

## Competing Intellectual Currents within Modern Turkish Conservatism: The Bergsonian Connection

### Abstract

The philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) emerged during a critical juncture of European history as a reaction to the predominance of Enlightenment rationalism and positivism. Essentially, it strived to contest the peculiar convictions of these intellectual traditions and reintroduce the primacy of creativity, transcendence and human agency. As such, its influence had travelled across time and place. In modern Turkey, the thought of Bergson particularly influenced a group of conservative literati including İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (1886-1978), Peyami Safa (1899-1961), Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974) and Mustafa Şekip Tunç (1886-1958). For these intellectuals, Bergson represented the face of the ‘Other West’ and they appropriated his ideas with the aim of transforming the starkly positivist and rationalist disposition of Kemalism while being firmly committed to the ideals of the Modern Turkish Republic. On a different side of Turkey’s intellectual spectrum, another figure also appealed to Bergson and his philosophy. It was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), who fiercely dissented the project of the republic for its pro-Western foundations and reconceptualized Islam as a totalizing ideology. Hence, through a critical cross-reading of different primary and secondary sources, the present article contrasts these competing currents of Turkish conservatism, their appropriations of Bergsonian philosophy and attitudes toward their society’s experience of the Turkish revolution and modernity.

**Keywords:** Henri Bergson, Intellectual History, Modern Turkey, Turkish Conservatism, Kemalism, Islamism

### 1. Introduction

Within the intellectual history of modern Europe, Henri Bergson (1859-1941) somewhat stands as a peculiar figure and, based on his far-reaching influence, it would perhaps not be a misnomer to place him among the most prominent thinkers of the late nineteenth century. His philosophy represented an idealist-spiritualist moment dissenting both Enlightenment rationalism and positivism that prevailed as the predominant intellectual tradition for understanding the world and developing attitudes to it in Europe during the nineteenth century. Bergson prioritized intuition over rationality in attaining absolute knowledge and human agency over determinism in understanding history and social change. As such, his ideas had transcended their own habitat of formation and time. They found fertile grounds in the intellectual milieus of many countries, both within and outside the European continent especially after the First World War. Remarkably, in modern Turkey the thought of Bergson procured resonance among a group of conservative literati including İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (1886-1978), Peyami

Safa (1899-1961), Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974) and Mustafa Şekip Tunç (1886-1958). The peak of the activities of these intellectuals dates back to the 1930s, the very early era of the republic when the country was undergoing an extensive modernization program at the hands of the civil elites of its one-party rule in order to catch up with the Western civilization and its momentous achievements over the recent passing centuries. While being firmly committed to the cardinal tenets and ideals of the Modern Turkish Republic, this group of intellectuals persistently labored to contest the dominant positivist and rationalist construction of Kemalism. On this particular account, they utilized the philosophy of Bergson which, for them, manifested the convictions of the 'Other West' and better captured the Turkish will to modernity. This complex appropriation of Bergson had gradually matured in their literary, philosophical and scientific writings. For these intellectuals, therefore, Bergson was more than a European critic of modern rationalism and positivism. Above all, Bergsonism embodied a burgeoning life philosophy that can better accommodate their special sensibilities.

The influence of Bergson in Turkey had been an enduring one. It did not remain limited to this period and, equally, to the various engagements of these intellectuals. Coming to the 1950s, another figure started to attain prominence in Turkey. This was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), who substantially contributed to the ideologization of Islam in modern Turkey and thus became eventually one of the most influential forerunners of Islamism. Kısakürek was inspired by Bergson in forming his critique of the West but he also predicated his rendering of East and West on Bergsonian dichotomies such as *madde-rub* (matter-spirit) and *akıl-maneviyat* (reason-spirituality). On the other hand, Kısakürek also fiercely criticized the project of the republic because of its secular and pro-Western foundations. He accused the elites of the one-party rule for imposing a worldview that was essentially alien to the social fabric of Turkish society. Hence, through a critical cross-reading of different primary and secondary sources, this article will probe into these competing intellectual currents that were, however, mutually indebted to the ideas of Bergson. In doing so, it aims to reveal why the thought of Bergson had materialized such a glaring diffusion in the milieu of the early republic and how this diffusion eventually gave birth to these competing Bergsonisms. To do so effectively, this article will first briefly outline the philosophy of Bergson by focusing on several of his quintessential ideas. Secondly, it will trace the history of Bergsonism in Turkey from the engagements of the republican conservative literati to that of Kısakürek. Lastly, it will contrast their different appropriations of Bergson by analyzing some of their key writings. The first group of conservative republican intellectuals are well-known names in Turkey and there is a relatively considerable size of secondary literature on their interaction with Bergson.<sup>1</sup> However, this existing literature mostly

1 This body of secondary literature mainly consists of numerous works written in English, French and Turkish. Especially, Nazım İrem's contributed to this body of literature by remains copious. On this account, some of his most important articles in English are İrem 2004, 79-112; İrem 2011, 873-882; İrem 2002, 87-112. Likewise, Dilek Sarıuş is particularly known for her works on the influence of Henri Bergson in modern Turkey, written in French. Chief among them are her doctoral thesis, Sarıuş 2016 and several of her articles

neglects to converge their interaction with that of Kısakürek.<sup>2</sup> With the scholarly contribution of this article, therefore, I hope to alleviate this particular omission. In the wake of these efforts, eventually, I also do hope to display that the critiques of Kemalism in Turkey had not developed *ex nihilo*. Rather, the long questioning of the status and nature of Kemalism and beyond, the Turkish will to modernity was inextricably linked to the conceptualization of the West. As such, Bergson as one of the most influential pioneers of the counter-enlightenment thought continuously helped shaping these critiques for decades.

## 2. The philosophy of Bergson: What it really stood for?

Throughout the years just before the First World War, Bergson was experiencing the peak of his eminence in France. This, however, only came gradually after the subsequent publications of his seminal works including but not limited to *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907).<sup>3</sup> These writings embodied the ground-breaking ideas and notions of Bergson, most notable among them being intuition, *élan vital* and duration. During these prolific years, Bergson undertook the great challenge of countering the predominant intellectual currents of his time. Indeed, determinism, positivism and, overall, scientism had overwhelmingly defined the mainstream convictions of European thought, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was mostly the outcome of the various critical interventions of a generation of prominent thinkers and their prevailing commitments to positivism in theorizing knowledge and to determinism in understanding society and social change. This generation of thinkers included Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Ernst Mach, Ludwig Büchner, Ernst Haeckel and many more.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, their peculiar intellectual disposition was arguably also aligned with Darwinism and its theories of social and biological evolution. Naturally, in this setting, science in Europe was perceived as the supreme medium for approaching the world and human life with its profound achievements in theory and practical benefits in real life. Hence, the cult of scientism during this era was perhaps best captured by Ernest Renan's audacious analogy of "*religion of science*".<sup>5</sup> As such, Bergson, himself was exposed to this tide of scientism in France during his early studies at *École Normale Supérieure*. As he testified else-

including but not limited to Sarmış 2014, 115-132; Sarmış 2020, 155-175; Sarmış 2019, 34-66. Lastly, one can come across the articles of different scholars including Nazım İrem and Dilek Sarmış written this time in Turkish on the same subject. Among these, some of the remarkable ones are İrem 1999, 141-179; İrem 2014, 41-60; Bayraktar 1998, 62-72; Kılıncımlı 2008; Sarmış 2009, 66-74.

2 It should be indicated, at this point, that the doctoral thesis of Dilek Sarmış can be regarded as a slight exception to this. See Sarmış 2016, 418-429.

3 Sinclair 2020, 14-18.

4 For a concise and articulate review of this intellectual transformation see Baldwin 2003, 11-26.

5 See Reardon 1989, 204.

where, he ardently read Herbert Spencer during these years and under his spell, he wanted even to further develop the mechanistic theories and their explanations for the universe.<sup>6</sup> However, as Bergson progressed in his intellectual pursuits, he somehow grew a discontent for the stark scientism of his time. He started to realize in a piecemeal fashion that the universe and human life had so many aspects and dynamics that inevitably slip the grasp of modern science. Their highly complex nature made them impossible to be reduced to matter and myriad processes that are associated with it. For Bergson, particularly problematic were the failure of science to capture the experience of duration, its confining outlook to knowledge and denial of free will and spirit.

With his own philosophy, Bergson aimed to reveal that scientific knowledge, while being valid in its own domain, is not the only kind of knowledge and, likewise, matter alone cannot account for the entirety of reality.<sup>7</sup> It was precisely because of this reason that along with science, complementarily, a proper practice of metaphysics was needed. To this end, he wanted to revitalize metaphysics and restore its status which was already shaken by Kant's sharp critique conveyed through his magnum opus *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). On this account, however, Bergson also believed that the proper practice of metaphysics should harbor firm empirical foundations. In fact, this was exactly what he tried to achieve in most of his well-known writings.<sup>8</sup> Bergson's critique of modern science is the offset of his burgeoning philosophy. He thought that the grasp of science is unavoidably limited because the intellect as the discursive and conceptual instrument of science had evolved for the particular aim of acquiring command over matter. For this particular reason, as Bergson maintained the intellect can only interact with what is static, material, and spatial.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in order to interact with the immaterial aspects and dynamics of reality, another kind of a method should be employed. For Bergson, this method is intuition. In Bergson's metaphysics, the notion of intuition occupies a considerable space. As being different than a cognitive process, intuition entails an intimate introspective and non-scientific experience, a transcending moment of touch with what remains and permeates beyond spatialized time.<sup>10</sup> According to Bergson, this is the experience of duration and its *episteme* can only be accessed through this experience. Bergson was convinced that the scientific conception of time as a cumulative entity befits only inert matter as it could project reality through separate and successive states within the confines of spatiality. Duration, on the other hand, is something beyond mathematical time. In this respect, for Bergson, in fact, duration (*durée réelle*) is lived time, a perpetual flow of becoming and creation that one could touch only momentarily and subjectively through intuition.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, overall, he argued that science and scientific knowledge can only project the surface of reality that

6 Gallagher 1970, 16; see the original in Bergson 1959, 294-295.

7 Gallagher 1970, 22; Sinclair 2020, 11.

8 Gallagher 1970, 12; Ansell-Pearson 2018, 3-4.

9 Bergson 1946, 41-43.

10 Bergson 1946, 34-36.

11 Bergson 1944, 3-10; Bergson 1946, 29-34.

is material and, thus, measurable. A deeper and more profound comprehension of reality, however, could only be formed with intuition.

Departing from his central theories of intuition and duration, Bergson extended his philosophy to cover a wide range of subjects including evolution of life in nature, dynamics of social change and history. In this respect, he first tried to counter both the neo-Darwinian mechanistic and the Neo-Lamarckian finalist theories of evolution with his own account. He argued that both theories glaringly fail to explain the inherent diversity, creativity and spontaneity in nature because each development in the evolutionary process is perceived to be contained in its preceding form in these theories. In the eyes of Bergson, this perspective by its peculiar nature inhibits any tangible potential for real change or creativity to take place.<sup>12</sup> Bergson himself firmly believed that evolution of life in nature is by no means a monolithic process. It does not take place under the mandate of rigid pre-arbitrated laws and, therefore, it is not mechanic. Rather, it is a form of creative becoming, a complex, impromptu and unpredictable process.<sup>13</sup> For Bergson, the evolution of life, however, is driven by a cosmic, inner directing principle, which he called *élan vital* (vital impulse). Although devoid of a very conclusive definition, *élan vital* signifies a conscious and vital force in living beings that proceeds through matter in an unforeseen and creative fashion.<sup>14</sup> Given this point, nevertheless, it is *élan vital* that propels the evolutionary mobility in the nature and orients living beings toward their survival and self-fulfillment. When it comes to Bergson's ideas on social change and history, a genuine attachment to the tropes of human agency, creativity and spontaneity is preset. On this account, he tried to deal with the problem of social change and how to account for it. In Bergson's view, transformative social change is habitually instigated by exceptional individuals, "mystics" in Bergson's words who can surpass the social constraints imposed upon them and influence masses with their personality for taking collective action at critical moments.<sup>15</sup> Since this sort of human agency is the most essential dynamic for social change, continuing with Bergson, it would arguably be misconceived to approach social change within a deter-

12 Bergson 1944, 36-48; Bergson 1935, 101-106.

13 Bergson 1944, 59-62.

14 Bergson tried to illustrate the notion of *élan vital* on several occasions. In one of them, he wrote that "*The evolution of life, from its early origins up to man, presents to us the image of a current of consciousness flowing against matter, determined to force for itself a subterranean passage, making tentative attempts to the right and to the left, pushing more or less ahead, for the most part encountering rock and breaking itself against it, yet in one direction at least succeeding in piercing its way through into the light. That direction is the line of evolution which ends in man.*" See Bergson 1920, 27-28.

15 In his influential book *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* which was originally published in 1932, Bergson mentions the saints of Christianity and the sages of Ancient Greece as exemplary personalities who had inspired masses in the past and, therefore, contributed immensely to the materialization of social change. Bearing this in mind, his social theory is somewhat similar to that of Max Weber who argued that charismatic leaders have the revolutionary capacity because of their natural ability to motivate their followers for believing in the legitimacy of their authority by non-rational means. See consecutively Bergson 1935, 25-29; Lefebvre and White 2020, 149-54.

ministic framework. In a similar vein, Bergson opposed any deterministic theory of history including technological determinism and Marxist dialectic materialism. He believed that history is not shaped by “ineluctable laws” enforced by persisting material economic and political conditions but rather it is determined by the volition and free will of men. Thus, history is susceptible to tectonic upheavals and struggle of creative forces realized in tangible events such as wars and revolutions.<sup>16</sup>

With its appealing affirmation of human will, creativity and spontaneity, for many intellectuals and artists in different places both within and outside the European continent, Bergson’s thought represented the new philosophy of freedom, which, by eschewing the deterministic approaches to nature and history, elevated human beings as gifted agents, masters of their own faith and makers of history. In its own heartland France, the philosophy of Bergson had vigorously nurtured several artistic and political movements. The Symbolist artists of the *fin de siècle* circle were thrilled by the groundbreaking ideas of Bergson. They perceived these ideas as the extension of the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, the famous existentialist German thinker who was already a highly celebrated figure among them.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the two most prominent forerunners of Cubism, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, acknowledged their interaction with the Bergsonian phraseology and notion of time in their 1912 manifesto *Du Cubisme*.<sup>18</sup> In France, also a distinct, politically unorthodox figure was indebted to Bergson. This was the anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel who tried to theorize an indeterminist, voluntarist form of Marxism and appealed to Bergson’s seminal work *Creative Evolution* in his conception of class warfare throughout his 1908 text *Réflexions sur la violence* (Reflections on Violence).<sup>19</sup> Another interesting connection to Bergson was realized in Italy during the early twentieth century. His philosophy was utilized this time by a group of nationalist, anti-modernist intellectuals including Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici who were affiliated with the journals of *Leonardo* (1903-1907) and *La Voce* (1908-1916). These intellectuals employed Bergsonian tropes and ideas in their critique of European modernism and its dominant materialist disposition. Their ideas arguably also contributed to the primordial ideological formation of Italian fascism.<sup>20</sup> Outside the European continent, besides Turkey, the imprint of Bergson’s philosophy showed itself also in Iran. Ahmad Fardid, a fervent anti-Western public intellectual and one of the progenitors of the *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification) discourse, had interacted with Bergson’s ideas during the 1930s. Fardid was especially

16 In a speech he delivered in 1915 at Collège de France entitled “La guerre et la littérature de demain” (“War and the Literature of Tomorrow”), Bergson indicated that history is shaped by “unforeseeable flicks carried out by free wills, creative of their own destiny and of that of their own country, when they see fit, and in the direction chosen by them.” Quoted in Sinclair 2016, 473; Robinet 1972, 1152. Also, a lengthy discussion on Bergson’s views on history is conducted recently in Schure 2019.

17 See Sinclair 2020, 16; Azouvi 2007, 59-76.

18 See Sinclair 2020, 16; Antliff 1993, 39-66.

19 See Sinclair 2020, 17; Sorel 1908; Fujita 2012, 126-43.

20 İrem 2004, 93; Adamson 1992, 32.

preoccupied with Bergson's notion of intuition. He viewed it as something akin to *elm-e hozuri* (non-rational knowledge) in the Iranian Islamic tradition. Presumably, Fardid saw in Bergson a philosophy of European origin that affirms the existence of a superior method for attaining absolute knowledge, a method that is predicated on subjective introspective experience rather than rationality. Therefore, Bergson's thought was invaluable. For Fardid, it might have represented a rebellious current within Europe against the ethos of science and universal rationality.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Bergsonism in the Early Turkish Republic: An Intellectual History

As the influence of Bergson had travelled to many countries throughout the twentieth century, it generated a body of diverse receptions. In each place, however, the reception of Bergson's philosophy was shaped by preexisting ideas, the intellectual setting as well as peculiar social and political conditions. This was, in fact, precisely the case of Bergsonism in Turkey during the early twentieth century. The history of Bergsonism in Turkey can roughly be traced back to the 1910s, the era of Young Turks when they realized their zenith of power in the Ottoman administration with enforcing their particular ideology and political aspirations. As known, the Young Turk leadership rose to power in the wake of the overthrow of Sultan Abdülhamit II in 1909. Arguably, with the 1913 *coup d'état* known in the history as *Bâb-ı Âlî Baskını* (Raid on the Sublime Porte) they decisively took the control of the Ottoman administration for the first time. This violent takeover was followed by the formal establishment of their political party *İttihad ve Terakki Fırkası* (Party of Union and Progress) based on the same foundations of their larger committee known as *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress) in the same year.<sup>22</sup> The ideology of Young Turks was predicated on varied and complex tenets. It had evolved through time by the critical contributions of prominent intellectuals and politicians such as Prince Sebahattin, Ahmed Rıza and Ziya Gökalp. Remarkably, all of these figures were intellectually committed to different versions of positivist social theories, believing that future reforms should be developed and implemented under the guidance of sociology, the new promising science of society.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the Young Turk literati were also duly familiar with the emerging European theories of social Darwinism and racial superiority which simultaneously impacted

21 Fardid attested his interest in Bergson through his life on several occasions. Most indicative among them was his publication of two articles on Bergson's philosophy. In 1938 he wrote these articles for the *Mehr* magazine in Iran at the age of twenty-eight. These articles had the same title as *Henry Bergson va Falsafe-ye Bergsoni* (Henri Bergson and Bergsonian Philosophy) and were published in two parts. See consecutively Mirsepassi 2017, 88-95; Fardid 1938 (I), and Fardid, 1938 (II).

22 For a good overview of this era see Hanioglu 2008, 150-202; Hanioglu 1995, 33-70; Zürcher 2004, 76-109; Howard 2017, 278-326; Shaw and Shaw 2002, 272-339.

23 İrem 2004, 85-86; Taglia 2017, 52-106; Mardin 1992, 173-299; Sarmış 2009, 67-68.

their worldviews in numerous ways.<sup>24</sup> Based on his very defining influence on the Young Turk ideology during the 1910s, however, one can perhaps regard the Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp as the most distinguished figure within the ranks of this circle of intellectuals. Gökalp, who also served the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) as a member of its central council in Thessaloniki, has been widely considered the main ideologue of Young Turks. Since Gökalp was an enthusiastic adherent of the social theories of Émile Durkheim and Auguste Comte, he prioritized society over the individual and was convinced that the self of the individual is strongly shaped by the norms and values of the society. He also appealed to positivist social theories in order to justify the emergence of the Turkish nation as a homogeneous group of people in terms of culture, religion, and national consciousness. For Gökalp, the establishment of a modern state was very much connected to this notion of nation and, in this respect, he tried to promulgate his own version of *Türkçülük* (Turkism) as the new political utopia that would save the empire from its dismal predicament.<sup>25</sup>

The Ottoman empire entered the First World War under the leadership of the Young Turks as an ally of the Central Powers in 1914. This perilous venture ended with a catastrophic defeat by the Allies after wars on multiple fronts that lasted for years. In the aftermath of the 1918 Armistice of Mudros, the Allies occupied the territories of the Ottoman empire including Anatolia, the six-century-old heartland of the Ottomans. This was followed shortly after by the occupation of Istanbul at the hands of British forces in 1920. With the consequences it brought to the Ottomans, the end of the First World War marked the outset of a turbulent, wavering era in the country. The feelings of despair, pessimism and frustration as well as ideas for full-fledged national resistance were brewing all over Istanbul and different parts of Anatolia. The massive destruction caused by the First World War in Europe and the grim reality of foreign occupation had transformed the worldviews of many Ottoman notables including intellectuals and statesmen. The overtly positive image of the West as a rational civilization and bastion of progress that had long been emulated by the majority of Ottoman literati was deeply shattered. Among the Ottoman intellectuals at the time, a growing skepticism and disdain toward positivism began to mature. It was precisely in this atmosphere that Bergsonism found fertile grounds to prosper. As revealed elsewhere,

24 Although Şükrü Hanioglu attests the conspicuous diversity of intellectual leanings among the Young Turk literati, he describes their ideology generically as social Darwinist, materialist, elitist and antireligious. On this account, Hanioglu particularly stresses the influence of the theories of social Darwinism and racial superiority that were transmitted to the Young Turk literati through the writings of Gustave Le Bon, Charles Letourneau, Edmond Demolins and Ernst Haeckel. Given this, however, Hanioglu also noted that despite the adherence to these theories to some degree, Young Turks had not developed any tangible nationalist theory based on race until 1904. It was only after the victory of Japan over Russia in the war of 1904 that deconstructed the general norm of European superiority, the Young Turk literati started to contemplate on their early versions of Turkish nationalism and superiority. See Hanioglu 1995, 208-12.

25 A thorough review of Ziya Gökalp's life and ideas can be found in Heyd 1950. See also Kadioğlu 1996, 177-193; Berkes 1954, 375-90.

by the late 1910s, the Ottoman literati started to split into two antagonistic groups. The first group remained somewhat committed to the core Unionist ideology that was fundamentally inspired by Ziya Gökalp and his disciples. The second group, namely the Bergsonians, on the other hand, began to emerge as a dissenting movement to the Unionists. Since the Unionists and their staunchly positivist, elitist and authoritarian ideology were widely blamed for the calamities of the war, the Bergsonians who were themselves mostly ex-Unionists, gradually distanced themselves from the Unionists and their ideology. As such, in Bergsonism they found a new, alternative philosophy that introduced the primacy of volition, creativity and freedom.<sup>26</sup> In his seminal study of Turkish intellectual history entitled *Türkiye’de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi* (History of Modern Thought in Turkey), Hilmi Ziya Ülken, a well-known veteran Turkish scholar of philosophy and history of philosophy who was himself influenced by Bergson, retrospectively described the predicament of the late 1910s in which Bergsonism had originated as follows:

In Istanbul, on the ruins of the collapsed empire, only two currents could be nurtured. One, was to rely upon a moral might and a semi-mystical, spiritual drive (*ruh hamlesi*) at the face of material impossibilities (*maddi imkansızlıklar*); the second, to gain momentum (*bız almak*) with the mastery of matter (*madde*) as a reaction to the idealist movement against the despair caused by the defeat. The first one of these was Bergsonian metaphysics, the second one was dialectic materialism.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, during these times of despair when the latent realities promised no congenial prospects, with its emphasis on spiritual might and human agency, the Bergsonian metaphysics became ever more attractive both during the war of independence and after the establishment of Turkish Republic.

Coming to the early 1920s, the names and ideas of Bergsonian intellectuals started to become more pronounced. At this time, the very first outlet that published the writings of Bergsonians was the journal *Dergâh* (The Lodge). It was established and operated by a relatively large group of intellectuals and writers, among them the most well-known Bergsonians being İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu and Mustafa Şekip Tunç. Both of these intellectuals served previously as educators at *Darülfünun*, the first modern university of the Ottoman empire that was established in 1846. Besides them, other very prominent writers including Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, Ahmed Hâşim, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Falih Rıfkı Atay and Halide Edip Adıvar wrote for the journal.<sup>28</sup> *Dergâh* had been active between the years 1921 and 1924, an important period that overlapped with the war of independence and the establishment of the modern Turkish republic. In *Dergâh*, essays on daily issues, poems, short stories as well as the translation

26 İrem 2004, 86-87; Sarmış 2009, 68-69.

27 See Ülken 1992, 375 (translation is my own).

28 See Uçman.

of Bergson's various writings in Ottoman Turkish were published every fifteenth days.<sup>29</sup> In his book *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi*, Hilmi Ziya Ülken conveyed that the Bergsonians, namely İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu and Mustafa Şekip Tunç who wrote for the journal *Dergâh*, had two common aspirations. First, they firmly supported the Turkish war of independence and its nationalist ideals. Second, they labored to counter the positivist tradition of sociology and political thought that was mainly associated with Ziya Gökalp and his disciples. In doing so, apart from Henri Bergson, they brought up the ideas of Émile Boutroux and William James.<sup>30</sup> Particularly deserving attention was, however, the way they had appropriated Bergsonian ideas, concepts and tropes in accordance with the reality of the war and their special perception of it. On this account, they viewed the foreign occupiers, namely the Allies as forces of material power that mustered superior armies and military vehicles to eventually enslave the Turkish nation. Inspired by Bergson, however, these intellectuals genuinely believed that, despite the odds, the Turkish nation can free itself from foreign occupation if it stimulates its creative energy and spiritual might for survival.<sup>31</sup>

Several writings of Baltacıoğlu and Tunç at the journal *Dergâh* poignantly revealed this conviction. One of these writings was Mustafa Şekip Tunç's article "Hakiki Hürriyet" (True Freedom) published in May 1921. In his article, Tunç argued that the human struggle against the misfortunes, sufferings, and perils of life harbors the precious potential for attaining a true and authentic form of freedom. In this particular respect, according to Tunç, overcoming these hardships with spiritual might (*ruh kuvveti*) is a form of self-fulfillment that endows one the rare realization of true freedom (*hakiki hürriyet*). Ultimately, therefore, attaining true freedom is inextricably bound to spirituality (*manevîyat*), particularly one's ability to be empowered by it during the critical moments of this struggle. In this line of thinking, Tunç also strongly reiterated his belief that spirituality (*manevîyat*) always overweighs materiality (*maddiyat*) in life.<sup>32</sup> Similar ideas were also found in İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu's short story entitling "Kerbelaya Giden Derviş" (The dervish who went to Karbala). This short story was published at the journal *Dergâh* in April 1921. In "Kerbelaya Giden Derviş", Baltacıoğlu narrates the story of a poor dervish and a craftsman. In the story, the dervish wants to have a meerschäum (*lûletası*) at his possession to be processed. To this end, he enters into a workshop owned by the craftsman and asks his services. The dervish only has a sexagesimal coin (*altmışlık*) in his pocket as his entire funds. As such, when it comes to the negotiation of the price, the craftsman does not find the sum offered by the dervish sufficient for his services and impolitely dismisses him from his workshop. The dervish, left in sadness and disappointment, recites a couplet and disappears. Afterwards, the craftsman's life begins to be shattered by various misfortunes; he loses all of his fortune and

29 Uçman; also detailed overview of the journal *Dergâh*, its publication and contributions to intellectual life during the war of independence can be found in Sarmış 2016, 132-58, Sarmış 2014, 115-32; Çınar 2003, 85-91.

30 Ülken 1992, 376.

31 Sarmış 2016, 132-137.

32 See the full article in Tunç 1921, 39.

dies out of sorrow.<sup>33</sup> Baltacıoğlu's short story is full of symbolic and mystic elements. It also embodies several caveats that unveil the influence of Bergson on Baltacıoğlu. First, material things in the form of funds, wealth and goods are always ephemeral and not to be depended on. Second, life is a playground of creative forces, working out their designs in the most mysterious ways. Hence, the future cannot be determined by the present and is therefore unforeseeable. Overall, life is much more complex and profound than what meets the casual eye, and it is susceptible to the making of myriad unexpected possibilities. In the end of the story, Baltacıoğlu connects these morals of the story to the war of independence:

This eternal (*ezeli*) law of life manifests once again a new miracle in the plains of Eskişehir: here see how the material power that came to burn away, destroy and obliterate the wealth and riches (*sâmân*) with its prearrangements and vehicles dissolves up against the breath of a poor dervish whose place of origin is unknown and who has only a staff in his hand as a weapon and only a sexagesimal coin (*altmışlık*) in his pocket as goods (*servet*).<sup>34</sup>

With these words, Baltacıoğlu displays his sincere conviction that Anatolia will prevail in its struggle for independence against the imperialist powers of Europe that represent material strength with their superior armies and technical skills. The determination of Anatolia in this struggle, on the other hand, lies in its spirituality (*manevîyat*) and spiritual might (*ruh kuvveti*).

The Bergsonian intellectuals remained committed to disseminate their ideas after the forces of national resistance in Anatolia under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had prevailed in the war of independence and the newborn Republic of Turkey was formally proclaimed in 1923. As such, they were engaged in various organizational and publishing activities during this new republican era which accommodated the emergence of a burgeoning cultural and intellectual climate in Turkey. In 1927, the Turkish Philosophy and Sociology Association (*Türk Felsefe ve İktisadiyyat Cemiyeti*) was established primarily with the initiative of Hilmi Ziya Ülken. Shortly after its establishment, the association began to be visible with its publication of the first scholarly humanities journal of modern Turkey, *Felsefe ve İktisadiyyat Mecmuası* (The Journal of Philosophy and Sociology). In 1931, Ülken invited Mustafa Şekip Tunç to take over the chairmanship of the association and the same year it was renamed as the Turkish Philosophy Association (*Türk Felsefe Cemiyeti*). The association continued to contribute to the intellectual life of modern Turkey with its publication of another prominent journal, *Felsefe Yıllığı* (Annals of Philosophy).<sup>35</sup> Complementary to these publishing activities, the association also hosted various public lectures, seminars and discussions. Since both Ülken and Tunç were highly enthusiastic readers of Bergson and wanted to further

33 See the reprinted version of the first issue of Dergâh in Tekin and İzgöer 2014, 7-8; original in Baltacıoğlu 1921, 2-3.

34 Tekin and İzgöer 2014, 8; Baltacıoğlu 1921, 3 (translation is my own).

35 A more detailed summary of these activities can be found in İrem 2002, 90-91; Sarıms 2016, 236-241.

appreciate his ideas particularly in the socio-historical context of their own newborn country, the French philosopher consistently remained at the focal stage of these activities.<sup>36</sup> Besides Ülken and Tunç, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu and Peyami Safa were the other two figures who labored to be equally active in their own ways and involved in publishing. In this respect, Baltacıoğlu undertook the chief editorship of two important journals during this era which were *Yeni Adam* (The New Man) and *Din Yolu* (The Path of Religion). Especially, *Yeni Adam* was one of the most prolific and long-lasting journals of modern Turkey since it continued to be published regularly between the years 1934 to 1978. *Din Yolu*, on the other hand, lived between the years 1950 to 1957 and published writings exclusively dealing with issues related to religion and religiosity in Turkey.<sup>37</sup> During the 1950s, another important journal emerged with the initiative of Peyami Safa. This was *Türk Düşüncesi* (Turkish Thought) that featured articles on various issues relating to culture, art and philosophy. *Türk Düşüncesi* was active between the years 1953 to 1960, publishing issues once every month. In addition to Safa, Ülken, Tunç and Baltacıoğlu regularly contributed to the journal with their articles. Again, their appeal to the thought of Bergson in this journal was quite explicit.<sup>38</sup>

All of these activities attest the presence of a relatively vibrant intellectual life during republican era of Turkey although at times restricting challenges were posed by the single-party rule that lasted more than twenty years. The Bergsonian intellectuals wanted to fully participate in this intellectual life, especially by taking advantage of the boom of printing press mediums such as journals and newspapers to promote their ideas and worldviews. During this era, the manifold entailments of Bergson's thought in different fields had been gradually infused into the setting of modern Turkey through the critical intermediary agencies of these intellectuals. In this regard, political Bergsonism was especially noteworthy and captivating. It emanated as an attempt to interpret the Turkish will to modernity in Bergsonian terms and, perhaps more importantly, to impact and eventually transform Kemalism in such a way that it would accommodate Bergsonian sensibilities. As such, the Turkish appropriation of Bergson came forth rather as a challenge but by no means as an antithesis to Kemalism. Contemporary to these intellectuals and their activities, on the other hand, another influential figure was making a name of himself with his public speeches and writings. This was Necip Fazıl Kısakürek who was known, among many of his undertakings including political activism, poetry, playwriting and oratory, by his chief editorship of the journal *Büyük Doğu* (The Great Orient). Before his editorship of *Büyük Doğu*, Kısakürek entered the scene of publishing in 1936 with his spiritualist culture and art journal *Ağaç* (The Tree) to which different famous figures such as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı and Mustafa Şekip Tunç also contributed.<sup>39</sup> He started to publish *Büyük Doğu* in September 1943 and the journal enjoyed a long run of thirty-five years until 1978. In the republi-

36 İrem 2004, 90; Sarıms 2009, 71-73.

37 İrem 2004, 94.

38 See Yılmaz 2003, 216-233; Törenek 2012, 237-249; Sarıms 2016, 414-427.

39 A very recent and informative piece on the journal *Ağaç* belongs to İlker Aslan. See Aslan 2020, 107-130.

can era, *Büyük Doğu* pioneered starkly conservative and Islamist stances. Kısakürek had been also a fierce critic of the single party rule and the Kemalist ideology in general.<sup>40</sup> Kısakürek embodied a complex personality. His life can be divided into two radically different episodes, the breaking point between them being his intra-faith conversion thanks to the influence of the Naqshbandi Shaykh Abdülhakim Arvasi in 1943.<sup>41</sup> Before this experience he arguably lived a non-religious life. Coming from a well-regarded family in Istanbul, Kısakürek first studied philosophy at Darülfünun. Before finishing his studies, he won a scholarship in 1924 from the Ministry of National Education (*Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı*) to study philosophy at Sorbonne University.<sup>42</sup> While residing in Paris, he also first-handedly attended the lectures of Bergson.<sup>43</sup> Before going to France, he also took lectures from Mustafa Şekip Tunç and upon his return to Turkey, their friendship persisted.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Kısakürek also interacted with Bergson and he explicitly displayed this throughout some of his writings. But, as far as his approach to Kemalism and, overall, his peculiar worldview were concerned, he differentiated himself from the other conservative Bergsonians.

#### 4. The diffusion of Bergson's philosophy in Modern Turkish Conservatism: The notion of the 'Other West' and different approaches to Kemalism

Following the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923, the country quite rapidly underwent a comprehensive modernization program that incorporated a series of political, social, economic as well as cultural reforms. Among these, perhaps the most drastic ones were the replacement of the old Perso-Arabic script with modern Latin alphabet, the abolishment of the Caliphate, implementation of a new civil code and many others. This process roughly lasted with rapid pace until 1934. The modernization program itself was articulated and implemented jointly by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his ally civil elites who formed the cadres of the ruling party, the Republican People's Party (RPP). During its congress in 1931, the party endorsed Kemalism as its official ideology along with the six main Kemalist principles including revolutionism, republicanism, secularism, nationalism, statism and populism.<sup>45</sup> As emphasized elsewhere, throughout this formative period of the republic, Kemalism had developed as a radical ideology of progress. With the strict, top-down implementation of modernizing reforms, the republican elites aimed to transform the old Ottoman-Islamic socio-cul-

40 Güzel 2003, 334-35.

41 See the story of his intra-faith conversion from his own account in his autobiographical piece: Kısakürek 2010, 80-93. Kısakürek's intra-faith conversion is also interpreted in terms of its wider entailments by Michelangelo Guida in Guida 2014, 98-117.

42 A short biography of Kısakürek can be found in Okay 1987, 1-3. See also Miyasoğlu 1999, 19-70.

43 This was retrospectively claimed by Rasim Özdenören, a Turkish writer who personally knew Kısakürek in his youth. Özdenören 2004, 139.

44 Okay 1987, 36.

45 Zürcher 2004, 181-182; Turnaoğlu 2017, 272.

tural strata of the Turkish society. Underlying this audacious effort was the optimistic conviction that modernity can be enrooted in a traditional Muslim society if the structure of government and human affairs are redesigned entirely with the guidance of science and rationality. Given this caveat, therefore, it is argued that Kemalism at its core was indebted to Enlightenment rationalism, French revolutionary ideals and nineteenth-century positivistic theories of progress.<sup>46</sup> Hence, based on their comprehensive research on the genealogies of Kemalism, well-known Turkish scholars perceived it as a late-Enlightenment will to modernity carried out in a non-European society and highlighted its positivist-progressivist foundations.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, although Kemalism drew on rationalism and positivism, during this formative period of the republic the Bergsonian intellectuals very much perceived it as an ideology in progress. This belief was perhaps most articulately disclosed by Peyami Safa in his book *Türk Devrimine Bakışlar* (Reflections on the Turkish Revolution). There, Safa indicated that Kemalism had not originated from “the book” or a pre-arbitrated ideal but rather had been shaped by the necessities of life.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, with thinking that the latent foundation of Kemalism is rather a contingent reality, Bergsonians tried to deconstruct Kemalism with their challenge and offer Bergsonism as an alternative republican philosophy of life.<sup>49</sup>

Taking this into consideration, these intellectuals had tangible reasons to hope that the Bergsonian challenge will eventually prevail. First of all, they were very much part of the group of republican elites although they were not exactly positioned at the center of power. İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, for instance, was the first president of Darülfünun after the establishment of the republic in 1923. He also served as an advisor to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on religious issues. Both Mustafa Şekip Tunç and Hilmi Ziya Ülken taught at Darülfünun and served in the educational bureaucracy through various significant appointments. Peyami Safa did not hold any public office throughout his life but he was a highly acclaimed writer and man of letters.<sup>50</sup> Therefore their ideas and activities were on the focal stage and close to the attention of the pioneers of the republic. Secondly, since the philosophy of Bergson, which for them represented the face of the ‘Other West’, was an emerging one, they might have believed that it could gain high recognition once fully known and appreciated in the country. Here it remains yet crucial to remark that these conservative intellectuals’ perception of the West was shaped by their specific reading of European intellectual and political history. In this reading, there existed a duality, two different versions of the West. The West as habitually known was built on the *Weltanschauung* articulated by Enlightenment rationalism and positivism with both predominating European thought in a totalizing fashion since the outset of the nineteenth century. But, as this ruling worldview in the West left no room for spirituality, transcendence, emotions, creativity and free human will, movements such as romanticism, spiritualism and existentialism sporadically tried to resurge

46 İrem 2004, 79-80.

47 See consecutively İrem 2004, 80; Mardin 1999, 192-204; Turnaoğlu 2017, 243-52.

48 İrem 2011, 881; Safa 2019, 164-65.

49 İrem 2004, 90.

50 See short biographical notes on Bergsonian intellectuals in İrem 2002, 89-92.

against it with the contributions of several influential European thinkers including Renouvier, De Biran, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and many others. However, it was Bergson who successfully matured the scattered ideas associated with these movements within what was seen as a systematic and all-encompassing philosophy.<sup>51</sup> Hence, for these conservative intellectuals, this rebellious undercurrent in Europe had emerged as the ‘Other West’. At this very point, they associated the former with decline and decadence whereas the latter promised new congenial prospects with its appeal to spirituality, creativity and primacy of human agency.<sup>52</sup>

Overall, it was emphasized that the history of the ‘Other West’ and the prospects of its special philosophical entailments had consistently remained at the margins of knowledge.<sup>53</sup> Thus, as Peyami Safa indicated in his article *Türk Düşüncesi ve Batı Medeniyeti* (Turkish Thought and Western Civilization) published in the journal *Türk Düşüncesi* in 1953, the worldview of the decadent West was still presiding in the republic and there were republicans who tried to conceive the Turkish revolution within this worldview which was an obsolete one in Safa’s eyes:

We do not know that today there exists a new and dynamic West that is in the state of its formation (*oluş*) and strives to eliminate its extinct side (*taraf*). No matter how it rests on decent intentions, those who want to confine the Turkish revolution in the mold (*kalıbına*) of this deceased (*ölü*) West, do not know how their convictions which they deem progressive (*ileri*), are backward (*geri*). The first question which they have to wake up from their half-awake state of dreaming of the West and ask themselves is, if I am not wrong, this: Which West (*Hangi Batı*)? <sup>54</sup>

On this occasion, Safa implied that in fact the Turkish revolution was better aligned with the ‘Other West’ and its philosophical entailments. With maintaining this stand, he also celebrated Bergsonism for its unique potential to encapsulate the spiritual essence of Turkish national culture.<sup>55</sup> Apart from Safa, Mustafa Şekip Tunç as well saw a convergence between Bergsonism and the Turkish revolution. In his address to Ninth

51 This important achievement of Bergson was explained in terms of his contribution to different discussions in European philosophy by Mustafa Şekip Tunç throughout the “Önsöz” (Foreword) of his translation of Bergson’s seminal piece *Creative Evolution*. See Bergson 1947, I- LII.

52 To reify this claim, Peyami Safa even appeals to Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* and Nicolas Berdyaev’s *The End of Our Time*. Eventually, he tries to display that the decline of end of the ‘classical’ West was even argued by European historians, themselves. See Safa 1953, 7.

53 Peyami Safa, for instance, wrote that “After the influence of the German philosopher Kant had spread to France, the philosophical current which destroyed the narrow and closed scientific view overwhelms the West: The history of the movement that started from Renouvier and extended through different tracks all the way to Bergson and other philosophical and artistic trends during the twentieth century, has not been studied by us.” See Safa 1953, 5 (translation is my own).

54 Safa 1953, 4.

55 Safa 2019, 161-62.

International Philosophy Conference at Paris in 1936 as a part of the Turkish delegation, he audaciously proclaimed that “*Turkey has constituted itself in the way Mr Bergson defined*”.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, although the conservative intellectuals tried to challenge the dominant positivist and rationalist disposition of Kemalism with their appropriation of Bergson, they were still devout republicans who were fully committed to the original ideals of the Turkish revolution. Among the many affirmations of this, perhaps the most indicative litmus test was their shared anti-clerical stances and adherence to the ideal of secularism. Just like other republicans, they were somewhat hostile to the *ulama* and their self-attributed guardianship of religion.<sup>57</sup> Given this point, they were even adamant to aid intellectually the efforts of the republican cadres to develop a new secular understanding of religiosity that is stripped from Islamic orthodoxy, which for them represented what Bergson defined as ‘static religion’. Therefore, they tried to formulate this new religiosity in line with the philosophies of spiritualism and mysticism.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, the journal *Din Yolu* edited by İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu between 1950 and 1957 as well as Mustafa Şekip Tunç’s 1959 book *Bir Din Felsefesine Doğru* (Towards a New Philosophy of Religion) were the fruits of this venture.<sup>59</sup>

When it comes to Kısakürek, on the other hand, although he was an Islamist by worldview and perhaps also can be regarded as an anti-republican since he categorically repudiated the project of the republic and its quintessential pillars like secularism, his perceptions of the decadent West and Bergsonian philosophy were somewhat compatible with those of the other conservative republican intellectuals. This becomes more apparent when his specific reading of the history of Western civilization is analyzed in terms of wider implications. This reading was conveyed in detail throughout his most renowned piece *İdeolocya Örgüsü* (The Weave of Ideologia) which was published as a compilation of his writings at the *Büyük Doğu* journal in 1968. Among the many works of Kısakürek, *İdeolocya Örgüsü* holds a special status. In many ways, it has been regarded as a manifesto reflecting his worldview, critique of the West as well as his version of East-West dichotomy.<sup>60</sup> In this piece, he contended that Western civilization was historically constituted by three integral elements: the Greek reason, the Roman order, and the Christian theology.<sup>61</sup> According to Kısakürek, the first two played a facilitating role in advancing the West’s mastery over nature, matter (*madde, eşya*) and social order (*nizam*) whereas Christian theology generated its morality (*ahlâk*), soul (*ruh*) and spirit-

56 Quoted in İrem 2004, 90; see the original in Tunç 1958, 17.

57 İrem 2004, 91.

58 İrem 2004, 98.

59 İrem 2004, 94, 98.

60 This special status of *İdeolocya Örgüsü* was stressed in the 1973 print of the book by Kısakürek as “This piece (*eser*) denotes the entirety of my essence (*varlığım*), the wisdom of my creation (*vücut hikmetim*) and my all (*her şeyim*)... I was created to weave (*örgüleştirmek*) this peace just like how a bee is assigned to draw the comb. My poems, plays, stories, philosophical and scholarly writings (*ilim ve fikir yazıları*) are nothing but curtilages (*müştemilât*) residing around the main artefact that is built by this piece”. See the section “İthaf” in Kısakürek 1973, 4.

61 Kısakürek 2002, 25-27; the same argument is also made in Kısakürek 1984, 18.

uality (*mâneviyyat*).<sup>62</sup> However, after the Renaissance, as Kısakürek further maintained, Christianity gradually retreated from the life of the Westerner (*Garpli*) since human reason and rationality started to excel more as an instrument for understanding the world.<sup>63</sup> For Kısakürek, a very critical juncture in the history of Western civilization was the nineteenth century when the Westerner's profound achievements in science as well as his mastery over nature and the matter (*eşya ve bâdiselere tabakküm*) matured his overconfidence on reason (*akıl*) and disavowal of metaphysics.<sup>64</sup> In *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, Bergson comes into the play precisely at this critical juncture. Kısakürek endows him a kind of protagonist role as a gifted thinker who positioned himself in opposition to this process with his philosophy. On his mention of Bergson in this particular context, Kısakürek wrote that:

The rational (*aklı*) and rationalistic (*akılcı*) philosophical disposition (*temayül*) of the nineteenth century, although a philosopher like Bergson was waiting in the ambush (*pusuda*), had nurtured the temperament (*mizacı*) of the new Westerner (*Garpli*) who turns his back on everything besides the deeds of conquest (*amelî fütubat*) achieved through some uninspected and uncontrolled mechanical discoveries, grows weary of thinking and starts to be disgusted with metaphysics, and played a major role in dissipating (*sığlaştırmak*) the human comprehension (*idrâk*) during the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup>

Although here Kısakürek avoided to convey his perception of Bergson in an elaborate and clear fashion, he implied that the overreliance on reason and rationality in the West continued to dominate despite Bergson and the critical insights of his philosophy. Kısakürek himself, nevertheless fully appreciates the pivotal contribution of Bergson, especially for how he also defied materialism and its European pioneers. This is pronounced explicitly by Kısakürek in his piece *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (Western Thought and Sufism) that was compiled from the recordings of his conferences, held during the Ramadan of 1962, bearing the same title.<sup>66</sup> There he lauds Bergson not only for his ability to display the limits of reason with using analytical and empirical methods himself in his studies *Creative Evolution* and *Creative Mind* but also, by doing so, for “striking the fatal blow (*ölüm darbesi*)” to materialism (*maddecilik*) and rationalism (*akliyecilik*). Interestingly, among the many prominent European thinkers of the nineteenth century who spearheaded their own forms of materialism or rationalism, Kısakürek somehow perceives the French philosopher and sociologist Auguste Comte and his disciples as those who aptly represent these philosophical traditions.<sup>67</sup>

62 Kısakürek 2002, 26-27.

63 Ibid., 43-44.

64 Ibid., 45-46.

65 Kısakürek 2002, 58-59.

66 See the ‘Takdim’ section of Kısakürek 1982.

67 On this occasion, Kısakürek described Bergson as “...a bright mind... A typical mind of the twentieth century, the thinker of the time who mastered the spiritualists (*ruhçular*)... The Eiffel tower of France in thought... The man who stroke the fatal blow (*ölüm darbesi*)

In the remaining part of Kısakürek's reading of the history of the Western civilization, Bergson comes up yet again in another context. According to Kısakürek, as the Westerner had failed to balance reason with spirituality and lost his attachment to Christianity, over the passage of the nineteenth century the West had been transformed into an individualist, mechanical and destructive civilization. For Kısakürek, this transformation eventually culminated in a formidable existential crisis (*bubran*) in the West. In the eyes of Kısakürek, the two world wars and the emergence of the European ideologies of communism, fascism and Nazism were the byproducts of this crisis.<sup>68</sup> Bergson appears in this context along with other thinkers and artists. They were the ones who foresaw the ultimate prospect this process and delivered the omen of the calamity of the First World War.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, throughout the rest of *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, Kısakürek described the West as a lost civilization, devastated by the calamities of war and social upheavals while searching the remedy to its crises in manmade ideologies. From *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, it can potentially be deduced that Kısakürek was influenced by Bergson in various ways, particularly interesting is the persisting dichotomies between *madde-ruh* (matter-spirit), *akıl-maneviyat* (reason-spirituality) and how much a defining role these dichotomies play in shaping the overall narrative of the book.<sup>70</sup> In his specific reading of the history of the West, however, Bergson and several other European thinkers were perceived as prescient individuals who diagnosed the discrepant nature of their civilization's overconfidence in reason and anticipated the upcoming grave consequences of this occurrence.

Despite granting these scattered albeit positive, commending appeals to Bergson, however, it should be remarked that Kısakürek never delivers what can be deemed as a thorough and systematic evaluation of his ideas, nor does he ever explicitly argue that Bergsonism can offer a congenial, all-encompassing life philosophy. This was perhaps so, as one might believe, simply because in his peculiar mindset only Islam could provide a convincing meaning to man's existence in this world. In fact, for Kısakürek, Islam was more than a religion and its entailing theology. It provided the perfect system

to rationalism (*akliyecilik*) and materialism (*maddecilik*)... Thus, to the school of August Comte and his disciples... Striking this fatal blow cannot be done with pure rhetoric, or with claiming he did or did not. It can only be done with a tract (*eser*)... Bergson, with Creative Evolution (*Yaratıcı Tekâmül*) and, later, with his tract Creative Mind (*Yaratıcı Muhayyile*), had delineated reason to its ultimate limits (*son hudud*) and demonstrated its inadequacy (*kıfayetsizlik*) with reason, itself." (my own translation) See Kısakürek 1982, 92.

68 Kısakürek 2002, 50-53.

69 Kısakürek conveys this in *İdeolocya Örgüsü* as "Thus, whereas the first epileptic (*sarahlı*) messengers (*habercileri*) of this dreadful (*korkunç*) advent (*geliş*) in the nineteenth century were artists like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, its heralds (*aksüilâmelcileri*) in the twentieth century were philosophers like Blondel, Bergson, Heidegger, Rosenberg and artists like Proust, Valéry, Mouriès and Mauriac." Kısakürek 2002, 59-60.

70 Kısakürek for example defines the East as the cradle of prophets and emphasizes the historical primacy of spirituality (*maneviyat*) in the East. Kısakürek 2002, 37-39.

of social organization, civil code and governance.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, neither man made philosophies nor modern ideologies and systems of governance could substitute what Islam offers in these respects because the supreme order (*nizam*) is prescribed by God and it surpasses common experience and thought. Hence, from precisely this perspective, Kısakürek approached the Turkish will to modernity. At its core, his approach embodied a narrative of decline that revolved through his specific reading of the Ottoman and modern Turkish history. On this account, he saw the roots of the Ottoman empire's decline for the most part in the *tanzimat* era and its particular entailments. Thus, he somewhat perceived this era as a part of the long epoch of decline and characterized it as a total mental surrender to the presumed superiority of the West since the Ottomans had shifted their paradigm and started to emulate Europe with new modernizing reforms. For Kısakürek, this signified a deviation from the perfect prescriptions of Islam and set an attitude of superficially mimicking the West. Hence, the Ottoman modernization that was initiated with the *tanzimat* and its forerunners was in fact alien to its own soil, according to Kısakürek. It originated a profound discrepancy that had ultimately facilitated the disintegration of the empire.<sup>72</sup> Lastly, largely due to its rigid positivist, scientist and secular foundations, Kısakürek viewed the Kemalist modernization pretty much in the same vein. He reflected the project of the republic as a betrayal to the historical and cultural heritage of Turkish people. Therefore, as Kısakürek believed, the quintessential trajectory of the republic to create a new individual, society and state was bound to be haunted by formidable spiritual and identity crises.<sup>73</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Starting from the onset of the modern republic, Turkish conservatism had evolved through complex historical processes. These processes were shaped by the peculiar setting of modern Turkey in the wake of drastic experiences of socio-cultural transformation. Today still, conservatism in Turkey remains as a vigorous tradition: It continues to orchestrate political ambitions and intellectual ventures. The present inquiry aimed to materialize a brief appraisal of the two intellectual currents within Turkish conservatism, particularly of their appeals to Bergson's philosophy and, in relation to this, their attitudes to the transformation of their surrounding society. Modern Turkey and the Ottoman empire, needless to say, have always been in close proximity to Europe in terms of interaction, be it political, cultural or intellectual. However, it remains never-

71 This can be deduced from a large bulk of Kısakürek's writings. Arguably, however, it was most audaciously put forward in yet again through *İdeolocya Örgüsü* where he lays out his projection of the order of Great Orient (*Büyük Doğu nizamı*). This roughly denotes a kind of utopian perfect order or state of affairs that will be established based on the prescriptions of Islam in the wake of a foreseen Islamic revolution (*İslam inkılabı*). In *İdeolocya Örgüsü*, Kısakürek describes in a meticulous fashion how he expects daily life, state and society would be in this perfect order. See Kısakürek 2002, 105-42; 163-206; 209-85.

72 Kısakürek 2002, 152-54; Kısakürek 1992, 52-79.

73 See Duran 2015, 523-29; Kısakürek 2002, 163-206.

theless remarkable to observe how Bergson had created such an enduring influence through a long span stretching roughly from the late Ottoman period to 1960s. In this regard, this inquiry tried to add to the existing literature on Bergsonism in Turkey by combining the engagement of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek with those of Hilmi Ziya Ülken, Mustafa Şekip Tunç, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu and Peyami Safa. In doing so, it also sought to reveal the main conceptual areas where secular republican conservatism and Islamism had been confronted by each other and how their common indebtedness to European thought related to this confrontation.

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