti-Islamic agenda, and that at any rate there was only one genuine form of Islam and it did not extend beyond the limits of the Sunni tradition. Eşref Edib was not even willing to afford the Alevis recognition as a legitimate Islamic sect. He contended that there was no such thing as "Alevism" but rather only corrupt and immoral forms of genuine Islam. His conclusion was that the government should facilitate initiatives to correct the deviant and ignorant ways of those who identify themselves as Alevis.[25] This was quite an ironic suggestion for someone who argued vigorously against the secularist state's involvement in religious affairs. The question of public and formal recognition of the Alevis' religious freedoms and rights was, not for the last time, hotly debated but never really settled. At any rate, in the decades since, whenever Islamists and conservative Sunnis have demanded more religious freedom and greater visibility for Islam in state and public affairs, they were countered with questions about their attitude toward the Alevis' democratic rights. Islamists and *Diyanet* officials found it difficult to recognize such rights in the late 1940s and in the decades that followed.[26]

The transition to democracy raised anew and even more contentiously the issue of the place that Islamic law could have in the secular republic. Islamists contended that "genuine laicism" does not entail complete rejection of Sharia law or hostility toward it.[27] Eşref Edib, for instance, argued that legislation in Turkey could and should rely on Sharia laws just as "there are many articles of law based on Christian jurisprudence and customs in all the civil law codes of the secular West." He accused the critics of Sharia law of Soviet-like "Red fanaticism" that flies in the face of dominant trends in the democratic West.[28] On this particular issue, however, the Islamists' position was rejected by the leaders of the two major parties. The RPP and the Democrats were locked in heated controversy on almost any topic, but in June 1949 they joined forces to pass a new legislation against "the corruption of religious principles and beliefs" and "propaganda involving the manipulation of religion, religious sensibilities, or anything considered sacred for the purpose of agitating against the principles of secularism." Celal Bayar, the leader of the DP and future president of the republic from 1950 to 1960, declared in no uncertain terms that his party "will never allow the revival of Sharia law and reactionaryism in Turkey."[29] The linking of Sharia law and obscurantism enraged the Islamists. The fact that the main opposition party supported this stance was particularly disheartening. They vented their frustration with the "antireligious" and "antidemocratic" measure before the legislation passed, but afterward they had to keep their views in this respect to themselves for fear of legal repercussions.[30] Nevertheless, their unwillingness to distance themselves from advocacy aimed at the reintroduction of Sharia law in one way or another had undercut their secularist discourse on other issues.

Sebilürreşad and like-minded publications helped shape an Islamist discourse that hybridized ideals and idioms from late Ottoman times with new republican vocabulary. Demands for "genuine" secularism and democracy went along with insistence on favorable positions for Sunni Islam and Islamic legal injunctions. However, despite Kemalist accusations of reactionary inclinations, Islamist publications were for the most part neither royalist nor obsessed with restoration of the Ottoman past. Their political discourse reflected adjustments to the changing circumstances under the republic. At the same time, *Sebilürreşad* published a long series of articles with titles such as "How Did the Europeans Destroy the Foundations of the Ottoman State?" and "A Great Ideal: Islamistan," which left little doubt regarding their sentiments about the dissolution of the Islamic Caliphate and the establishment of a nationalist republic in its stead.[31] Thus, while Islamists pointed out the inconsistencies and contradictions in the early republic's practice of secularism, they also exposed themselves to accusations of hypocrisy and deviousness in their demands for religious freedoms that should be inherent in genuine democracy and secularism.

RELIGIOUS ADMINISTRATION IN A SECULAR AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The jurisdiction and status of the *Diyanet* became a particularly hot-button issue in the late 1940s, for the first time since its inception in 1924. The reforms of the early republic relegated the religious administration to a subsidiary of the Prime Minister's office and left it without any jurisdiction over religious education, judicial affairs, and Islamic endowments. In 1931 it lost even the administrative authority over mosque officials and employees. Although the *Diyanet* never became completely redundant, an air of deliberate impairment, obstruction, and degradation hung over it from its early days nevertheless. With democratization set in motion after World War II, increasing demands to rectify this situation were voiced by Islamists, conservatives, and some liberals and by officials of the *Diyanet*.

For the first time since the 1920s, calls for fewer inhibitions on educational activities and greater administrative and financial autonomy, or perhaps even complete independence, for the religious administration were published freely in Turkey. On this issue too, contending interpretations of democracy and secularism and contrasting attitudes toward the Ottoman past informed viewpoints on what should be the proper way to administer religious affairs and Islamic institutions in Turkey.

Advocates of a broader mandate for the *Diyanet* suggested three main alternatives to the status quo. The first two options necessitated a complete severance of the ties between the *Diyanet* and the government, which its supporters argued was imperative for the institution of genuine secularism in Turkey. The advocates of unmitigated formal separation between state and religious institutions parted, however, on whether the *Diyanet* should thereafter retain its exclusive religious authority for all Muslim citizens of the republic, or instead be replaced by privatized, community-based religious organizations. The first option entailed a vision of a centralized, monopolistic, nationwide but independent institution. The second envisioned a network of many regional or localized faith-based communities in a competitive market-oriented setting. A third option did not go as far as cutting the formal ties between the *Diyanet* and the government. Instead, it envisioned their redefinition by awarding the official religious administration broader jurisdiction and significantly greater levels of administrative and financial autonomy. This option anticipated the maintenance of the official and symbolic affiliation between the *Diyanet* and the republic even as the Muslim religious administration would be awarded the greater autonomy promised to the Christian and Jewish communities in Turkey by local law and international treaties.

From the Islamists' standpoint, all of these suggestions were preferable to the status quo, but it was not immediately obvious which one was both most advantageous and feasible. In late 1947 Eşref Edib therefore took the unusual step of polling politicians, intellectuals, and readers on their preferences in this regard. He asked in particular for their opinion on the option of organizing an independent religious administration for the Muslims along the lines of the institutions tending to the religious needs of the Christian and Jewish citizens of the republic.[32] Most respondents dismissed this option. Only one of them, Kâzım Nâmi Duru, a well-known Turkish nationalist and former Unionist, advocated the complete disestablishment of the *Diyanet*.[33] All others opined that it should remain an official institution of the state. One commentator, Fatin Gökmen, an RPP member who was nevertheless well-known for his Islamist inclinations, acknowledged that until the nineteenth century the Muslims of the Ottoman lands were mostly organized in decentralized, localized religious communities. He warned, however, that a move to restore this state of affairs through the privatization and dismemberment of the *Diyanet* might lead to Christian-like sectarianism among the Muslims, with negative theological, social, and political consequences.[34] Most respondents to the poll, and ultimately *Sebilürreşad* itself and most other Islamist publications, indeed found little attraction in a decentralized, liberalized, market-oriented, and pluralistic vision for the administration of religious life in Turkey. Instead, they supported the maintenance of the *Diyanet* as a monopolist, governmental, nationwide organization but with a broader mandate and greater administrative and financial autonomy. Senior officials in the *Diyanet* of the late 1940s also shared this perspective.[35]

The appointment of Ahmed Akseki in April 1947 as head of the *Diyanet* helped galvanize support for the reinvigoration of the religious administration. His deceased predecessor, Şerafeddin Yaltkaya, was accused by Islamists of allowing the Islamic institutions in Turkey "to degenerate and waste away."[36] In contrast, Akseki's commitment to the regeneration of religious life in Turkey was never doubted. If anything, some younger and more radical Islamists who came of age under the republic and never attended an Ottoman medrese accused him of being too passive and complacent. The poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, for instance, accepted Akeski's piety but mocked him for his inability to resist transgressions against Islamic institutions during the early decades of the republic. But Akseki's old acquaintances in *Sebilürreşad* immediately came to his defense. Eşref Edib and like-minded medrese graduates and veteran Islamist commentators reminded Akseki's critics that he and his colleagues had done all they possibly could to subtly resist the attacks on Islam under the authoritarian governments of the early republic. Framing their observations within the prevailing discourse of secularism, they insisted that after the *Diyanet* was freed from the paralyzing authority of the executive branch of the government, Akseki would be the best person to lead a revival of religious life in Turkey.[37]

The association between *Sebilürreşad* and the top officials of the *Diyanet* was no secret. As salaried state officials, Akseki and his colleagues could not publicly endorse the Islamist publication's campaign for the reinvigoration of the *Diyanet*, at least as long as the RPP was still in power. At the same time, articles they penned and statements they made were often featured in *Sebilürreşad*, and Eşref Edib's friendship with Akseki and other senior *Diyanet* officials was well known.[38] At any rate, indications of their shared vision for the future of the *Diyanet* were quite apparent. In February 1948, for instance, a group of twenty parlia-

mentary deputies submitted a bill that called for the reopening of institutions of religious learning under the auspices of the *Diyanet*, which was to be awarded greater administrative and financial autonomy. This bill did not pass, nor did similar draft laws submitted to parliament in the months that followed. Nevertheless, their submission gave the Islamist press opportunities to propagate similar ideas, and even Ahmed Akseki broke his usual public silence on controversial questions and essentially endorsed these proposals in declarations to the press.[39]

Kemalists and some liberal commentators rejected such proposals as thinly veiled efforts to revive the defunct Ottoman religious establishment. Rehashed negative imageries of the ulema and their institutions were invoked anew against this alleged specter of religious fanaticism and reactionary aspirations.[40] Minister of Education Hasan Tahsin Banguoğlu thus declared in early 1949 that although the RPP government was favorable toward the reopening of institutions of religious education, it would resist any effort to turn them into neo-medreses under the oversight of the *Diyanet*.[41] Kemalists indeed often continued to associate the republican religious administration with negative stereotypes of the Ottoman religious establishment. Well into the 1950s many of them still viewed "the majority" of officials in the *Diyanet* as enemies of Atatürk and his reforms. They charged that officials of the Diyanet, similarly to the ulema in Ottoman times, persisted in "refusing to help pull Turkey away from the Middle Ages," preferring instead to "hold sway over [the religious institutions]."[42] Indeed, many Turks continued to associate the *Diyanet* with what was sometimes termed derogatorily "medrese culture" or "medrese mentality."[43]

Islamist commentators meanwhile found the new political circumstances opportune for a counteroffensive to set the record straight on the Ottoman religious establishment. For more than two decades they had to quietly endure intensified assaults on the reputation and legacies of the ulema and their institutions. Islamist pundits now sought to rectify their historical memory, partly out of historical consciousness but largely in an effort to justify the watering down or even reversal of some of the reforms of the early republic. Articles such as "The Ulema's Great Services to the Homeland" were published in response to Kemalist accusations that the ulema lacked patriotism. Pieces on the medrese reform of the late Ottoman period and testimonials that it was initiated at the behest of the ulema were featured in repudiation of their negative characterization as medieval, backward, and reactionary. Critics of the religious establishment were accused of malicious Communist-inspired enmity toward religion and were cautioned that "the nation will never feel any affection or trust toward those who exhibit disrespect to the ulema."[44]

Articles in the Islamist press acknowledged the association between the Ottoman ulema and the *Diyanet*, though mostly in a positive way. Eşref Edib in fact hailed the officials of the *Diyanet* for being graduates of medreses. He explained that they ought to be proud of their educational background "because a genuine religious scholar has to graduate from a medrese." He went on to argue that proposed new institutions of religious learning should be modeled on the reformed medrese system that was abolished in 1924. He reminded readers that in 1922 Mustafa Kemal went on record in praise of the reformed system, the last commissioner of which was Ahmed Akseki, the officiating head of the *Diyanet*. For these reasons, Eşref Edib insisted, no one should heed the hysterical warnings that the reopening of institutions of religious learning under the auspices of the *Diyanet* might revive a reactionary and backward educational system. He further emphasized that everybody should acknowledge the mistake of closing down the medreses in the first place. It was immaterial for him whether the new institutions would be called medreses or not. The essential thing was that in essence they should indeed be a revived version of the reformed medreses and be administered by the capable and well-intentioned "former" ulema and current officials of the *Diyanet*.[45]

After years of being on the receiving end of all kinds of insults and mockery, Islamists found it liberating to taunt the RPP in the run-up to the elections of 1950. The hastiness of the ruling party's effort to shed its antireligious image among conservative constituencies prompted scoffs and jibes in the Islamist press. New government policies and initiatives were judged to be too little and too late. For example, a decision to reestablish a faculty of theology was welcomed in principle, but the curriculum of the new institution and its subordination to the Ministry of Education were censured. Similarly, the restoration to the *Diyanet* of administrative oversight over all mosque officials and personnel was complimented, even as criticism was expressed over the fact that jurisdiction over the vast properties of the Islamic endowments was not transferred to the religious administration.[46] It was clear for all to see that the RPP was prepared only to tweak the existing policies, not to change them rapidly and fundamentally. Gradual relaxation of some prohibitions had been implemented since 1947, but at the same time efforts were still invested in suppression of Islamist activities and conservative Sufi networks. In early 1950, for example, several Sufi orders were busted and their leaders were put on well-publicized trials. Not long afterward, and only weeks before the first fully democratic parliamentary elections, dozens of people were arrested in Ankara when they exploited the funeral of Marshal Fevzi Çakmak in order to launch street demonstrations in support of the Arabic call to prayer.[47] In these circumstances, and con-

sidering the RPP's track record, it is no wonder that the Islamists, like the majority of "former" ulema, though not all, prayed for and advocated an electoral defeat of the ruling party. They were not necessarily thrilled with the main challenger. The DP in fact disappointed *Sebilürreşad*, for instance, with its outspoken opposition to any implementation of Sharia law. Nevertheless, the Democrats did promise to relax many prohibitions of the early republic and to allow Islam greater visibility in the public sphere, which definitely rendered them more appealing to Islamists and many conservatives than the RPP.[48]

NEW DAWN, OLD FRUSTRATIONS

The defeat of the RPP in the parliamentary elections of May 1950 was met with jubilation throughout Turkey, including by the Islamist press. *Sebilürreşad* reported gloatingly about the ruling party's shocking setback, framing it as no less than a divine punishment for its ostensible transgressions against Islam. Eşref Edib opined that this was only the beginning of payback to a party that "did all it could to suffocate religion and [stifle] freedom of conscience," humiliated the believers, oppressed religious functionaries, and suppressed religious education. The DP's astonishing landslide victory raised expectations for many changes in the republic, not least of which was changes in the relations between religion and state. The Democrats vowed to defend Atatürk's legacy, but at the same time they made it quite clear that they intended to scale back the assertive and restrictive secularist policies that had been in place since the 1930s. Eşref Edib cautioned the Democrats that they too would face divine retribution and end up like the RPP if they failed to learn from the former ruling party's mistakes. He argued that the "national will" demanded the facilitation and encouragement of genuine religious life and Islamic institutions, and that the Democrats' long-term political fortunes hinged on respecting this popular demand.[49]

The early days of the DP's rule did not disappoint the Islamists. Prime Minister Adnan Menderes initiated in mid-June the lifting of the ban on the call to prayer in Arabic. A few weeks later his cabinet decided to make religious classes mandatory rather than elective for all school children, albeit with an opt-out option. Meanwhile, the reopening of vocational Imam-Hatip schools was discussed and planned in earnest.[50] *Sebilürreşad* celebrated these changes as marking the end of the age of "dictators and autocrats" (*diktatörler* and *şefler*) and followed the pro-DP press in depicting the former government as an "ancien régime" (*devr-i sabık*), a term that harks back to the French Revolution and was once also reserved by the Unionists to describe the period of Abdülhamid II.[51] Eşref Edib went on to demand the augmentation of the authority and jurisdiction of the *Diyanet* as an essential component in the "great revolutionary change" carried out under the new government. He even suggested that the legislators should consider admitting the head of the *Diyanet* into the cabinet, reminding them that in Ottoman times the Sheikh ul-Islam was a member of the cabinet with a rank equal to that of the Grand Vizier. Pushing the analogy further, he proposed that the Prime Minister and the head of the *Diyanet* be given equal status, second only to that of the president of the republic. The restorationist subtext was quite clear, even if for legal reasons he could not spell it out. Similar inhibitions held him back from openly advocating the reapplication of Sharia law. Yet he made his position clear enough with strong criticism of pundits who warned against the "threat" of reintroduction of the Islamic law in Turkey. For the time being, however, *Sebilürreşad* concentrated on advocating the expansion of the functions and jurisdiction of the *Diyanet* in general and awarding it authority over religious education in particular.[52]

The campaign for the reinvigoration of the *Diyanet* was backed by a number of new Democrat members of parliament and by the leadership of the *Diyanet* itself. Only days after the legalization of the call to prayer in Arabic, a bill that called for the expansion of the jurisdiction of the religious administration, including to educational activities, was submitted to parliament.[53] Meanwhile, Ahmed Akseki felt confident enough under the new government to lobby publicly for the reinvigoration of the *Diyanet* along similar lines. In early August he went on an unprecedented and well-publicized tour of the provinces, for inspection of current conditions and consultation with *Diyanet* officials and community leaders. The elderly man traveled for six weeks throughout Turkey, including a two-week stay in Istanbul, before returning to Ankara in late September. In press conferences during and after the tour, he emphasized his displeasure with the status quo and delineated proposals for the rectification of the policies of the early republic. He opined that the empowerment of the *Diyanet* should be the first *necessary* step toward a renaissance of religious life in Turkey. The reinvigoration would include oversight of the properties and assets of the Islamic endowments, jurisdiction over all institutions of religious learning, and greater autonomy from political pressures and dictates. The Islamist press of course supported these ideas, whereas the reactions in the general press were much more lukewarm or even dismissive.[54]

Yet Akseki's initiative did appear to be picking up steam in late 1950, not least thanks to the support of Ali Fuat Başgil. The French-trained professor of constitutional law, prominent liberal intellectual with conservative leanings, and future presidential candidate published a series

of opinion pieces in which he called for the freeing of the *Diyanet* from the tight control of the state.[55] He proposed that it would be renamed and its headquarters would be relocated to Istanbul, away from the center of government. More substantively, the *Diyanet* would be awarded full control over all affairs pertaining to Muslim worship, religious education, and Islamic endowments. This revamped and invigorated establishment would be placed under the administrative authority of an elective body of former Ottoman ulema and medrese professors. Başgil opined that eventually this regenerated religious establishment should be separated from the state fully and formally, in order to implement a genuine form of secularism in Turkey.[56] He was a rare instance of a supporter of complete separation between religion and state who was not suspected of antireligious inclinations. Other contemporary advocates of the disestablishment of the *Diyanet* were mostly associated with an anti-Islamist posture that some suspected was antireligious.[57] Akseki and other senior *Diyanet* officials did not share Başgil's last proposition, nor did the Islamists of *Sebilürreşad*. Nevertheless, they did like the other components of his program, and many shared his harsh criticism of the RPP's state "terrorism" since the early 1920s.[58] In fact, Ahmed Akseki was sufficiently impressed with Başgil's vision that he appointed him to serve on an official three-member committee that Ahmed Akseki had established with the aim of preparing a draft law for the redefinition of the functions, jurisdiction, and legal status of the *Diyanet*.[59]

While the committee was at work behind closed doors, Akseki then turned to mobilizing public and political backing for the reinvigoration of the religious administration. For this purpose, in December 1950 he circulated a memorandum that decried the pitiful condition of religious life in Turkey, pointed out the causes of the problems, and suggested how they should best be addressed. His report emphasized that the government-imposed impotence of the *Diyanet* since the 1920s had led to the decline of religious education and other aspects of religious life in the republic. The remedy thus should involve the implementation of steps toward a more autonomous *Diyanet* with augmented jurisdiction and functions. Akseki argued that such a reform would not only help the regeneration of religious life and institutions in Turkey but would also bring Turkey in line with all other democratic countries.[60] Professor Başgil, meanwhile, was finalizing the details of the needed reforms. His draft bill included new administrative and financial arrangements but delved into particular detail regarding the proposed new institutions of religious learning. They were clearly to be modeled after the reformed medreses of the late Ottoman period. Başgil's ultimate vision of complete disestablishment found no expression in the bill, presumably because it was not shared by Akseki.[61]

The new bill was conceived with great hopes but it soon proved to be stillborn. The most devastating setback to its implementation was the death of Ahmed Akseki in January 1951 at age sixty-four. Başgil commented dejectedly a few years later that with Akseki gone, efforts to reinvigorate the religious administration were dealt a fatal blow.[62] Whether the initiative ever had a chance is debatable, but it is clear that the passing away of its most respected advocate definitely facilitated the sidestepping and eventual dissipation of this effort. This outcome was very frustrating to Akseki's Islamist supporters. *Sebilürreşad* even went as far as speculating and charging that the vicious criticism he faced from RPP supporters caused Akseki's heart failure and untimely death.[63] The draft legislation he inspired won some support among DP activists and parliamentary deputies in 1951,[64] but as it turned out, the leadership of the party displayed no intention to endorse it.

The government of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was in fact unwilling to endorse any major change related to the organization, functions, or jurisdiction of the *Diyanet*. In a debate in parliament in February 1951, Menderes made it quite clear that he had no intention of backing either the replacement of the *Diyanet* with localized community-based religious organizations or its complete disestablishment, or any other major change in its official status and jurisdiction.[65] Whether connected with this issue or not, finding a replacement for Akseki took the government three months. After all internal candidates from Akseki's close circle of friends and colleagues were rejected, the cabinet appointed Eyüp Sabri Hayırlıoğlu, a former member of parliament from Konya who was not associated with his predecessor's grand reform scheme. Hayırlıoğlu remained in office until May 1960, when a military coup d'état ended the DP's rule. Under his bland leadership, the *Diyanet* operated throughout the 1950s as a dependent and politically dependable government agency. With the exception of its very public opposition to a new wave of Qur'an translations and to public advocacy for "Turkification" of religious life by some Kemalist intellectuals, the religious administration maintained a relatively low profile and remained quite peripheralized during the 1950s, much like it had under RPP rule in the early decades of the republic.[66]

PASSING THE TORCH

In their decade in power, the Democrats failed to live up to the Islamists' exaggerated expectations or to the hopes nurtured by senior *Diyanet* officials in 1950. The DP was still considered a lesser of evils in comparison

with the RPP, because it allowed more visibility of Islam in the public sphere and reopened more than a dozen Imam-Hatip schools. Yet the initial excitement of many in the Islamic circles had waned by the mid-1950s.[67] In retrospect, some Islamic intellectuals even went so far as to describe the DP's electoral victory in 1950 not as a watershed in the modern history of Turkey but rather as little more than a change of power from hard-liners to moderates within the Kemalist camp.[68] What one scholar termed "the tempering of the Kemalist revolution" and another defined as efforts of the DP government "to distance itself from assertive secularism" was generally deemed insufficient and disappointing by most Islamists, for several reasons.[69] On the one hand, the state was not as pronouncedly Islamic as the Islamists would have liked it to be, and on the other hand, many limitations on religious activities and institutions were still in place while the *Diyanet* remained as beholden to the political authorities as it had been before 1950. Thus, the Islamists' agenda after the military coup of May 1960 still featured components similar to those of the first transition to democracy after World War II, such as renewed demands for the empowerment of the religious administration.[70]

The 1960s also marked the end of a generational shift within Islamic circles, with the gradual passing away of the last generation of Ottoman ulema. At the same time, a similar transition was taking place in national politics, the military, and the intelligentsia, with the "children of the republic" increasingly taking over from the generation of the "founding fathers" of the republic. In Islamist circles, as among many conservatives, these "founders"' were less than revered by many, but the majority still came to terms with the republic they had established. The Islamists' understanding of how the state should be structured and operated was often at odds with the Kemalist orthodoxy, to be sure. Yet beyond rhetorical allusions to the ideal of Muslim unity across existing national frontiers, *Sebilürreşad* and like-minded publications neither desired nor advocated the restoration of the Ottoman Caliphate. Instead, they campaigned for change within the basic framework of the republic, nurturing the idea of Islamic unity as an ideal to be realized at an unspecified time in the future. The modifications they envisioned in the near future did draw on Ottoman precedents, particularly when it came to Islamic institutions, but for the most part there was a clear recognition that such modifications might be only partially implemented by the watering down of the restrictive parameters set by the early republic. A fringe radical minority notwithstanding, there was a general understanding that any change would have to be sought within the elastic confines of democracy and secularism. Most Islamists were more than willing to demand additional religious liberties for themselves within these frameworks but were much less inclined to acknowledge, let alone stand up for the rights of groups such as the Alevis to their own freedom of conscience.

Sebilürreşad and like-minded publications from the late 1940s helped nurture a counternarrative of Turkish history. Their campaign may have fallen short of realizing its goals, but it did help lay the groundwork for a robust Islamist political discourse, as well as attesting to the failure of the efforts of the early republic to eradicate the legacies of the Ottoman ulema. The last generation of Ottoman Islamists left strong foundations for an intellectual and political tradition that hybridized Ottoman legacies with the new realities of the republic.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Past Legacies, Future Prospects

Turkey has undergone remarkable changes in almost every aspect of the state and society since the 1950s. Yet, some underlying sociocultural and political issues from the early days of the republic have remained unresolved and highly controversial through coups d'état and restorations of democracy, transitions between statist and liberal economic models, and prolonged periods of contestation between ultranationalists, Marxists, Islamists, conservatives, liberals, and Kemalists of various stripes. The relations between religion and state in general, and the roles and jurisdiction of the *Diyanet* in particular, are one of the most important and most controversial of these topics.[1] Debates about the official role that religious institutions and functionaries ought to play in a modern state, if any, in fact hark back to late Ottoman times.

The establishment of the republic and the new policies it implemented failed to eradicate the long-term impact of Ottoman institutions and legacies they set out to supplant. Indeed, recent academic studies, popular literature, and public debates in Turkey all point to the persistence of Ottoman legacies in many facets of the republic. In the past it was primarily Islamists who lamented the demise of the "Islamic empire" and its replacement by the "Kemalist republic." More recently, liberal scholars and intellectuals have also sought to recover the Ottoman past as a vision for the future, though they usually underscore the empire's pluralist character and long track record of tolerance toward minorities. Yet the desirability and serviceability of past Ottoman models for today's Turkey has remained a highly controversial topic, as is evident in the contentious tone of recent public discussions about the purported "return of Ottomanism," or neo-Ottomanism, ostensibly promoted by the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government at home and abroad.[2] On this backdrop, the jurisdiction and roles of the *Diyanet* have recently also come under new

scrutiny. Not for the first time since the early days of the republic, a major shift in the local political arena and in Turkey's international circumstances have prompted reassessment of the relations between religion and state in general, and of the status and mandate of the *Diyanet* in particular.

The debates in present-day Turkey concern contemporary issues, but their historical roots may be traced almost invariably to the late Ottoman period and the early years of the republic. The reforms of the nineteenth century set in motion two important developments in this regard. One was a policy of centralization, bureaucratization, and formalization of the religious establishment. Another was increasing encroachments into the traditional jurisdiction of the religious establishment in key areas such as education and justice administration. By the eve of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the results of these policies were substantial albeit mixed. They were very evident in the urban centers, but much less so in the geographical and ethnic peripheries of the empire. They led to the establishment of potentially competing bureaucracies and institutions under the auspices of new government ministries, but left substantial jurisdictional and personnel overlaps between these bodies and the religious establishment. The Young Turk Revolution and the early decades of the republic witnessed some continuation in these trends, but also significant changes from the previous periods. The drive for the centralization, bureaucratization, and formalization of the religious administration was intensified. In this sense, the establishment of a tightly controlled and highly bureaucratized *Diyanet* and the outlawing of "unofficial" religious personnel and institutions by the early republic was the culmination of policies pursued since the nineteenth century. To some extent, even the much more restrictive redefinition of the functions of the religious administration, first explored by Unionist governments and fully implemented by the early republic, may be traced back to earlier reforms of the nineteenth century. But the new policies also differed from previous ones in some fundamental ways. For one thing, under the CUP, and more dramatically during the one-party rule of the RPP, the size, scope, and reach of the religious administration and its institutions were severely curtailed. For another thing, initiatives to refashion the educational and judicial functions of the religious administration under the CUP, and their complete elimination by the early republic, were radical and drastic to a degree that had been implausible and all but inconceivable in the late nineteenth century. That is because a type of assertive secularism that was barely existent in the late nineteenth century and remained marginal albeit more public after 1908 became the dominant ideology under the early republic.[3]

The radicalized and heavy-handed policies of the CUP and the early republic produced some contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, the downsizing of the religious establishment, the contraction of its jurisdiction, and the stricter government control over it were expected to transform it into a more pliable and efficient state agency for the primary purpose of mobilizing and controlling the population, particularly at times of national crisis. On the other hand, the ability of the Unionists and the early republican leadership to realize these aims was undermined by suspicions that their reforms and repressive policies were informed by positivist, materialist, and antireligious convictions. Such concerns first became evident after the Young Turk Revolution, turned more acute during World War I, and reached a climax in the 1930s, albeit with a certain hiatus in this respect during the struggle for Muslim sovereignty in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace (1919–1922). Subsequently, the relations of the Unionists and the early republican leadership with their respective religious administrations had been fraught with latent tensions, only qualified cooperation, and endemic lack of trust.

At the same time, the early republican policies inadvertently revived the split of the religious establishment into official and unofficial spheres. The contraction of the religious administration and the suppression of Islamic institutions either pushed underground or prompted the organization of clandestine ulema and Sufi networks outside the official purview of the state. This development flew in the face of decades-long efforts to incorporate "unofficial" ulema and Sufi sheikhs into the religious establishment. Furthermore, in contrast to the Ottoman past, the new or surviving unofficial networks were deemed illegal by the early republic. Yet "informal" religious scholars and spiritual guides have continued nevertheless to provide alternative and unauthorized forms of religious education, instruction, and leadership for both young and old. This was particularly evident in rural settings and among non-Turkish ethnic groups, but to an extent it also existed in the privacy of homes in the urban centers, away from the prying eyes of the authorities. In this respect, the suppressive ways of the early republic had the unintended consequence of undermining its own policies of centralization, bureaucratization, and formalization of religious functionaries and institutions. The *Diyanet* was indeed closely supervised and highly controlled, but its penetration into society was quite limited, both because of its size and because of its subordination to a government that was suspected by many devout Muslims of harboring antireligious sentiments. The early republican governments were able to carry out remarkable reforms at a rapid pace thanks to their disregard for the desires of the majority of the population, but the price was the creation of resentment and alienation

even among erstwhile supporters, and plausible allies among the citizens of the republic.

The policies of the early republican leadership were informed by, or included elements of, what José Casanova identified as the three propositions of the theory of secularization. The government implemented measures toward differentiating the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms; it sought to marginalize religion to a privatized sphere; and dominant groups in the Kemalist elites were operating under the assumption that religious beliefs and practices were on a course of decline.[4] However, the RPP leadership felt compelled to compromise on each and every one of these issues, even during the heydays of assertive secularism in the 1930s, in the face of the conservatism and religiosity of the majority of the citizens of the republic, and the role of Islam as agent of acculturation of non-Turkish Muslims into the Turkish nation. The clash of the ideology with the social realities of Turkey had created multiple inconsistencies and contradictions already in the early days of the republic. Tensions between the ideology of secularism and its actual practice have been attested to in many countries, including, of course, the United States and France, both of which have often been viewed in Turkey as frames of reference for the secular republic. In Turkey, however, the contradictions became particularly glaring and controversial because the state did not go as far as the United States and France did in its structural separation between religious and state institutions, even as it went much further in its interventionism in matters relating to even the form and content of worship. Controversies about the official status and state-dictated jurisdiction and functions of the *Diyanet* have epitomized the tension between the contrasting "separation" and "control" tendencies in the secularist policies of Turkey since the early days of the republic.

The onset of the Cold War and the transition to democracy prompted a reassessment of the relations between religion and state and the position of the *Diyanet*, but no dramatic changes in either. None of the proposals for the redefinition of the status and functions of the religious administration, or for its abolition altogether, ever came close to realization. Calls for the abolition of the *Diyanet* have been put forward occasionally since the late 1940s, particularly during periods of political transformation, but time and again they have met insurmountable opposition. Neither most Kemalists and conservatives nor the majority of Islamists found this vision particularly appealing. For different reasons they were all concerned that ending the state-sponsored monopoly and regulatory authority of the *Diyanet* would lead to what has often been termed "religious anarchy," a concept that encapsulates to varying degrees both distrust of the possible effects of religious pluralism on na-

tional unity, and fears of the potential sociopolitical consequences of a complete liberalization of religious life. Conservative and Islamist thinkers who pointed out the possible benefits of the abolition of the *Diyanet* and its replacement with privatized faith-based communities were never able to become dominant voices among their respective constituencies. More often, conservatives and Islamists advocated greater autonomy and expanded jurisdiction and functions to the *Diyanet* within the confines of the state. Such proposals were of course anathema to Kemalists of virtually any stripe. The self-designated guardians of the republic never fully trusted the *Diyanet* and its officials, even in the 1930s, and were loath to accept the reinvigoration of religious institutions. Perhaps expectedly, they conjured up negative images of the late Ottoman ulema and their institutions in order to buttress their case against a more independent and influential official religious establishment. Subsequently, the transition to democracy in the late 1940s did not lead to a comprehensive redefinition of the status and jurisdiction of the *Diyanet*.

The *Diyanet* has grown quite remarkably in size and reach since the early 1950s, but its jurisdiction, functions, and subordination to government control have not changed in any fundamental way. Its function as a centralized state-sponsored religious administration, as well as its mission to disseminate government-approved religious views and practices, has persisted, even as Turkey has undergone remarkable social, political, economic, and cultural changes and upheavals since the 1950s. Changing political circumstances notwithstanding, the *Diyanet* has often been criticized by ultraconservative Islamists as excessively subservient to the government, even as die-hard secularists have remained suspicious of its officials' priorities and loyalties. For many of the former, the *Diyanet* failed to live up to the example of the Ottoman ulema, whereas for some of the latter it has actually maintained some of the ulema's most baneful characteristics. After each military coup, the *Diyanet* was among the targets of heavy-handed interventions to ensure its Kemalist loyalties, which in turn refueled suspicions against it in Islamist circles. Meanwhile, many Kemalists became increasingly aghast at state-led efforts to formulate, partially through the agency of the *Diyanet*, an integrationist Turkish-Islam synthesis that in the 1980s aimed at producing a more religion-friendly Kemalism and at assisting the suppression of the rising tide of Islamism, Marxism, and Kurdish nationalism. The government's control of the *Diyanet* and its manipulation of the *Diyanet* for political ends thus undermined any pretension that it was an apolitical provider of religious services and not an instrument of supervision, discipline, and social molding and management. The *Diyanet*, like other legacies of the late Ottoman period and the early republic, hence remained a very controversial institution during the long decades of the Cold War.[5]

Fast forward to the early 2000s and a new period of democratization in Turkey again thrust the *Diyanet*, for the umpteenth time, into debates about the relations between religion and state. In the previous six decades the country witnessed tremendous changes in its international, regional, and internal circumstances. It saw the rise of the radical Left as well as its relative decline, the emergence of militant Islamist movements and their overshadowing by more benign and democratic forms of Islamic activism, periodic military coups followed by efforts to establish a fully democratic system, inflammation of relations between religious and ethnic groups and initiatives for national reconciliation, the replacement of statist dogmas with market-oriented policies, and periods of economic boom and bust. During this period the *Diyanet* has expanded exponentially in size and reach, and the number of institutions of religious education in Turkey, under the oversight of the Ministry of Education, has increased dramatically. These changes have not ended the controversies surrounding the *Diyanet* but rather have exacerbated them in recent years.

The emergence since 2002 of the Islamist-rooted AKP as the dominant political force in Turkey has refocused attention on potential changes in the status and functions of the *Diyanet*. Yet again, as in 1950, the ruling party has upheld the cause of democratization as the centerpiece of its political agenda. AKP leaders have promised to lift restrictions on religious freedom and to promote liberalization and equal rights for all religious and ethnic groups in Turkey. In the 1950s, the democratic agenda was implemented on the backdrop of efforts to affirm Turkey's membership in the America-led "Free World." As it turned out, the road to democracy was long and bumpy indeed during the decades of the Cold War. In the 2000s, the new drive for democratization is informed by a declared desire to safeguard human rights and to create a workable civil society, a stable political life, an environment beneficial for business and economic growth, and better prospects of accession to the European Union. The AKP government has pledged its determination to introduce significant constitutional changes toward that end, including in regard to the *Diaynet*'s official status, jurisdiction, and functions.

The AKP leadership has made no secret of its desire to accord the *Diyanet* greater autonomy. In late 2002, only days after the party swept to power, the state minister in charge of affairs relating to the religious administration declared that the *Diyanet* should be supervised not by politicians but rather by its own functionaries, along with theologians and religious scholars from Turkey's faculties of theology. AKP officials

continued to issue similar statements in the years that followed.[6] Professor Ali Bardakoğlu, head of the *Diyanet* since 2003, has endorsed this goal. He does not shy away from pointing out that all too often in the past decades, political authorities intervened in religious affairs, even as they reiterated the need for separation of religion and politics. He therefore advocates, just as Akseki did in 1950, the shielding of the *Diyanet* from political manipulations and pressures so that it would be able to freely enlighten and educate the people about Islam.[7] Eight years into the AKP rule, political obstacles have hitherto delayed yet again the realization of this vision of an autonomous but still centralized, bureaucratized, monopolistic, state-sponsored *Diyanet*.

The AKP leadership in fact has not entirely broken away from perceptions of the *Diaynet* as a tool for the advancement of government-sanctioned national policies. Prime Minister Erdoğan, like his predecessors at the helm of the government, sees the religious administration as a vehicle for the promotion and buttressing of national policies and as a state-friendly disseminator of moderate and enlightened interpretations of Islam. During a ceremony for the *Diyanet*'s eighty-sixth anniversary in early March 2010 he indeed reemphasized this role in the government's "project of national unity and fraternity."[8] In practical terms, this translates into concerted efforts to involve the *Diyanet* in outreach initiatives aimed at the Kurdish and Alevi citizens of the republic, and in ideological and educational campaigns against ultra-conservative and militant interpretations of Islam. These efforts won the government and the *Diyanet* much praise in some circles but also aroused suspicions and prompted opposition in others.

The policies of "opening" toward the Kurdish and Alevi citizens of the republic are cases in point. The AKP government has been proposing a set of measures aimed at lifting curbs on Kurdish cultural life, in an effort to undercut support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its agenda. The *Diyanet* was assigned a meaningful role in the initiative. For instance, in late 2009 it issued authorization to deliver parts of religious sermons and rituals in Kurdish rather than Turkish, as well as a pledge to sponsor the publication of Kurdish-language literal translations of the Qur'an and other key Islamic texts.[9] Ironically, the new measures are partially justified in terms similar to those that have been deployed by Turkish nationalists since the early years of the republic. In early 2010 the head of the *Diyanet*, accompanied by all the top officials of his office, conducted a three-day-long tour of southeastern Turkey, reportedly in order to promote the new initiative, help regenerate religious life in the region, and contribute to strengthening its bonds with the republic.[10] When it comes to Alevis, one important sticking point has been

the refusal of the government in general and the *Diyanet* in particular to recognize them as a distinct sect with full rights to religious freedom. In 2009 the AKP government initiated public workshops involving Alevi and Sunni communal leaders, intellectuals, and academics with the aim of finding a common ground that would alleviate tensions and address grievances. The consultations reached their conclusion in January 2010 with the publication of a set of recommendations that included a call for the establishment of a bureau for Alevi affairs under the auspices of the *Diyanet*. They did not suggest acknowledgement of the Alevis as an officially recognized religious sect, or formal acceptance of their places of worship as prayer houses, both of which are anathema to many Sunnis in general and to the leadership of the *Diyanet* in particular. *Diyanet* officials endorsed the recommendations in principle, and AKP activists and supporters hailed them as an important step toward democratization and national reconciliation.[11]

In both "opening" initiatives, however, target audiences accused the government of intending to deploy the *Diyanet* and its officials for ideological ends. Kurdish and Alevi political opponents of the AKP have been particularly vehement in their denunciations. They reject as a sham the government's claims to be acting in the name of pluralism and democracy. They charge that short-term political gains and long-term assimilationist designs inform the AKP policies. Thus, Kurdish and Alevi political leaders and opposition activists have argued that the alleged outreach initiative disguises a clandestine scheme aimed at the co-optation of the Kurds and the "Sunnification" (*Sünnileştirmek*) of the Alevis, so that they will all be transformed into carbon copies of the AKP's Islamist supporters. One activist captured the views of many other suspicious critics when he charged that the government and senior officials of the *Diyanet* have the mentality of "Sunni ulema," which was expressed as a slur.[12] This belligerent rhetoric does not represent the whole spectrum of views among Kurdish and Alevi citizens of the republic, but it does reflect deep-seated suspicions about the central government in general and the mission and impact of the *Diyanet* in particular. The harshest critics therefore not only rejected the particulars of the ruling party's "opening" initiatives, but also went on to advocate the abolition of the *Diyanet* as a prerequisite for genuine secularism, religious freedoms, and human rights for all citizens of the republic. In this respect, their demands converge with the views of some Kemalist and leftist intellectuals,[13] and hark back to the debates of the late 1940s.

The fact of the matter is that there is no broad public or political support for the abolition of the *Diyanet*. Two extensive polls in the last decade found that robust majorities of 75 to 80 percent of respondents

view the *Diyanet* as compatible with the secularism of the republic and oppose its disestablishment or replacement with privatized community-based organizations. Furthermore, although the public is well-aware that the *Diyanet* does not represent the entire spectrum of beliefs and faiths among the citizens of the republic, a robust majority nevertheless upholds the view that the *Diyanet* contributes to national unity in Turkey and plays a significant role in blocking the spread of wrong and harmful religious interpretations. Kurdish respondents were an exception in this respect, with a small majority of them favoring abolition.[14] None of the major political parties in Turkey supports this view. In light of public opinion and these political circumstances, the government and most of its backers argue that recent demands for the unmaking of the *Diyanet* are not only impractical but also irrational. From the perspective of the government and the senior officials of the *Diyanet*, one of its main goals has always been and should continue to be the facilitation of "the process of understanding and implementing religion *correctly*."[15] However, although for some in Turkey this goal is part of a laudable mission to serve as a moderating force in religion, others perceive it as a cover for either a covert pursuit of an Islamist agenda or a spineless repackaging of Islam to befit Western demands and expectations.

The *Diyanet* has indeed faced such severe criticisms from both staunch Kemalists and ultraconservative Islamists. Many Kemalists charge that under the guise of reform and democratization the AKP seeks to undermine secularism and empower Islamic institutions and influences in Turkey, with the full cooperation of the *Diyanet*'s leadership. In March 2008, for instance, Ali Bardakoğlu criticized a judicial decision that rejected the constitutionality of mandatory religious education in the state schools. His argument that the *Diyanet* should have been consulted on the matter drew strong responses from Kemalist circles. One critic clamored that "the president of the Diyanet should know his limitations. They have there a Fatwa Bureau and they issue fatwas as if they are Sheikh ul-Islams. In a secular country there should not be a Fatwa Bureau in the first place." This led to only one among many public spats in recent years in which the *Diyanet* has been charged either implicitly or directly with intending to undermine secularism and reassume authority and influence once held by the Ottoman ulema.[16] In 2008 these accusations were included in an unsuccessful legal bid to outlaw the AKP, and they reportedly informed a number of failed conspiracies to initiate a coup d'état against the ruling party.[17] At the same time, ultraconservative Islamists have harbored long-standing suspicions that the *Diyanet* allegedly has limitless pliability and excessive willingness to pander to Western expectations of a moderate Islam. In early 2008,

a firestorm of controversy erupted in Islamist circles after British media outlets issued celebratory accounts on "radical revision of Islamic texts" under the auspices of the *Diyanet*. The reports related to an actual initiative to classify and partly reinterpret the vast corpus of hadith literature. Ultraconservative Islamists issued vehement denunciations of this so-called "Islam 2.0 project," which they depicted as a treacherous endeavor to reshape Islam according to Western dictates and expectations. The tone of the attacks and their content were so alarming and hysterical that Ali Bardakoğlu hastened to clarify that the foreign press reports were highly exaggerated and that "nobody could dare initiate reform in religion." He explained that the *Diyanet* seeks only to facilitate access to key Islamic texts, in order to make them more approachable and relevant for the twenty-first century.[18]

Ultraconservative Islamists, like many Kemalist critics, do not necessarily question the necessity of the *Diyanet* per se, but rather question its goals and policies. Ultraconservative Islamists accuse moderates in the *Diyanet* of deplorable betrayal of the authentic traditions of Islam and the legacies of "genuine ulema" of the past.[19] Some Kemalists meanwhile deride the *Diyanet* for purportedly being informed by the archaic and twisted "mentality . . . [and] logic of the ulema."[20]

The leadership of the *Diyanet* responds to these charges by emphasizing both its own Ottoman heritage and its republican credentials. Ali Bardakoğlu thus finds it necessary to reject, time and again, assertions that he conducts himself as if he is a Sheikh ul-Islam and not a civil servant in a secular republic. He insists that the *Diyanet* has been invested by the secular state with "the official authority to speak on behalf of religion," and thus doing so should not be falsely construed as though *Diyanet* officials operate "like the ulema of the republic or like an Ottoman Sheikh ul-Islam."[21] At the same time, official publications of the *Diyanet*, and Bardakoğlu himself, contend that the *Diyanet* "is not a novelty in Turkey; its roots can be found in Ottoman history." With the caveat that the "functions and mandates" of the republican religious administration and the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam are dissimilar, they still emphasize that, this fact notwithstanding, "in Ottoman society, the relations between religion and politics and the organization of religious affairs were regulated under the authority of the institution of Şeyhülislâlık [that is, the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam], which was granted a certain degree of autonomy. This [approach] was largely preserved and continued during the Republican period, with some limitations in the field of authority."[22] The wording of this and similar statements might seem quite convoluted, but their aim is quite clear. The emphasis on the fact that the *Diyanet* represents both Ottoman legacies and new republican realities

seeks to draw on both sources of legitimacy, in the face of ultraconservative Islamist criticisms on the one hand and Kemalist suspicions on the other. Moreover, such a position justifies, quite overtly, demands for the reorganization of the *Diyanet* as a more robust and autonomous institution that could reacquire more "Ottoman" attributes without shedding its republican identity and characteristics. This is indeed the stated goal of Bardakoğlu and the AKP government. Their argument is that although the *Diyanet* should maintain its monopoly over Muslim religious services, it could nonetheless help promote the cause of religious pluralism, tolerance, and human rights in Turkey by becoming more autonomous and by reaching out to the Alevis and the Kurds, and to non-Muslim communities in Turkey. This vision does not, however, challenge in any way the desirability of maintaining the *Diyanet* as a government-sanctioned national institution, in a society in which diversity rather than uniformity has remained a fixture of religious and spiritual life in spite of recurring government-sponsored projects of homogenization since the late nineteenth century. The criticisms and suspicions that the *Diyanet* faces are not likely to go away should it become more autonomous and assertive.

Senior officials of the *Diyanet* often anchor their advocacy of more autonomy with the assertion that "the administration of religious affairs was organized by the Ottoman state but was deliberately left autonomous as to how to operate."[23] They may have a point here. However, by the same token, until the nineteenth century, the Ottoman government also refrained, for the most part, from inhibiting the operation of Islamic institutions outside the purview of the official religious establishment. In fact, most ulema and Muslim institutions and places of worship operated quite independently of the state administration. They were largely left to their own devices, as long as they were not perceived as disturbing the public order or threatening vital interests of the state. *Diyanet* officials also make the case that "the official status of religion" in the republic is on par with many other European countries, such as Germany, Italy, and Greece, and therefore does not in itself impede freedom of religion for all individuals and religious communities in Turkey.[24] The reality may not be as rosy, but critics who argue that the abolition of the *Diyanet* is a prerequisite for genuine freedom of religion in Turkey might be in for a long wait.[25] Instead, an arrangement in which the *Diyanet* is awarded more autonomy and maintains its official status but at the same time loses its state-sanctioned monopoly might be a more viable option for liberalization. According to such an arrangement, the *Diyanet* would retain its existing institutions, properties, and symbolic functions, but citizens of the republic, whether Sunnis, Alevis, Turks, Kurds, or non-Muslims, would be allowed to pursue their religious and spiritual life

outside the purview of the state. Scaling back the more-than-century-long tradition of government supervision and strict regulation of religious life, and the reorganization of the *Diyanet* as a more autonomous but less monopolistic institution, may serve well the consensual cause of pluralism, peace, democracy, and stability in Turkey. For that to happen, however, the Turkish political class, military, and the public at large must reach the conclusion that the potential benefits of such a move outweigh the risk that it might facilitate the operation of secessionist and extremist groups (that is, the PKK and Islamist militants, respectively). Whether this will be the case remains to be seen.

When it comes to the relations between religion and state in general and to the *Diyanet* in particular, the legacies of the late Ottoman ulema and their institutions, as well as the debates and struggles surrounding them, did not dissipate with the end of empire. One important lesson of the late Ottoman period and the early decades of the republic is that uncompromisingly confrontational attitudes and belligerent standpoints did little long-term good to either side of the debate, or to the country as a whole. Whether this lesson has been learned is not a moot point. The recent reinvigoration and self-confidence of Islamist movements in Turkey, including some calls for the reemergence of new-style ulema, as well as the feasibility of a Kemalist backlash, might put it to the test in the near to intermediate future. Liberalization will at some point almost certainly require de jure relaxation of the state-backed monopoly of the *Diyanet*, and interlinked ambitions to instill government-approved dogmas and practices through it. Ottoman precedents may be serviceable for the purpose of inspiring and legitimizing reforms toward the liberalization of religious life in Turkey—that is, the pre-nineteenth-century form of the religious establishment and Islamic institutions prior to the drive toward centralization, regularization, and monopolization, which were pursued by both the late Ottoman and early republican governments.

Reference Matter

Notes

Abbreviations

BH	Beyan'ül-Hak
BCA	Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
Cİ	*Ceride-i İlmiye*
FH	*Fikir Hareketleri*
HD	*Hakka Doğru*
HK	*Hayr'ül-Kelâm*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
İM	*İslâm Mecmuası*
İMMA	İstanbul Müftülüğü—Meşihat Arşivi
İTAM	*İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası*
Mİ	*Medrese İtikadları*
MMZC	*Meclis-i Meb'usan Zabıt Ceridesi*
MW	*The Muslim World*
NYT	*New York Times*
PRO	British National Archives (formerly Public Record Office)
SM	*Sırat-ı Müstakim*
SR	*Sebilürreşad*
TE	*Tevhid-i Efkâr*
TİTE	Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Arşivi
TM	*Teârüf-i Müslimin*
TV	*Takvim-i Vekayi'*
YG	*Yeni Gazete*
YTE	*Yeni Tasvir-i Efkâr*

Chapter One

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Chapter Three

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Chapter Four

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Chapter Six

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"A country where in Turkish the call to prayer is said,
The meaning of his prayer the villager can understand. . . .
A country in whose schools the Turkish Qur'an is read
Everyone, young and old, understands the Guide's command. . . .
Oh Turkish son, there is your homeland!"

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Index

Abduh, Muhammad, 26, 31
Abdülbaki [*Gölpınarlı*], 109–110
Abdülhamid II, Sultan: censorship and political repression, 79, 81, 117; pious regime, 13–14, 79–81
Abu Hanifa, 125, 140
Ağaoğlu [Agayef], Ahmed, 62
Ahmed Asım Efendi, 80
Ahmed Hilmi, Şehbenderzade Filibeli, 27–28
Ahmed Midhat Efendi, 16, 22
Ahmed Naim, 119, 121–122
AKP, *see* Justice and Development Party
Akseki, Ahmed Hamdi: and the early years of the republic, 75, 111, 114–116, 120–123, 132, 134; as head of the *Diyanet* (1947–1951), 138, 145–151, 160
Alevi, Alevis, 4, 141–142, 153; and the "opening" initiative, 160–161, 164
Ali Fethi [Okyar], 119
Ali Vehbi Efendi, 18
Armenians, 19, 95, 99
Asad, Talal, 15
Atalay, Besim, 140
Atay, Falih Rıfkı, 140
Austro-Hungary, 11, 93–94
Ayasofya Mosque (Hagia Sophia), 17, 37, 86, 118, 130
al-Azhar, reform of, 53

Balkan Wars (1912–1913), 27, 57, 70, 91
Baltacıoğlu, İsmayil Hakkı, 127–128, 140
Banguoğlu, Hasan Tahsin, 146
Bardakoğlu, Ali, 160, 162–164
Başgil, Ali Fuat, 149–151
Bayar, Celal, 142
Berkes, Niyazi, 131
Beyan'ül-Hak (newspaper), 33, 52, 55, 67, 70, 82–83, 87–90
Bilecik (Turkey), 94–95
Bilmen, Ömer Nasuhi, 104
Bosnia-Herzegovina, 19, 93–94
Börekçi, Rifat, 119, 125, 132
Bucharest (Romania), 94
al-Bukhari (hadith collection), 119, 121–122
Bursa (Turkey), 66, 130–131

Caliphate, abolition of the, 72, 105–109, 118, 143, 152
Casanova, Jose, 15, 19, 157
Catholic Church, Catholicism, 5, 16–17, 22, 119
Caucasus, 6–7, 26
Cemal Pasha, 44
Cemil Said [Dikel], 118, 131
Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Meb'usan*): definitions and functions, 37–38, 77, 102; elections, 82, 89–91, 108; legislation, 39, 47, 54, 60, 66
Clericalists, clericalism, anticlericalism, 5–6, 11–12, 23–24, 38, 85–86, 97–101
Cold War, 136, 139, 157, 159
Combes, Émile, 20
Committee of Union and Progress (CUP): association with the nationalist movement, 95–96, 99, 102–103, 108; reformist policies, 20–21, 44–49, 55,

118, 155–156; relations with the ulema, 52–53, 77–79, 82–95, 101, 114
Communism, 136, 139, 146

Çakmak, Marshal Fevzi, 147

Democracy, democratization, 3, 86, 91, 105, 112, 127, 136–148, 157–165
Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP), 141–142, 148–152
Duru, Kâzım Nâmi, 144
Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs), 3; in the early 2000, 154–165; in the early years of the republic, 106–135; during the post-World War II period, 136–153
Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 102
Džemaluddin Efendi, Mehmed, 93

Ebül'ula Mardin, 45
Edirne (Turkey), 66
Egypt, 5–7, 25–26, 51, 53–56, 75, 93, 103, 111–112, 118, 128, 133
Engelhardt, Édouard, 19
Enver Pasha, 44
Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, 2–3, 160
Ertur, Hüseyin Kâmil, 87, 108–109
Esad Efendi, 67
Eşref Edib [Fergan], 45, 74–75, 137–149
Europe, Ottoman perceptions of, 14–21, 120, 138–139
European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), 2

Faculty of Theology (*İlahiyat Fakültesi*), 73, 106, 110, 126–127, 147, 159
Ferid Pasha, Damad, 96, 100, 102
Freedom and Alliance Party, *see* Liberal Union
Freemasons, Freemasonry, 9, 40, 87
France, 14–16, 23, 93, 139, 157
Franz Ferdinand, Archduke, 93–94
French Revolution, 148

Gökalp, Ziya, 46, 62, 118
Gökmen, Fatin, 144–145
Göztepe (Turkey), 125
Grand National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*), 119, 139–140, 145–146, 151
Greece, 5, 99, 111–112, 126–128, 164
Günaltay, Mehmed Şemseddin, 141

Hadith (prophetic traditions), 25,110, 119–122, 163
Halim Sabit Efendi, 32, 39, 46, 56
Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 101
Hayırlıoğlu, Eyüp Sabri, 151
Headscarves controversy, 2–3
Hejaz (Saudi Arabia), 111
Hell, Hellfire, 41–44
Hüseyin Hüsnü Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 85

Ibn Arabi, 42
Ibn Taymiyya, 42
Imam-Hatip schools, 73, 106, 126, 148, 152
Imperial Ramadan Lectures (*Huzur Dersleri*), 80
India, 7, 51, 75
Iran, 2, 4–7, 11, 37–38, 133
Islamic Academy (*Dar'ül-Hikmet'il-İslâmiye*), 98
Islamic Endowments (*Evkaf*), 143–150
Israel, 139
Istanbul University (*Darülfünun*), 73, 126
Izmir (Turkey), 99

İctihad (newspaper), 57
İnönü, İsmet, 110, 119
İslam Mecmuası, 45–49, 56, 108
İsmail Hakkı, İzmirli, 45–48, 62, 132
İsmail Hakkı, Manastırlı, 17, 37–38, 86

Jarullah, Musa [Bigiyev], 41–44
Jewish, Judaism, 19, 144
Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), 154, 159–164

Kavala (Greece), 90
Kelime-i Tayyibe (newspaper), 45
Kemaleddin Bey, 62

Kemalism, Kemalists, 3, 8–9, 21, 157–158, 161–165; in the early years of the republic, 73–74, 105–115, 123, 126–134; during the post-World War II period, 137, 140–152
Kısakürek, Necip Fazıl, 145
Konya (Turkey), 66, 90, 151
Kurds, Kurdish, 105, 111, 119, 141, 158, 160–165
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), 160, 165

Liberal Union (*Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası*), 89–91, 96–100

Mahmud Shevket Pasha, 91, 93
Majalla, the (*Mecelle*), 38–39
Martin Luther, 43, 119, 139
Medrese education: abolition, 72–73; legacies, 73–76, 113, 134, 140, 145–147, 150; pre-reform period, 7, 34, 79–80; public image, 23–25, 47, 83, 97, 100; reform proposals, 40, 47, 50–56; the reformed system, 56–72
Medrese Student Association (*Talebe-i Ulum Cemiyeti*), 70, 72
Medrese students (*Talebe-i Ulum*), 52–75
Mehmed Âkif [Ersoy], 27, 45, 119–123, 131–132
Mehmed Ârif Bey, 25
Mehmed Cemaleddin [Seven], 125–126
Mehmed Džemaluddin Efendi, 93
Mehmed Nuri Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 103–104
Mehmed V Reşad, Sultan, 60, 85
Mehmed VI Vahideddin, Sultan, 95
Menderes, Adnan, 148, 151
Military insurrection of April 1909, 53–54, 83, 85–86
Ministry of Education, 47, 72–75, 106, 126, 132, 147, 159
Ministry of Islamic Endowments, 5, 45, 47, 60, 87
Ministry of Justice, 20, 39, 47, 92, 97–98
Ministry of Religious Affairs and Islamic Endowments (*Şer'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*), 71–72, 106
Miras, Kâmil, 122
Morality committee (*ahlak komisyonu*), 98
Muhammad, the Prophet, 109, 128, 130, 138
Muhammed Hamdi Efendi [Yazır], 21, 67, 119, 121–122
Murad Bey, Mizancı, 16, 20
Musa Kâzım Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 17–18, 31–32, 40, 46–48, 54–55, 65, 69, 87–92
Mustafa Hayri Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam, 44, 47, 60–61, 64–65, 69, 87, 92
Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk], 95–96, 99, 102–109, 141; comparisons with the Prophet Muhammad and the early caliphs, 109–110; religious policies, 22, 72–73, 110–111, 121–134, 147
Mustafa Sabri Efendi, Sheikh ul-Islam: opposition to the republic, 111–114, 120, 126–129; political career to 1918, 37–41, 78–95; as Sheikh ul-Islam, 69–71, 95–104; theological views, 41–44; views on religious reform, 33–34, 45, 48–49

Neo-Ottomanism, 154

Ostrorog, Count Léon, 39

Ömer Seyfeddin, 23

People's Party (*Ahali Fırkası*), 84–85
Priests, priesthood, 7–8, 16–17, 20–23, 28, 34, 42, 70, 106
Protestant Reformation, 43, 119–120, 139

Qur'an, 42, 115; commentary (*tafsir*) on, 61, 67, 118–123; translation of, 25, 116–123, 129–132, 134, 139–140, 151, 160

Reactionary, reactionaryism, 4, 8–12, 23, 53–59, 70–74, 82–88, 110–111, 129, 133, 140–147
Religion: and science, 16–28, 52–61, 70–75; religious education (under

the republic), 72–75, 106, 126–127, 147–152, *see also* Medrese education; religious reform, 24–50, 120–132; school textbooks, 109–110
Republican People's Party (RPP): in the early years of the republic, 107, 110–115, 121, 126–135, 155, 157; during the post-World War II period, 136–152
Revolutionism (*inkılapçılık*), 107
Richelieu, Cardinal, 100
Ridda, Rashid, 86
Romania, 19, 93–94, 111
Rumi, Jalal al-Din, 42
Russia, imperial, 7, 19, 26, 41–42, 51, 75

Sadık Bey, 100–101
Said Halim Pasha, 23–24, 27
Sarajevo (Bosnia), 93–94
Science, *see* Religion, and science
Scholasticism (*iskolastik*), 12, 70
Schools, modern, 5, 7, 11–12, 18–19, 24, 45, 51, 55–58, 61–62, 66–67
Sebilürreşad (newspaper): under CUP rule, 45–49, 58–59; in the post-World War II period, 137–153; during the struggle over Anatolia and in the early days of the republic, 96–99, 119
Serbia, 94
Seyfeddin, Ömer, 23
Sheikh ul-Islam (*Şeyhülislâm*), office of the: change in roles and jurisdiction, 20–21, 38–40, 46–48, 97–98; comparisons with the *Diyanet*, 149, 162–163; functions, 4–5, 8, 42–43, 57, 61
Sharia, 37–38, 47–48, 82, 87, 142–143, 148–149
Shia Islam, Shiites, 4, 37, 109, 141
Sırat-ı Müstakim (newspaper), 17, 32, 37, 45, 48, 56
Soviet Union, 75, 116, 133, 139, 142
Sufis, Sufism, 5, 109–113, 147, 156
Sunni Islam, Sunnis, 4–5, 109, 114–115, 125, 133, 141–143, 161, 164
Şerafeddin [Yaltkaya], 46, 110, 132, 145
Şevketi Efendi, 56
Şirani, Ahmed, 89

Tanin (newspaper), 81
Theology (*kalam*), 31–32, 34, 41–46, 61, 110
Thrace, Eastern (Turkey), 65–66, 68, 70, 100, 156
Thrace, Western (Greece), 90, 111–112
Tokat (Turkey), 79, 82
Translation: of Islamic literature, 1, 25, 116–125, 129–132, 13–140; of Western works, 19, 22, 67, 115
Treaty of Lausanne, 105
Treaty of Sèvres, 103
Tripoli (Libya), 87
Turkification, proposals and policies, 123–132, 139, 151

Ubeydullah Efendi, 25, 118, 128
Ulema: association with the *Diyanet*, 112–115, 133–135, 146–147, 150, 158, 161–165; comparisons to clergy, 8, 21–24, 42, 70, 97, 106; under the early republic, 105–135, 156; historiography, 1–10; political activism, 77–104; public image, 12–13, 29–34, 140, 146–147, 158. *See also* Medrese education; Sheikh ul-Islam
Ulema Association (*Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i İslamiye*), 8, 23, 33, 37, 52, 55, 67, 69–70, 81–92, 96
Ulus (newspaper), 140
Umayyad Caliphate, 109
United States of America, 117, 136, 139, 157

Yalçın, Hüseyin Cahid, 81
Yarın (newspaper), 111–112, 126, 128–129
Yaşar, Hafız, 129
Yerebatan Mosque, 129
Yücel, Hasan Ali, 140